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Writing a mission statement. (Board Primer) (associations) William M. Drohan.

Abstract: Mission statements serve as the governing ideal of groups or associations. It articulates the identity, purpose and direction of the association and influences decisions that have to be made. It is best incorporated into the strategic planning process. Moreover, a mission statement targets a specific audience and is succinct. It creates a unifying environment and provides a reference point on which all association activities can be compared to.

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How to capture the essence of your association in a well-written statement.

A good mission statement expresses an association’s reason for being, conveys the association’s identity, and articulates purpose, focus, and direction. Such a statement is meaningful and inspiring and imparts a sense of stability in the midst of change.

A mission statement differs from a vision statement, which is a picture of what an organization is striving to become. A vision statement pushes the association toward some future goal or achievement, while a mission statement guides current, critical, strategic decision making.

BASIC PARAMETERS

Audience. To write an effective mission statement, it’s essential to first determine all the various groups who compose your target audience. Is the statement intended for employees, members, sponsors, volunteers, government officials, and opinion leaders? What combination of these do you need to address? Knowing the target audience will help you tailor the length and tone of the statement itself.
Length. A good association mission statement is succinct. Anything longer than 30-40 words tends to spill over into your goals, objectives, strategies, and tactics, which are separate issues and integral parts of a solid strategic plan.

Tone. The tone varies from organization to organization. However, make sure your mission statement reflects your membership makeup and speaks convincingly to your target audience. If the language used is lofty or ponderous, even the most aspirational mission statement will not be taken seriously. Consequently, it won’t be used as the guide it’s meant to be.

APPROACH

Writing a mission statement is most easily and effectively done as part of the strategic planning process. Logic would have you start the process by developing the mission statement, proceed through environmental analysis (identifying SWOT: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats), and end with developing and prioritizing goals and objectives.

However, this method can be an excruciatingly painful one, since strategic planning committees and boards of directors often try to limit the purpose of the association without the benefit of first seeing the big picture. Instead, writing a mission statement is best accomplished at the end of the strategic planning process rather than at its beginning. By going through the SWOT analysis and developing goals and objectives first, the mission of the organization becomes much clearer, and a better statement can result.

CONTENT

The actual mission statement includes a succinct description of why the association exists and who it represents. The statement identifies the association’s scope of operations, key values, guiding principles, and priorities.

One example of a good mission statement that includes these elements is that of ASAE: “The mission of ASAE is to promote and support excellence and professionalism among association executives and to work diligently to increase the effectiveness, the image, and the impact of associations as they serve their members and society.”

Remember, this is a working document, not some esoteric declaration destined to gather dust on the shelf. Creating a legitimate and viable mission statement and communicating
it are essential steps in member service. A successful statement becomes a unifying force, a foundation on which to build, and a reference point for everything the association does. It’s well worth the time to make sure it is written in such a way that it will serve as a guide and an inspiration for many years to come.

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