
HOW TO WRITE A GOOD MISSION STATEMENT:

A GUIDE FOR NEWBIES (OR “OLDIES” NEEDING A REFRESHER)



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Introduction

We speak of mission statements, and you yawn. Well, stop that. Mission statements don't have to be boring. In fact, when you really stop to think about them they are the road maps for our lives. For example, you have a mission statement for your life. You may not have articulated it, but it's there. It is that which drives you, pushes you, causes you to get out of bed each morning. Your mission may be to simply appease your boss or to put food on your table, but that is still a mission. Hopefully, however, your mission is more than that—to somehow make a difference in your world, to make it a better place perhaps.

In the same way, coalitions also have missions whether they are articulated or not. The problem with not being intentional about your coalition's mission, however, is that your group ends up having as many unwritten missions as there are people who attend. Each comes with their own preconceived notion of what your coalition should be trying to do. It's a recipe for disaster.

So, if you really want your coalition to make a difference in your community, take the time to think through and spell out your coalition's mission. It's really not that hard to do. This guide will walk you through it.

How This Manual is Organized

This guide is divided into three sections followed by a brief conclusion. The first section briefly describes the differences between mission statements and vision statements. If that doesn't interest you, we will not be offended if you skip to the second section where we get to the meat of the matter. The last section simply gives some sample mission statements for you to consider.

In addition, to the text, we at the Evolution Foundation are very aware that some people learn better through more visually stimulating media like videos. Where possible we've placed a few links to quality YouTube videos in the guide as well. Be aware, however, that these were not produced by the Evolution Foundation but have been posted on YouTube for public use.

Mission vs. Vision

In this video Adriana Girdler does a good job describing the difference between mission and vision statements. You'll notice that some of the examples she gives of mission statements don't exactly fit the model described here but that's okay.

You'll also notice that some of the vision examples she gives are a bit more lengthy than we recommend. That's okay, too. See what you think.



Part 1: Mission or Vision

There is much in the literature about how to write mission and vision statements. Unfortunately, the more you read the more muddled it gets. Often the different experts contradict each other. So, what we share here is not a consensus among the experts, but rather a general agreement among most of them.

Most agree, there is a difference between a mission and vision for an organization. First, let's start with 'vision.' ***Vision is a short, easy to remember statement that describes what your world would look like once you accomplish your mission.***

Think for a moment about an athlete who wants very much to become a professional NBA star. Every morning he gets up and the first thing he does is close his eyes and imagine himself hitting the winning shot in the seventh game of the NBA finals. That's his vision, "Winning Shot."

The vision is what success looks like to him. It's a picture he creates in our mind that drives him. We all know, however, that our athlete friend can get up every morning and meditate on his vision, but if he doesn't go to the gym and spend thousands of hours practicing, the vision is nothing but a pipe dream.

His mission, then is "to become the very best basketball player he can become through hard work, practice, and discipline."
The mission is the means to the vision.

Coalitions can have visions as well, though they are sometimes a bit more difficult to picture. I encourage you to attempt this with your group. Here's an exercise you may want to try.

Divide coalition members into groups of three or four. Ask them to imagine a time 10 years from the present in which their coalition has been so successful that the local newspaper wants to do a feature article on your group. What is the headline of that article? In other words, how does the newspaper writer sum up all the good work you've done in just a few words? Get reports from your groups and see what you can come up with.

Not all coalitions have vision statements. It's okay if you don't. Mission statements may be enough. The advantage of a good vision statement, however, is that it gives a short, easily remembered picture of what your coalition is moving toward.

A Similar Two Step Approach

This video describes a two-step approach to writing mission statements that is similar to the three-step outlined in this guide.

But if you look closely, you'll see that the sample mission statements he gives includes our third step, he just doesn't talk about it.

Unfortunately, this video is focused heavily on for-profit businesses rather than non-profits like your coalition.

If you want to skip past all the business stuff, just advance the video to the 2:41 mark.



This is advantageous to both your coalition members and for any marketing materials you might create for those outside your coalition. A good vision statement looks great on a t-shirt. Others can read your vision and know immediately what you are about.

Part 2: The Mission Statement Formula

We could go on and on about the thousands of poor mission statements circulating in our world. You've seen them. They look and sound like someone's dissertation. They have run-on sentences you think will never end. They use words you have to look up in the dictionary, and in the end they sound like a foreign language.

The people who have created these mission statements were well intended, and they no doubt put hours into thinking through each line and wordsmithing each phrase until it was just right. The problem with such mission statements is that nobody, and I mean nobody, reads them, much less remembers them. They get filed away in a folder where they are forgotten. A lot of good that does.

Mission statements are meant to be the road map for your organization's future, the driving force that gives you purpose. If you can't even remember what it says, then it can't possibly fulfill its function.

So, we offer a simpler way to create your mission statement. We guarantee it won't take hours. And the formula we use will be easily remembered. In addition, the end result will be short enough for you to place on your agendas, marketing materials, and anything else your coalition produces. Heres' the formula:

Purpose + Target Audience + Strategy = Mission Statement

Let's look at each of these one at a time:

Purpose:

To write your purpose statement simply answer these questions.

- What is the ultimate result we work to achieve?
- What is the focus problem we are trying to solve?

- What is the need we exist to resolve?

In other words, write a short phrase that describes why your coalition exists. This needs to be short and succinct.

One of the coalitions we work with agreed that their purpose was “*To promote safe and healthy lifestyles.*” That’s it. There is no need at this point to describe in detail what “safe and healthy lifestyles” entails. This phrase may include alcohol and tobacco prevention, diabetes testing, recreational facilities, lighted community sidewalks, mental health screenings, and more. Yes, the coalition needs to discuss these things and understand what they mean by their phrase “*safe and healthy lifestyles,*” but the broader statement here is what we are after for our mission statement.

The verb is also important. This coalition chose the word “promote.” Does that describe what your coalition does or is there a different verb that comes to mind? Maybe you facilitate, or encourage, or advocate, or produce, or initiate. You get the idea. The verb choice is important so think it through.

Target Audience

Whose lives are you trying to affect? Here you need to be as specific as you can. In our example from above, the coalition settled on “*youth and families.*”

To arrive at that they spent some time discussing what “youth and families” meant. Does this include only those families who are struggling or living in poverty? Does it include the homeless man that has no family? Does it include those in nursing homes? What about other service providers? Do your efforts help them in some way? At first coalition members may be reluctant to narrow their focus, but we caution you against that. If your coalition’s efforts are not focused on a clear, identifiable audience then you will be constantly pulled in all directions and find yourself accomplishing little.

You will notice as you read some of the sample mission statements in the next section that almost all of them use some form of this phrase “*youth and families.*” We are not opposed to that language, but we do encourage you to have an honest conversation about what that means to your coalition.

Strategy

Okay, you know your purpose (why you exist) and you know your target audience (whom you are trying to affect). Now the question remains, how are you going to do this? How are you going to go about bringing your purpose to reality in the lives of your target audience? What specific methods are you going to use?

Our example coalition said they exist to “*promote safe and healthy lifestyles.*” That’s great. Now how are they going to do that? Is it going to happen simply by meeting each month, or is something else needed? Here’s what they came up with:

through increased public awareness, education, program development, policy change and community collaboration.

Your coalition may come up with many different strategies. That’s great. Discuss each one. Do they seem right for your group? Ask yourself, “Is our coalition really willing to do all these things?” Too often, coalitions get carried away at this point describing all the things they *could* do or think they *should* do rather than focusing on those things they realistically will do. Write down only what you *will* do.

As in the “purpose” part of the formula, notice the verb used here in the strategy section as well. This coalition chose the verb “increase.” That assumes some of this was already happening. You may want a different verb. Pick the right verbs for your coalition. Pick words that best describe exactly what you will do.

Putting it Altogether

This is the easy part. Let’s look at our formula one more time.

Purpose + **Target Audience** + **Strategy** = **Mission Statement**

Now simply plug in our sample coalition statement from above and see what we get.

To promote safe and healthy lifestyles among **youth and families** through **increased public awareness, education, program development, policy change and community collaboration.**

Between the purpose and target audience add a connecting word like “*among*” or “*for*” or “*with.*” Between the target audience and

What are We Fighting for?

This is a question David Burkus asks as the key to a good mission statement.

David has a lot of great things to say about creating good mission statements. But, like many of the other videos on YouTube he approaches it from a for-profit approach. So, when he talks about companies, you should think “coalitions.”



**WHY
MISSION
STATEMENTS
FAIL**

the strategy add another connecting word like “*through*” or “*by*.” There you have it.

Use Your Mission Statement

The value of creating a mission statement rather than simply copying one is that it gives your coalition an opportunity to truly talk through what you are about, why you meet, what segment of the population you are trying to help, and how you want to go about doing that. These are necessary conversations for coalitions to gain focus.

Once your mission statement is written and your coalition has an agreed upon, clear understanding of why they exist and what they are trying to accomplish, use that to your advantage.

- Print your mission statement at the top of your coalition’s agenda each month. Review it at the beginning of each meeting as a way to focus members on why they are there and to introduce new members to your purpose.
- Print your mission statement on all your marketing materials—brochures, Facebook pages, business cards, newspaper articles, or anything else you produce so those in your community can know what your trying to do.
- Once a year, schedule a portion of your coalition meeting to seriously re-examine the mission statement. We said our purpose was to “promote safe and healthy lifestyles,” for example. How well have we done that this past year? What might we have done better? We said our strategies were things like education, program development, and policy change. Did we really do all these things? Are we going to do these things in the future?
- When your coalition creates its strategic plan, pull out the mission statement first and talk about it. Every goal and action step in your strategic plan must support this mission statement. It will be the driving force behind everything you plan to do as a coalition and keep your plan from addressing issues outside your focus.

Part 3: Sample Mission Statements

The mission statement we used for our illustration in Part 2 is an actual statement created by a coalition here in Oklahoma. We use it here only for illustrative purposes and hope you don't simply copy it for your own. It is not perfect. No mission statement is.

Similarly, the sample mission statements below are statements created by coalitions across the state. Some are better than others. Please don't copy them word for word as your mission statement. Instead, take the time to work through the needed step of creating your own.

That being said, feel free to copy phrases and verbs you like if they truly meet your coalition's needs. As you read these statements, see if you can find their purpose, target audience, and strategy. You may not find all the elements in every statement. Don't be alarmed; the mission statement police won't care. Mission statements are unique to each coalition as they should be.

Strengthening families and enriching the lives of children and young adults through community partnerships for the purposes of reducing barriers, increasing accessibility, empowering individuals and families, and fostering hope.

To provide the tools for a better future for Oklahoma's children and their families through knowledge understanding and nurturing care.

To develop a collaborative system that allows families to access resources and services to promote wellness through education, advocacy, barrier reduction, and promotion of a drug-free community.

To improve the lives of families, the coalition will remove barriers, fill service gaps, and increase awareness of services through networking, education, the development of resources, and the development of partnerships.

Our purpose is to better serve children and families by bridging gaps, breaking down barriers and guiding them to appropriate prevention and intervention resources and services.

To provide a System of Care for comprehensive, high quality mental health and substance abuse services for Oklahoma County families and children to live healthy lives in their community through community collaboration involving key partners who work cohesively to educate, advocate, and support.

To ensure overall wellness and stability for children and families by identifying and addressing unmet needs through community collaboration, research and education.

Create an accessible system of care for children and families to thrive in their community through comprehensive and integrated participation for children, families, and systems that impact children and families.

To promote emotional and mental wellness for our children, youth, and families through a community collaboration to provide comprehensive and integrated services and supports.

Help all children, youth, and families through data, goal setting, and best practice services to create successful lives.

To promote safe and healthy lifestyles among youth & families in Woodward County through increased public awareness, education, program development, policy change and community collaboration.

Support an accessible system of care for children, youth, and families, ensuring emotional, behavioral and social wellness by promoting family-driven integrated comprehensive services.

Conclusion

We hope this brief manual on creating your coalition's mission statement has been helpful. If you don't have a mission statement, we strongly encourage you to create one. The formula outlined is the simplest and easiest way we know to do that.

If you already have a mission statement, we hope you'll take the time to pull it out, reflect on it. Use this formula to evaluate it if

you like. Our main desire is that you have a statement that truly reflects what you are about and is used to motivate you down the right path.

And as always, the consultants at the Evolution Foundation are here to help you. We would be happy to come to your coalition meeting and facilitate a mission statement process with you. Just give us a call. You can find our contact information on our Facebook page: www.facebook.com/OKEvolutionFoundation.

We have more guides for you and your coalition.

Check out our other

[Newbie Manuals](#)