

Thinking About Mission, Vision and Values

Museums use various combinations of Mission, Vision, Values and Purpose statements to define their reason for being, their desired outcomes, their internal culture, and the principles that unite their board, staff, and volunteers in service to their audiences and other stakeholders. These statements are expressed differently depending on the history, size, governance, discipline and location of individual organizations. The test for each organization is whether the statements are clear, focused, important to the organization, meaningful to the internal stakeholders, and agreed upon by all who are charged with carrying them out.

Mission Statements

Mission statements are the means by which successful organizations describe the business they are in, the audiences they serve, and the potentials for their future contribution to society. The Mission keeps them from straying into tempting but off-target ventures, and helps them to focus their resources and energies on the activities that will enable them to accomplish their goals.

By defining precisely what the organization is, why it exists, and how it is unique, the Mission sets long-term direction. If it is too broad, the institution may never hope to fulfill it with available resources, and if it is too narrow there will be fewer opportunities to grow and prosper within that definition. It can also define what the museum is *not*.

Vision Statements

Vision Statements are ways of communicating the excitement that an organization feels about its future direction and destination. For some museums, Vision statements are a concise way to express their major goals and strategic objectives, and to direct all eyes towards the hoped-for results of short- and long-term decisions and actions. Others use them to both expand upon and further delimit their Missions for a defined period of time. And, some combine them into the Mission Statement.

No matter how Vision statements are used, they let both internal and external stakeholders know that the *status quo* is not part of the strategy for advancing the Mission. They are about *becoming* more than being, about aspirations and inspiration. A well-conceived Vision Statement, however expressed, generates enthusiasm and support from board members, staff, donors and other funders, volunteers, members, and the general public.

Values Statements

While Mission and Vision Statements tell the world about the Why? and the future What? of the organization, Values Statements often are used to explain the philosophy or manner by which audiences, stakeholders, collections, and communities are to be considered and treated along the way to reaching specific short- and long-term goals. Some organizations use them to create a structure or culture that supports the achievement of Goals and Strategic Objectives through expected behaviors and ways of thinking. And, depending on the history and expectations of the institution, they can also be strictly internal codes for interpersonal behavior that relate to how the work environment is structured.