



### **Nonprofit Vision Statements, Core Values & Mission Statements**

In the nonprofit field, reference is often made to an organization's core values, mission statement, and vision statement. I have found that there is some confusion regarding the difference between a mission and vision statement, and that some organizations have never identified their core values. This article will help you to understand these three items, and how important they are to your organization's overall operation, funding, and future.

The first item to consider is the organization's vision statement. A nonprofit organization is formed for a specific purpose. The vision statement is a snapshot or summary of what the organization's end goal or final product should be. To illustrate this, the example I will use is an organization whose primary purpose is to help individuals with disabilities secure employment. A possible vision statement might be "To help all persons with disabilities, who are interested in and capable of working, to secure employment." Although vision statements can be two to three sentences, most are only one sentence in length.

Once the vision statement is complete, the organization should turn its attention to developing core values. Core values express what the organization believes in, supports, and is passionate about; they are critical in defining the mission statement. For example, if the organization was developed to assist persons with disabilities in securing employment, core values may include statements related to the fact that persons with disabilities have a right to be employed and should be a part of the workforce; that regardless of their disability, they are capable of working; that they can perform the essential functions of positions, with or without accommodations; and that they should be tax-payers versus tax-users.

The organization's vision statement and core values are instrumental in developing and finalizing a mission statement. Where the vision statement relates to the organization's end goal (what the organization envisions for the future), the mission statement reflects how the organization will reach that goal. It is more action oriented. Again using the example of persons with disabilities securing employment, a possible mission statement might be "Through career exploration and education, job seeking skills training, and other applicable employment related services, we assist individuals with disabilities who seek employment to find jobs that reflect their interests, education, and skills." As you can see, this mission statement clearly identifies what the organization will do to help persons with disabilities achieve their employment goals. Most mission statements are one to two sentences.

Taking time to clearly define the organization's vision, and prioritize what it believes in and supports, will facilitate the development of a mission statement that stakeholders are passionate about and can easily communicate. In addition, a well-written mission statement provides a quick and clear summary of the organization's purpose for the public and is helpful in writing grants and securing funding. Although mission statements can be timeless, boards should review the organization's mission at least annually to review its relevancy, and to remind themselves of why they became involved with the organization in the first place.

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