

Values, Vision and Mission Statements

“Values, Vision and Mission Statements” are a common strategy for organizations and each of their subunits to align their work to a common architectonic set of organizational values, vision and mission statement. The process has become so common that the phrase is taken to mean one thing, rather than three separate activities. This is because producing the documents emanates from the same set of activities that are designed to answer the following three core questions: What do we value (Values Statement)? What long-term change do we want to make a reality (Vision Statement)? What is our purpose and who are the beneficiaries of this purpose (Mission Statement)? Boards can use the creation of these different documents to memorialize the board’s direction of the organization, the values that guide it and the operational implications for the organization. The process works best for addressing problems of organizational fragmentation, low employee morale or a sense of estrangement between the work of the board and those in charge of the daily work of the organization.

Following is an example of a typical board-level Values, Vision and Mission Statement.

Values statement (Answers the question, what do we value? What are our basic beliefs?):

“Our work will be guided and informed by our beliefs and commitments to:

Responsiveness – we value continuous citizen engagement

Inclusiveness - we respect people, value diversity and are committed to equality.

Efficiency – we value the most efficient use of our financial resources

Effectiveness – we are committed to effective delivery of public services

Quality - we strive for excellence through continuous improvement.

Collaboration - we are committed to a culture of teamwork and collaboration.”

Vision statement (Answers the question, what long-term change do we want to make a reality?) "Our vision is an economically robust community that provides all citizens with a high quality of life with equal access for all.”

Mission statement (Answers the questions, what is our purpose and who are the beneficiaries of this purpose?) "Our mission is to provide all citizens with high quality and equally

accessible public services that we are mandated to provide by law and to support citizen efforts to expand these services within the constraints of the budget and the law.”

One of the noticeable characteristics of each of the above statements is that they don't vary much from one jurisdiction to another. But that is not the point of preparing these documents. The value is in the *process of engagement*, which enables participants to spend what can seem inordinate amounts of wordsmithing time on what may strike you as “nit-picky” issues. But behind these small changes can be mountains of difference in the meaning of phrases like ‘inclusiveness’, ‘equal access’, ‘mandated services’. Debating the meaning and reach of these terms is necessary for norming the mutual expectations of all participants. In fact, think of writing these documents as a social norming process, not simply the production of documents to determine the direction of the organization. When first elected to office, you will find that the organization and certainly many of its subparts may already have prepared such documents. If not, or if they have not been revisited in a while, the documents provide an opportunity to verify if everyone is working from the same page.