



Nonprofit Organizations

# How to Write an Amazing Nonprofit Mission Statement

From Mundane to Memorable

SHARE

PIN

EMAIL



Could your mission statement be your nonprofit's rocket to a great future?. Andy Ryan/Stone/Getty Images

By Joanne Fritz

Updated January 20, 2017

Mission statements have often been mind numbing, good only for bureaucrats and to impress funders.

But your mission is part of your branding, just like your logo or website design. That's why it must be outstanding.

Nonprofits, today, often shorten their mission statements to few, pithy words that work across communication channels. The best ones express the focused purpose of the charity and work well with branding, marketing, fundraising, and even your graphic design.



Some people say that mission statements are old fashioned. Don't believe it. Effective mission statements are more relevant than ever. An article from Ohio University refers to research that shows that Millennials especially are drawn to a strong mission.

The article states, "Young employees want to believe their work is making a difference, whether they are in the for-profit or nonprofit sector. Good mission statements place the organization in the wider social context, and show how the work of the organization contributes to making society a better place."

Today, donors, supporters, volunteers look for a nonprofit's mission statement. Yours should be right up front on your website, in your annual report, and in your fundraising materials.

NASA knows the importance of a good mission statement. Although that agency calls it their "vision," they use it to communicate a laser-like focus:

*"We reach for new heights and reveal the unknown for the benefit of humankind."*



---

There is no one way to write a mission statement. Studying many examples should help you recognize what makes a good one.



The best are highly readable and inspirational, but still answer the why, how, and for whom your charity exists.

## The Benefits of a Compelling Mission Statement

- **It focuses your energy and clarifies your purpose.**

Writing a mission statement forces you to figure out exactly what your nonprofit does. You'll have to answer several questions. For instance, whom will you serve? Where are you doing your work? What specifically do you do and, maybe, even more important, what are the things you don't want to do? A narrow focus helps avoid mission creep.

- **It motivates board, staff, volunteers, and donors.**

A mission statement is not just for internal use or to submit to the IRS for tax-exempt status. It helps attract new people and more resources to your cause. Make your mission statement compelling as well as clear. It will be your best public relations tool.

- **It helps to get IRS approval as a tax-exempt organization.**

If you plan to apply for tax-exempt status, 501(c)(3), or some other IRS classification, the IRS will use your mission statement to determine if your organization matches its requirements.

## 6 Ways to Write a Mission Statement That Is Memorable, Not Boring

1. **Bring in many perspectives.**

Get lots of input from the community you plan to serve, as well as from your board, staff, and volunteers. Inclusion develops a broad base of support. You can get this input through meetings, surveys, or phone calls. Ask people what they think about the services you plan to offer.



## 2. Allow enough time.

Time spent now will pay off later. So don't rush the process. Reflect on the information you gather, write the first draft, and let everyone read it and suggest changes.

## 3. Be open to new ideas.

Opinions from lots of people are especially important for a charity's founders. You may have had tunnel vision while getting your organization set up, but now it is time to get a fresh perspective so you can avoid founder's syndrome. Stay open to different interpretations of what you should be doing and how to accomplish your goals. Use brainstorming techniques to encourage lots of ideas. You can winnow them down later.

## 4. Write short and only what you need.

The best mission statements are brief and state the obvious. Your statement's length and complexity depend on what your organization wants to do, but keep it as short as possible.

As Tony Ponderis says, the mission statement should be "...short enough to remember and easily communicate. Strong enough to inspire."

## 5. Get help from a professional writer.

A well-written mission statement can be the foundation for your organization's marketing and branding program. Consequently, it should not be written just for managers and insiders. Get help writing a statement that appeals to a broad audience.

For instance, a good writer can help you avoid jargon and stilted language. The goal should be a mission statement that you are proud to display and that everyone understands. Erica Mills, in *Great Mission, Bad Statement*, suggests that you check out how easy or hard your mission statement is to read by using a well-known test available right in Word docs.



few decades. Cass Wheeler, a long-time CEO of the American Heart Association, says in his book, *You've Gotta Have Heart*, "The environment changes and the organization changes, so a periodic review is important to ensure that there is alignment of purpose and reality."

## 5 Things to Avoid in a Mission Statement

1. Jargon that only professionals in your particular field understand.
2. Stilted, formal language.
3. Passive voice (passive: "XYZ is an organization that helps women achieve independence"; active: "XYZ helps women achieve independence.")
4. A focus on the group, rather than the people it serves.
5. Generalities, such as "saving the world" or "eradicating poverty."

Never cut corners when it comes to your mission. It is worth the time and attention you lavish on it.

Writing a mission statement could be the toughest writing assignment you ever take on, but the result can provide the foundation for everything else you communicate about your charity.

---

### What Is a Mission Statement (with Mission Statement Examples)

[Read Article ▶](#)

---

### The Art of the Business Plan: What's in Your General Description?

[Read Article ▶](#)

---

### 4 Mistakes That Could Cripple Your Nonprofit Startup

[Read Article ▶](#)

---

### What is a Nonprofit? How do I Start One?

[Read Article ▶](#)

---

### 8 Ways to Become a Super Organized Grant Writer

[Read Article ▶](#)