

What is a professional practice statement?

This Professional Practice Statement, developed by the Association Forum, is provided as a management tool for associations and individual association professionals, developed by experts in the industry, and recommended as a means to achieve excellence in managing associations and other not-for-profit organizations.

BACKGROUND

The focus of this professional practice statement is the development of mission and goal statements for nonprofit organizations. A well-developed mission statement can accurately capture both a compelling image of what the organization ultimately hopes to achieve, as well as reflect its beliefs and principles.

- A mission statement describes the overall purpose of the organization; it states the reason(s) why the association exists. It may also identify the groups the association exists to serve: its own members, others in the industry or profession, clients/customers, and/or various publics.
- Goals describe specific, measurable outcomes to be achieved for the organization to meet its mission. Goals guide the organization's activities by providing a measurement of its decision making and resource allocation.

MISSION STATEMENTS AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

In the broadest terms, a mission statement presents the unique reason(s) for the existence of an organization. It clearly identifies and communicates the organization's essence to its stakeholders, including, for some organizations, the public at large.

The organization's mission statement should be well-written and easily understood. Mission statements are not marketing slogans. Rather, they should be written to: 1) promote unity, 2) motivate action within a given set of parameters, and 3) establish the underlying tone for the organization's culture. For these reasons, mission statements are among the most critical components of an organization's strategic plan, and are built to stand the test of time.

The characteristics of a mission statement include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Precisely and simply states the organization's purpose;
- Elicits a positive, motivational response among organizational stakeholders; and
- Reflects a tangible scope of activity against which the organization can measure performance.

GOAL STATEMENTS AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

Goal statements are a natural outgrowth of an organizational mission, and often form the main framework of a strategic plan. These statements set the appropriate priorities for the organization to advance towards its mission at a particular point in time; more importantly, they define the outcomes the organization can realistically achieve given its resources.

Goals may be organization-wide, or program-specific. For example, administrative goals could address governance or staff resources, while programmatic goals could relate to product and service targets. Goal statements should be issue-driven and rooted in the association's business or practice environment. For this reason, goal statements need periodic evaluation and adjustment to accurately reflect changes in the operating environment and build on progress that has already been made.

The characteristics of a goal statement include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Specifically relates to the organization's mission;
- Is measurable against stated performance expectations;
- Generates a timely response to relevant issues in the marketplace, bound by concrete deadlines; and
- Presents a challenging objective that maximizes resources while maintaining a realistic opportunity for success.

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POLICY STATEMENT

The Association Forum believes that association professionals and governing bodies have a shared responsibility for the development and execution of sound mission and goals statements. The following are professional practices to be considered when executing that shared responsibility.

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES FOR GOVERNING BOARDS

CREATE A FORMAL PROCESS FOR DEVELOPMENT AND ONGOING REVIEW

The organization should establish a formal process for assessing the relevance of organizational programs to mission and goals.

MISSION STATEMENTS

- Initial development of a mission statement should be based upon input from the organization's stakeholders. A variety of methods for obtaining this input may be used depending on the organization's needs and culture.
- A single mission statement should be formally adopted by the organization's governing board.
- The mission statement should undergo periodic review to confirm its validity, or, in rare instances, adjust to changed realities.

GOAL STATEMENTS

- Development of goals should take into account both a short- and long-term perspective in consideration of the organization's mission statement.
- Feedback regarding the goals, specifically their measurability and scope, should be obtained from relevant stakeholders.
- If the development of goals is delegated to a body outside the governing board, e.g., a strategic planning committee, all goals should receive formal approval by the organization's governing board.
- Goals should be evaluated frequently to assess progress (at least annually for long-term goals, and quarterly for short-term goals). Goals should be adjusted (by adding, subtracting or revising goal statements) to reflect accomplishments and new challenges presented by the marketplace that are related to the organizational mission.

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES FOR ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVES

SUPPORT THE FORMAL PROCESS FOR DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW

- Gather and present relevant data to the governing board to serve as a context for discussions related to organizational mission and goals.
- Provide analysis of trends, stakeholder needs and organizational resources that could be translated and prioritized into organizational goals by the governing board.
- Consistently manage the implementation of goals to meet stated expectations.
- Facilitate the governing board's process of reviewing and updating mission and goal statements.

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MISSION AND GOAL STATEMENT IMPLEMENTATION

Circulate mission and goals statements to organizational stakeholders, especially decision-making bodies.

Reference the organization's mission and goals in all decision-making deliberations.

Ensure that organizational activities are generated from and progress towards mission and goal achievement.

DISCLAIMER

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