

- [Home](#)
- [NonProfit Library](#)
- [TRAINING](#)
- [PRODUCTS](#)
- [About Us](#)
- [Contact Us](#)

Click [Here](#) to
Subscribe to Our
FREE eNewsletter

[Our Privacy Policy](#)

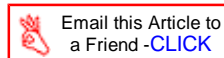


CLICK to See
Our Latest
eNewsletter

3 Statements That Can Change the World: Mission / Vision / Values

by *Hildy Gottlieb*

Copyright, Hildy Gottlieb / ReSolve, Inc. 2007 ©



Does your organization have a Mission Statement? You probably do. How about a Vision Statement? A Values Statement?

If you do not have these three statements, or if you have them but are not using them to guide your organization's work, you are missing out on some of the simplest and most effective governance tools you could find. These statements of your Vision, your Mission and your Values can define and guide your organization's ability to create the future of your community!

Vision vs. Mission

We can't really begin the discussion of the Vision Statement and the Mission Statement without first addressing the semantic difference between the two. Get 10 consultants in a room, and you may get 10 different answers to just what that difference is!

To distinguish between Vision and Mission in our own work, we have defaulted back to the plain English usage of those words. And the simplest way we have found to show that difference in usage is to add the letters "ary" to the end of each word.

Vision**ARY**
Mission**ARY**

We certainly know what those two words mean. A visionary is someone who sees what is possible, who sees the potential. A missionary is someone who carries out that work.

Our favorite example of this everyday usage is Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus was a **visionary**. He saw the potential, the possibilities for making life better. His **missionaries** carry his work and his words to the world, putting his vision into practice.

Your organization's vision is all about what is possible, all about that potential. The mission is what it takes to make that vision come true.

Vision Statement

If your Vision Statement is a statement of what is possible, the picture of the future you want to create, the critical question for a Community Benefit organization is then, "Vision for whom? For what?" From the perspective of your organization's ability to accomplish as much community impact as possible, now and into the future, the only answer can be that ***your organization's vision is for the future you want to create for the community you wish to impact.***

An effective Vision Statement will therefore tell the world what change you wish to create for the future of your community. Our vision is a community where _____.
Our vision is a community that _____.

Given that this sector is all about changing our communities and our world, I am amazed that the corporate version of a Vision Statement is still taught in this sector. But conference presenter after conference presenter continue to teach that "Your organization's Vision Statement is the picture of the future you want for the organization."

In a for-profit company, that definition of a Vision Statement makes sense. Self-perpetuation is what such a company is meant to do - to keep creating profits, long into the future, for those who own that company.

But when the purpose of an organization is Community Benefit, its vision must be for the community, not for itself.

When an organization's Vision Statement focuses on the organization itself, we end up seeing Vision Statements like this one, which falls into the "We couldn't make this up" category.

A crisis nursery for abused and neglected children showed us the Vision Statement they had posted in their lobby. It read, "Our vision is to be the most effective crisis nursery in the state."

For those of you who have heard me speak about this from a podium, you know this is the point where my voice raises three octaves and I cry, "NO!" The ultimate vision, from the community's perspective, is not that the community has an incredible crisis nursery, but that they not need a crisis nursery! The vision for what is possible is a community where children and their families are safe!

We can only create significant improvement in our communities if our vision is about exactly that - the difference we want to make, the dream of our communities' highest potential.

Your Vision Statement will therefore answer the big question - WHY are you doing what you are doing? You are doing it so you can create a community that is better than the way things are now. You are doing it so that individuals' lives will be better, so that everyone's lives will be better. Your Vision Statement will create that context. It will tell where you are heading.

So, for your organization's Vision Statement, fill in this blank:

Our vision is a community where

_____.

or

Our vision is a community that

_____.

Example:

At the Community-Driven Institute, our vision is a vibrant, healthy, compassionate world.

We Couldn't Make This Up

A human service organization proudly showed us that their Vision Statement took up an entire page. That page described, in minute detail, the future of that organization. A full paragraph described what the facility would look like. Another full paragraph described what the programs would be like, and yet another paragraph detailed (I swear I am not making this up) how the organization would be financially sound. In this entire single-spaced, jam-packed page, the word "client" appeared once, and the word "community" appeared not at all.

Mission Statement

Like the Missionary, your Mission Statement will turn your vision into practice. The Mission Statement is the one that will actually do the work.

Again, it is easy to see what the Mission Statement needs to do if we go back to plain English usage. Consider the phrase "mission accomplished" - the work is done. Consider the phrase "mission impossible" - the job cannot be done. The mission is the doing part - it is what you will do to bring that vision to reality.

And while it is powerful to talk about the work you do, it is more powerful to talk about it in the context of why you are doing that work - your vision for making your community an amazing place to live.

As you craft your mission statement, then, consider starting with your Vision Statement as the lead-in to your Mission Statement:

Our vision is a community where _____. To bring that vision into reality, we do _____.

To expand on the practical part of your Mission Statement, you might add where you do your work, and for whom, to further describe what you do.

Our vision is a community where _____. To bring that vision into reality, we do _____ for _____ in the _____ region / area / township / etc.

Mission Statements should not be flowery and overblown. If it is taking a committee 6 months to rewrite your Mission Statement, the resulting Mission Statement will likely be bad. Keep it simple simple simple!

I am not a fan of the thinking that says "Your Mission Statement should fit on a Tshirt." That is a slogan, an ad campaign. Perhaps if you are Coca-Cola that might make sense. For the work we do in this sector, we don't need to be snazzy. Just tell folks what you do, and why you are doing it.

Examples:

One of our favorite mission statements is that of the Diaper Bank we founded.

The Diaper Bank's long term vision is a community where everyone's basic needs are met. To accomplish this in the short term we provide diapers to needy populations. To effect long term community improvement, we work to increase awareness of the issues facing vulnerable populations.

The mission statement of the Community-Driven Institute is:

Our vision is for a healthy, compassionate, vibrant world. Our mission is therefore to ensure the Community Benefit Sector has practical tools for accomplishing those visionary ends. We do this work by convening, engaging, mobilizing and supporting the sector, to ensure we all have the means to make our world an amazing place.

Values Statement

Whether written to be effective or ineffective, Mission Statements and Vision Statements are relatively common in this sector.

But that is where most organizations stop. Vision and Mission. Statements of where we are headed, and what we will do to get there.

It is the rare organization that takes the time to then define HOW they will do that work - the talk they want to walk.

We Couldn't Make This Up

A new organization formed a committee to craft their Mission Statement. The committee spent months on the task - a dangerous sign of what's to come. Here is what they presented as their final product:

To nourish the seeds of knowledge already planted within the hearts of the youth, which will grow into a beautiful and thriving tree, shading all cultures of our community, and eventually bear the fruits of a unified people.

These days, when I speak about this issue, I offer the audience a prize for the first person to guess what the organization does.

The correct answer: A multi-cultural, multi-disciplinary, inner-city youth center.

The best answer I ever heard: A sperm bank. I laughed so hard I gave the guy the prize anyway!

The only way we can create an amazing future for our communities is if we do our work in a way that reflects universally shared values. This ensures we do not squander our time and resources rationalizing our actions, and it helps ensure we are not potentially squandering our community's goodwill.

Further, if your goal is to create the future of your community - the lofty goals of your vision statement - then you will want to ensure your work reflects the values you want to see in your community.

A Values Statement provides the tools for the organization to accomplish that. First, the Values Statement will look outside the organization, to the visionary outcomes you want to create for your community.

What values will need to be present in the community for your vision to come to pass?

What values would the community need to emphasize? What values would have to be the norm?

From there, your Values Statement will look inside, to see how your own work will model those values, to teach those values by example.

How will your work reflect those values?

How will you ensure you are modeling those values to the community?

When you have a tough decision to make, will you always err on the side of those values?

Fill in the blank: We always want the community to be able to say _____ about the way we do our work.

Most boards we encounter have never talked about these issues.

The rare few who do indeed have a code of values - a Values Statement - may point to the sign on the wall in the lobby, to prove they have such a thing. But in practice, they have no mechanisms for ensuring their stated values are used in their work. They have no way of translating the sign on the wall into the decisions they make and the actions they take every day.

That is the power of what a Values Statement can do. It will not only tell the world outside and inside the organization what talk you want to walk, but it can give you the tools for measuring whether or not you are indeed walking that talk!

When we begin talking with organizations about creating a Values Statement, we get mixed reactions. One of the most common reactions is, "We don't need this. We already know what our values are."

When we ask a few key questions, though, it becomes clear that while everyone on the board believes they have a shared core of values, in fact, each board member simply believes, "Everyone here shares my values!"

One of the other common reactions we get when the issue of "values" is raised is that a discussion of values is little more than "Touchy Feely mumbo jumbo," with no real practical application to the work the organization does.

And again, the truth is directly opposite of that. Boards face values-based dilemmas at the board table all the time - they just don't recognize them as such. Any time the board is faced with the question of "What is important here?" that is a values-based decision.

- Are there groups from whom it is not ok to accept donations?
- What kind of employee benefits package should we offer?
- When a board member betrays a confidential

***We Couldn't Make
This Up***

- matter, what should we do?
- When we've outgrown our rental space, should we buy a building and potentially go into debt, or just lease more space?

These questions (and a thousand more lined up behind them) all pivot on values issues. Any discussion that focuses on the question, "What's more important - this, or that?" is a discussion of values. And without prior discussion of what values will guide decisions, each of these discussions has no context for the decision.

And while all these issues are important reasons for addressing core values in the form of a formal statement, the most critical reason is this:

Absent a values-based context for decision-making, groups are more likely to default to fear-based decision-making when things get tough. And those fear-based decisions are more likely to cross the very lines we would have agreed we would not cross, had we talked about those values in the first place. The only defense against making fear-based decisions you may live to regret is to have discussed core values ahead of time.

Your Values Statement will start with your Vision and Mission, and will then talk about how you will ensure that work is done to model the behaviors you want to see in the community.

Example:

Again, the Diaper Bank's Values Statement - its working credo - provides a touchstone for decision-making at that organization. To see that document, [CLICK here](#).

To see the Values Statement of the Community-Driven Institute, [CLICK here](#).

For Values Exercises to use with your own board
[Click Here](#)

The 3 Statements in Practice

As has been stated throughout this article, the Vision Statement, Mission Statement and Values Statements are not simply for hanging in your lobby or putting on your letterhead. These are practical tools that will help your board govern towards creating more impact in your community.

Here are just a few ways these statements can be used to further your work.

Begin Board Meetings with All 3 Statements

Board meetings have a tendency to quickly dive into the million small items that need to be addressed. By starting the meeting with just a few moments to review and talk about these 3 Statements, you are setting the tone and the context for those practical discussions.

What are we really here for? What is the context of the decisions we will make today? What future are we trying to create, and for whom? And when we do make

A substance abuse recovery organization had an annual fundraiser, a Kentucky Derby event that was very popular. Folks would dress up as if they were going to the race, and they would then watch the race together on big screen televisions.

The flyer for this event came to our office, and we couldn't believe what we saw. As is common with event marketing, the flyer had a list of all the great things intended to entice someone to join the fun. A raffle, a silent auction. Watching the race among friends.

But at the top of that list of fun things - number 1 on the list - was "Beer, Wine and Mint Juleps."

At a fundraiser for a substance abuse recovery organization, the event's NUMBER 1 fun item was all about alcohol!

Clearly, this is an organization that either has no Values Statement, or doesn't use the one they have when decisions are being made.

We Couldn't Make This Up Either!

Lest you think values-free decisions only happen in small local organizations, the International Red Cross has become the media's poster child of such actions.

And while the public is relatively aware of the various debacles that occurred after 9/11 and Katrina, the most blatant example of what happens when there is no core of values guiding decisions is the

decisions - which is what we are here to do - what will we base those decisions on?

By starting each meeting with a re-commitment to those 3 Statements, you will be more likely to keep them in your mind as your board does its work.

Have the 3 Statements Available at the Board Table

Because it is not always easy to remember to fall back on these 3 Statements when we are faced with tough decisions, have copies of the 3 Statements available on the board table at every meeting, to serve as physical reminders.

We cannot count the times, during tough decisions, that we have seen a board member, deep in thought, reach across the table for a copy of their Values Statement, to put that decision into perspective.

Ask the Question

A great habit to cultivate is to have the question asked, for each and every decision of the board, "How will this fit into our Vision for the future of the Community?"

And then, as your board directs a committee or the staff to do particular tasks, ask the question, "Are there specific parts of our Values Statement we want the staff to pay attention to, as they do that work?"

The only way to remain conscious of these guideposts is to do just that - be conscious. Keep those 3 Statements consciously in the forefront of your decision-making. And the easiest way to do that is to create habits, such as these, that remind the board, all the time - this is what we are about. When we have tough decisions to make, this is what we have said is important.

Use the 3 Statements as the Context for Your Organization's Planning

The most influential decisions your organization will make happen during your annual planning sessions. (Don't forget that "budgeting" is planning as well. Your budget is the financial plan for the coming year - the place where your plans will either become reality, or die for lack of inclusion in the budget.)

When it is time to determine goals for the coming year, how will those goals fit in with the future you want to create for the community? As you pursue those goals, what values do you want to be sure guide that work? And as you start planning for how you will use the next year's work to further your vision for the community, are there areas of "What you do" - your mission - that might need to expand?

As you create your annual plans, thoughtfully consider how those plans align behind your dreams for the community. And make sure your 3 Statements are guiding those plans.

Using the Values Statement to Evaluate Your ED / CEO

Evaluating your CEO based on what they did is easy. We tally up everything the CEO was directed to do, and see if that was, in fact, done.

But if your CEO knows he/she will also be evaluated based on whether or not he/she adhered to your Values Statement in doing that work, you will then be able to measure not only **whether** he/she did the work, but **how** that work was done.

Using the 3 Statements to Evaluate the Board's Own Performance Throughout the Year

situation for which the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has had to fine the American Red Cross \$4 million dollars. Yes, you read that right - a \$4million dollar fine.

According to the FDA, the Red Cross failed to ensure the safety of the nation's blood supply. In a 2001 article about the Red Cross, New York Times reporter Deborah Sontag noted, "Food and Drug Administration inspectors found that some Red Cross blood centers would keep testing blood until the tests delivered the desired results; for instance, blood that tested borderline-positive for a given virus would be retested five or six times until the numbers came out negative."

Because blood = money for the Red Cross, if it looked like one more run-through the machine might make that blood usable, they would run it through till it passed.

Values issues, especially when it comes to money, do not just happen in small organizations. They happen when we have no bigger picture of why we are doing what we are doing, and no guiding principles, based on universally shared values, that guide our work.

It is the rare board that takes the time to evaluate itself. We have watched boards openly rebel against doing that at meetings, seeing it as a time-waster. But if boards are not monitoring their own progress, how can they move the organization forward?

A simple board self-evaluation can be done by using the 3 Statements

Vision

Have we done our work in a way that will move our vision forward? Have we focused entirely on our mission, at the exclusion of our vision? How might we change our work to aim at that vision?

Mission

Have we done our work in a way that monitors to ensure we really are accomplishing our mission? And if not, how might we change our work to ensure we are indeed accomplishing that work?

Values

Have we done our work in a way that adheres to the universally shared values at the core of our Values Statement? And if not, how might we change our work to ensure we are indeed walking our talk?

The board is the leader of the organization. If the board is assessing its own work in light of these 3 Statements, it is taking a huge step in reaching for the organization's highest potential to create an amazing community.

Conclusion:

A Mission Statement that tells what the organization does, while necessary, is incomplete. By adding the Vision Statement that explains why the organization is doing that work - where it is aiming - and the Values Statement explaining how the organization will do that work, the board will have three solid tools to serve as a barometer, regardless of who is on the board at the time.

By creating these 3 Statements, and by committing to have those statements guide your organization's work, your board will have 3 simple yet powerful tools for ensuring continuity of your efforts to create a better future for the community you serve.

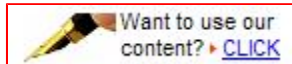


For an example of what the 3 Statement look like in action ► [Click](#)

Is your board governing for what matters most? ► [Click](#)

Want inspiration for imagining the future of your community? ► [Click](#)

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN INSTITUTE



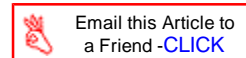
Was this Article Helpful?

Subscribe to Our FREE eNewsletter

First Name Last Name Organization E-MAIL

Message Format Text HTML

 **SUBMIT**



**TO DOWNLOAD A
PRINTER FRIENDLY PDF
OF THIS ARTICLE:**
 [CLICK HERE](#)

[\[Home \]](#) ~ [\[NonProfit Library \]](#) ~ [\[TRAINING \]](#) ~ [\[PRODUCTS \]](#) ~ [\[About Us \]](#) ~ [\[Contact Us \]](#)

Website Design by Dimitri Petropolis
Copyright © 2001-2008 ReSolve, Inc. All Rights Reserved