

# Nonprofit Mission Statement Background Information

## **The Bottom Line**

A clear, concise nonprofit mission statement lets the world know what you do, whom you help, and what problem you are working to solve. It's the foundation of your messaging.

## **Mission & Vision Statements**

A vision statement articulates where you are headed, your future, the target in the distance that you are aiming for in everything that you do. The vision statement expresses the overall goal of your nonprofit.

A mission statement is what you are doing now, in the present, to reach the goal in your vision statement.

A nonprofit mission statement describes your organization's fundamental, unique purpose. It communicates the value the nonprofit delivers, and what groups it serves, and how.

Therefore, the best nonprofit mission statements are a succinct encapsulation of:

- Why does your nonprofit exist
- Whom it serves
- How it serves them

Some nonprofits struggle to differentiate between a mission and a vision statement.

Although both mission and vision statements capture the essence of your nonprofit's beliefs and values, a vision statement explains the overall goal of your organization looking into the future, while the mission statement outlines the present plan to realize the vision.

## ***Why Are Mission Statements Important for Nonprofits?***

### **1. They Clarify Purpose & Determine Direction**

A good mission statement serves as somewhat of a North Star for your nonprofit. It's a foundation for your strategy and a guiding tool for a multitude of activities: from hiring to marketing. By definition, you can't prioritize everything, and your nonprofit mission statement helps you clarify what to focus on.

### **2. They Motivate Staff, Supporters, Board, & Volunteers**

Mission statements do not only dictate and influence how organizations should act but also heavily influence how employees and volunteers think of their roles. A mission statement influences and shapes your organizational culture, and organizational culture is a crucial aspect of employee happiness. People want to believe in the work that they do.

### **3. They Provide a Template for Decision Making**

A mission statement is to an organization what a compass is to an explorer. If designed well, it will provide your nonprofit with a framework for making decisions throughout the organization. Your nonprofit mission statement can help you evaluate options and decide what's best for your nonprofit according to your preferred future.

### **4. They Focus Energy & Attention**

A mission statement can help your team work through different problems and evaluate multiple possibilities. It is especially helpful when your team is being pulled apart in too many directions. A well-crafted mission statement allows your nonprofit to have consistency across time and geography.

### **5. They send out a Powerful Message to the Public**

In one or two sentences, your mission statement sums up the essence of your organization. It speaks volumes about what you stand for, and it should make people want to know more about your organization and support your work.

## ***What Makes a Strong Mission Statement***

A strong nonprofit mission statement is:

**Short.** With enough brainstorming, most organizations can create a single-sentence mission statement.

**Clear.** State what you do without over-explaining.

**Direct.** Name the problem your organization works to solve, the reason your organization exists, and the people or animals you help.

### **How to Write an Awesome Nonprofit Mission Statement (+Tips)**

#### 1. Make it clear

- Your nonprofit mission statement should be unambiguous, simple, and easy to understand.
- This is not the time to show off your vocabulary.
- Use simple and concrete language, and avoid buzzwords and jargon.

#### 2. Make it concise

- A well-crafted mission statement should also be brief and to the point.
- This is often one of the hardest tasks, but try to keep your nonprofit mission statement at 5-15 words, 20 words max.
- Avoid words > 12 letters or 4 syllables long and don't use more than a 1-word string (A, B, and C).

#### 3. Make it informative

- A mission statement should, above all, inform others about what you do and guide your team members and stakeholders.
- It doesn't matter how concise or catchy it is if it doesn't do that.

#### 4. Stay open

- It is also crucial to stay open throughout the process.
- Sometimes, fiery discussions arise when talking about mission and vision statements and individuals may disagree on everything from purpose to wording.

#### 5. Review it frequently

- Once finalized, your nonprofit mission statement should be reviewed frequently, to accurately reflect what your nonprofit does and stands for.

## ***What to Avoid when Writing a Nonprofit Mission Statement***

Creating a mission statement is a foundational step for any nonprofit organization, but it's crucial to avoid common pitfalls that can undermine its effectiveness. By steering clear of the following pitfalls, you can craft a clear, inspiring, and actionable mission statement that truly reflects your organization's purpose and engages your stakeholders.

### 1. Generalities

A common mistake when writing a nonprofit mission statement is to make it too vague.

E.g. "We help people."

### 2. Formal language or jargon

The nonprofit world is full of buzzwords and industry jargon. Avoid it, and avoid formal language. The language should be at an 8th-grade level.

E.g. To protect people from harm with a range of 'outcome focused' functions that 'are professionally competent and understand the operational context of their services, ensuring that they are quality assured, effective and efficient'.

### 3. Taglines

Taglines are often confused with mission statements. They can describe your organization, but they are no replacement for mission statements. They are brief and sharp, and a common marketing tool that is ever more present in the nonprofit world.

E.g.

Kodak: Share moments. Share life.

Wal-Mart: Save Money. Live Better.

These taglines say very little about the organization, while a nonprofit mission statement should provide a common understanding and clarity about what's unique about your organization.



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