

Vision: How do we want things to be in the future?

A group without a vision is similar to a family on vacation without a road map. They may see some neat things and enjoy themselves, but never get where they planned to go... and there could be a lot of conflict about which roads to take! A vision is a statement about what the future will look like, if all your problems can be solved. Don't make it too long or too fancy, or carve it on stone tablets.

Here are some of the things a vision should do:

- Give meaning to the work that you expect from people.
- Evoke clear and positive mental images of "What it should be like around here."
- Create pride, energy, and a sense of accomplishment.
- Link the project with the results.

Here are some things a vision can be:

- Simple.
- Engaging to the heart and spirit.
- An assertion of what we want to create.
- A living statement that can change and expand.
- A springboard.

Crafting a vision is hard work, since it reaches to the heart of what people believe. Hours have been spent debating the merits of one word against another; that's why a vision should be closer to five words than to fifty! It's important that everyone involved at this stage can live with the vision, even if they don't love the way it turned out.

Once a draft vision statement is up on the flipchart, the group can test it by asking:

- Can it be accomplished? Is it doable?
- Has everybody been honest about what they want? Is this vision authentic?
- Is it worth getting excited about? Will people care about it?
- If achieved, will it make this a better place? Do people have something to gain from it?
- Can we put it on a T-shirt? (In other words, is it short, clear, and memorable?)

Every member of the group should be able to remember the vision (another reason to keep it short), and should be able to support it. It is worth the time spent to get to that point, as it will make the rest of your work much easier.

Mission statements

A vision statement expresses how the group wants things to be. A mission statement expresses how the group will do business in order to achieve the vision. If the vision statement is clear, then writing the mission statement should not take long. Some groups bypass this altogether, if their vision and focus are very clear. However, it's worth the time to clarify why this particular group has come together at this time to accomplish this particular work.

Keep in mind that you're not writing vision and mission statements just to have something impressive on the wall. These are working documents that keep the group focused. If they need to change or be made clearer in future, do it... after all, they belong to your group.

To formulate the mission statement, ask:

- Who are we?
- Who or what do we work for?
- What do we offer?

To test the draft statement, ask:

- Is it clear and understandable to all the stakeholders?
- Is it brief and memorable?
- Is it unique to this group?
- Does it reflect the group's core values?
- Is it broad enough to be flexible, without being fuzzy?
- Will it help us make decisions?