

Setting Your Foundation's Mission, Vision, and Values Resources & Samples

To assist our members, Philanthropy West Virginia is pleased to provide this resource to our members to guide their work in creating their mission, vision, and values to guide their grantmaking work. Definition of each term is:

- Mission Statement is a statement of action about your philanthropic purpose
- Vision Statement is a statement of the future world and view you wish to create/see.
- Values are your guiding principles for the board, staff, and founder(s) for decision making and fulfilling your mission and vision

The following is compiled from professional experience and peer resource groups.

Creating Your Foundation's Mission Statement

You have decided to start a family or private foundation. **What's next?** That's an excellent question that your mission statement can answer.

Mission Statements establish what will direct your foundation, express the impact you want to make, and energize its passions. Your mission tells a story in a very brief and compelling way. Borrowing from the work of Foundation Source, it states having a clear mission can:

- Express the founder's intentions for future generations
- Ensure board members know what the foundation intends to accomplish (What is your enduring purpose?)
- Provide a reference point that discourages mission drift (Who are we (the foundation)?)
- Let other funders know how they can collaborate with you
- Shield the foundation from being deluged by grant requests from every organization (What is your focus over time not just the current year?)

Your foundation's mission statement serves as your launch point not as an extra step afterward. Your mission serves as a compass for board members, staff, and the communities and organizations you interact with them. As your foundation has a goal, the mission statement tells you how it can be reached. As a board member once shared, the mission statement is "your constellation for navigating the waters as both an assertion of your journey in oceans that has competing needs and challenges. Creating your mission statement and working toward it serves as a call to action to create a better community and state."

What is required for an effective mission statement? Here's Five components to consider:

- 1) Incorporating the values of the founder(s)
- 2) Brevity
- 3) Simple language
- 4) Specific focus
- 5) Avoid Terminology

In creating your mission statement, you establish your "North Star" so that your foundation identifies what you want the foundation to accomplish and attract a group of potential nonprofits to request funds aligned with your goals. This avoids having to feel like your foundation must fund all things and be all things to all organizations.

Here are a few examples from Philanthropy WV's members:

- **Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation:** "To encourage human development in West Virginia and Southwestern Pennsylvania through strategically placed charitable resources."
- **Pallottine Foundation of Huntington:** "Through the support of transformative health initiatives that empower all individuals to lead lives of optimal health, self-reliance, and self-respect, the Pallottine Foundation of Huntington strives to foster systemic change and collaborative impact in our community."

- **Bernard McDonough Foundation:** "To improve the communities within West Virginia."
- **Roy & Dr. Gwen Steeley Foundation:** "Investing in education to strengthen West Virginia communities"
- **The Ross Foundation:** "Build a strong and healthy local community by supporting nonprofit organizations which create a lasting impact in the Mid-Ohio Valley Region."
- **Maier Foundation:** "is on the furtherance of higher education in West Virginia and on the higher education of West Virginia residents attending colleges and universities elsewhere. In addition, the Foundation makes educationally-related distributions to cultural and other organizations in the Kanawha Valley."

When setting your foundation's Vision and Values a few steps to take include:

Once you have set your mission, identifying your vision and values comes next. As the Council on Foundation's shares in their 2009 resource for family and private foundations, "statements of the founders' enduring philanthropic purpose and the principles that can guide its charitable work as a family or founders."

1) When defining your vision, focus on what is the change you (founder(s), board, and staff) wish to create with your philanthropic giving or foundation's grantmaking. Your vision statement should define:

- i) What is your foundation's view toward/of the future of what your giving will accomplish to improve society?
- ii) What's the legacy the foundation (board, staff, and founder(s)) want to leave?
- iii) The dream of what you will make possible and what you will fund or will not fund to achieve that dream
- iv) A Vision Statement is usually one to two sentences. Here are a few samples:
 - "The _____ community or region is a forward-thinking and closely connected community that fearlessly works together to promote the prosperity of all."
 - "Overcoming financial barriers to the pursuit of educational opportunities, creating an educated and economically advanced Mountain State."
 - "That our community's future is filled with hope, promise and a belief that the Tri-State will continue to grow and prosper."
 - "Our vision is anchored in a belief in people, organizations and the power of partnerships. We believe more people must directly influence the institutions and leaders that shape their economic and civic lives."

2) When defining your values, focus on:

- i) How are the board members expected to act to carry out the foundation's mission?
- ii) What are the standards or ethics that the founder(s) embrace?
- iii) What does the founder(s)/board members hold to be most important and which guide group decision making and behaviors?
- iv) What accompanies and amplifies the Mission?
- v) Feature key words defined in behavioral terms
- vi) Your values can serve as the source for governing principles and policies
- vii) Values can be four to six identified words with agreed to definitions or value statements a series of 2 to 4 sentences here are some examples:
 - "We nurture leadership within the communities we serve, and we participate in leadership when it adds value."
 - "We expect collaboration among the public, private and nonprofit sectors in order to leverage the resources that each can bring to common concerns."
 - "We honor our founders' belief in 'helping people help themselves,' and we seek opportunities to cultivate the creativity of people and communities."
 - "Integrity, Opportunity, Responsibility, Excellence, Collaboration, and Accountability"

Creating your foundation's Mission, Vision, and Values will take some time, but is a group activity and process. Input from the founder(s), board members, and staff will help create a clear path for your foundation's future. Helping create a foundation's mission, vision, and values is a special expertise of Philanthropy West Virginia. If you need assistance in facilitating this process, please reach out to Philanthropy WV's staff to arrange a consulting session by calling 304.517.1450.

Sources: Council on Foundations, Foundation Source, Jewish Funders Network, and Philanthropy West Virginia