

Chapter 4

Developing a Mission Statement

A mission statement is a broad expression or description of your organization's reason for existing. It is the single, consistent message that you, your board members, other volunteers and eventually your staff will use to gather public support and attract funding. It should express the overall purpose of the council and be agreed upon by everyone involved in the organization.

Source: "Developing a Mission Statement," Starting Up: A Handbook for New River and Watershed Organizations. Published by River Network

The mission statement, or statement of purpose, is a great tool for bringing various watershed interests and stakeholders together. It provides a way for everyone to have input into the formation of the organization. And it serves as a vehicle to achieve "buy-in" from the different interests that will be making up your watershed council.

A mission statement basically explains why the organization exists – what problem(s) it is being organized to solve or what need it is being formed to meet. Such a statement should be broad enough that it doesn't require changing too frequently, yet specific enough to describe the organization. The most effective mission statements are generally not very long, and they do not tell in great detail what the organization does. Instead, they present a simple, focused statement of WHY the organization exists.

In an article by Jean Vogt published in the Society for Non-profit Organizations' *Nonprofit World* (Jan/Feb 1994), titled, "Demystifying the Mission Statement," it is recommended that a mission statement include three basic elements:

- 1 identification of who (or what – the watershed, the local economy, etc.) will benefit from the services provided by your group;
- 2 a statement of the end goal your group hopes to achieve through the provision of its services – what you expect will happen to the entities you serve or what goals will be reached;
- 3 identification of the general services to be provided to reach the goal – a very general statement of HOW you will do what you say you will do, as, for example, through education and outreach, or using funding and member expertise.

Keep in mind that the mission statement may change, over time, as your organization changes and progresses. You may want to revisit your mission statement on some regular basis – once a year or every other year – to be sure that it continues to reflect your group's purpose. It's also good to hold such reviews regu-

“Defining the purpose and mission of the [organization] is difficult, painful, and risky. But it alone enables [an organization] to set objectives, to develop strategies, to concentrate its resources and to go to work. It alone enables [an organization] to be managed for performance.”

Source: Peter F. Drucker, Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices (1973, 1974)

larly so newer members of your group – especially within the governing or decision-making body – have the opportunity to express their views on the mission statement and hear discussion among the other members about the statement and its relevance to the group’s activities. Regular review of the mission statement is also a good way to take the pulse of the organization as a whole by seeing how people think the mission statement fits with what the group is currently doing.

The mission statement is a product of the organization, not just one or two people; and the process of creating a mission statement is as important as the resulting statement, itself. Going through the process of creating a mission statement helps solidify commitments and increases buy-in from the various stakeholders involved. The process also allows individuals or organizations to voice concerns and visions for the group and its future, with the benefit of everyone else hearing them. By expressing all these thoughts and concerns early in the process, you reduce the likelihood that individual members or participants will find reason to abandon the group later, since they will have been part of the initial scoping and creation of the mission from the beginning.

If individuals on your governing body start having disagreements about direction, focus, or activities to be undertaken by your organization later on, it is always helpful to look back at your mission statement and affirm whether you are all in agreement about continuing to work toward that mission or whether you might want to change your mission to accommodate new or changing situations in your watershed.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Collect mission statements from other organizations, both watershed-oriented and others, as models or examples. There is no need to recreate the wheel in this process. You may find another organization with a mission statement that expresses what it is your group is hoping to accomplish. Use that as a model or basis for the development of your own mission statement.

If possible, establish a subcommittee to take a first stab at a draft mission statement, which can then be presented before the full board or other decision-making body for refinement and, ultimately, adoption. If changes are substantial, send the whole thing back to the subcommittee for a second round. The committee can do the wordsmithing to capture the revisions desired by the whole group, and can then bring back a revised version for further discussion.

Try to mirror the overall representation of your council on your mission statement subcommittee. In other words, try to balance the various interests represented by the individuals making up the committee so that all points of view and differing perspectives are brought out in the committee discussions before going to the full group for discussion and adoption.

Come to the creation of your mission statement with an open mind. In the case of the Yuba Watershed Council, for example, the subcommittee consisted of representatives from two federal agencies, a property owners group, a neighborhood association, an environmental organization, and the local irrigation district, along with a volunteer facilitator/consultant. The irrigation district representative ended up suggesting the stronger environmental protection language for inclusion in the mission statement.

Don't expect to get something put together in just one meeting. It usually takes at least two or three meetings to come up with a draft and to go through the revision and adoption process.

Have a good facilitator lead the committee meetings and the presentation of drafts to the larger group in order to avoid getting too hung up on precise wording and risking having the whole process stalled. If necessary, postpone any decision until the next meeting, giving people time to digest and think about the mission statement before having to make a final decision. If there are one or two people who seem to be having problems with it, encourage them to attend the next subcommittee meeting where the mission statement will be further refined or revised.

Once you have adopted a mission statement, the “Demystifying the Mission Statement” article recommends you use it in communicating with all your target audiences, internally and externally. It should appear in some format (the original or some paraphrase of it) in all publications and communications. It can also be used for addressing board development, long-range and strategic planning, program evaluation and other activities in the future. In other words, all actions of your organization should be evaluated in terms of how they help fulfil the mission.

From your mission statement come your organizational goals, objectives, and workplan. Programs are developed to fulfil the mission statement, and funds are generated to support these programs. Through your mission statement, staff, board members and the community know what the organization is striving to accomplish and how they can contribute to the effort.

Above adapted from “Demystifying the Mission Statement,” Nonprofit World Jan/Feb 1994. Published by The Society for Nonprofit Organizations, 6314 Odana Road, Suite 1, Madison, WI. 53719. 608-274-9777.

For a list of sample
missions statements, see
pages 50-52.



CHAPTER 4 - KEY CONTACTS/REFERENCES/RESOURCES

Yuba Watershed Council. Contact: Ron Zinke,
NRCS, 113 Presley Way, Suite 1, Grass Valley,
CA 95945. Tel: 530-272-3417. Fax: 530-477-
8055.

Jean Vogt, "Demystifying the Mission Statement,"
Nonprofit World (Jan/Feb 1994). Published by
The Society for Nonprofit Organizations, 6314
Odana Road, Suite 1, Madison, WI. 53719. Tel:
608-274-9777.

Peter F. Drucker, ***Management: Tasks, Responsi-
bilities, Practices***. New York: harper & Row.
1973, 1974.

***Starting Up: A Handbook for New River and Wa-
tershed Organizations***, published by River
Network, PO Box 8787, Portland, OR 97207-8787.
Tel: 503-241-3506. Fax: 503-241-9256.
www.rivernetwork.org. 1996.

SAMPLE MISSION STATEMENTS

The following is a list of sample mission statements from other river groups and watershed councils, compiled by River Network and published *in Starting Up: A Handbook for New River and Watershed Organizations*, 1996 [reprinted with permission].

Examples of Mission Statements

The following mission statements provide you with a wide array of style and content. Notice how each statement answers, to some degree, the questions: who or what is the focus of the organization (keep in mind that unlike many other types of nonprofit organizations, the focus of most river groups is the river or watershed itself and not necessarily a group of individuals); what is the end or goal toward which the services will be delivered; and what services will be provided. Note also that it is not always necessary or practical to answer the above questions in great detail, but it is to your organization's advantage to be as specific as you can. Most missions can be stated in one concise sentence - this allows for easy repetition and comprehension.

Cannon River Watershed Partnership (MN)

To protect and improve the surface and groundwater resources and natural systems of the Cannon River watershed by providing for its cooperative management and protection and by instilling a sense of watershed pride.

Clinton River Watershed Council (MI)

To serve as a forum for all interested parties and to provide for comprehensive river resource management and education to protect, preserve and improve the Clinton River and its watershed for the benefit of industries, businesses, governments, organizations and individuals.

Colorado Rivers Alliance (CO)

To protect and restore the natural character and responsible use and enjoyment of Colorado's rivers through communication, cooperation and policy.

Elizabeth River Project (VA)

To form a partnership among diverse community interests to raise appreciation of the economic, ecological and recreational

importance of the river; and to restore the Elizabeth River system to the highest practical level of environmental quality.

Friends of the Animas (CO)

To promote the environmental well being of the Animas River, its watershed and riparian zones by providing information and facilitating discourse.

Friends of the Black River/Seventh Generation (OH)

Seventh Generation is a nonprofit, grassroots environmental organization in greater Lorain County. We are dedicated to protecting and preserving our natural resources to ensure a clean, safe, and beautiful environment for all living things, for the next seven generations. This is accomplished through education and community involvement.

Merrimack River Watershed Council (MA)

The protection and restoration of the Merrimack River and its tributaries for the enjoyment of the public, benefit of its communities, and health of the watershed ecosystem.

Mill Creek Conservancy (CA)

To preserve and protect Mill Creek by bringing together landowners, developing resource management techniques and emphasizing local coordination and control of resources.

Organization for the Assabet River (MA)

Founded in 1986, the organization works with citizens and government to restore the river’s water quality to fishable, swimmable standards and to protect the river corridor.

Perkiomen Valley Watershed Association (PA)

To protect and conserve the natural resources of the Perkiomen Creek watershed through education, monitoring, detection and pollution studies and attempting to maintain high water quality through local ordinances.

Presumpscot River Watch (ME)

PRW is dedicated to preserving and improving the health of the Presumpscot River watershed by scientifically monitoring water quality and selected sites; sharing water quality data with watershed residents to increase awareness; and serving as an advocate for the river through community legislative, and individual efforts.

Rio Grande Restoration (NM)

To restore the Rio Grande to health by establishing a naturalized flow regime of improved, high-quality water in the river for the benefit of fish, wildlife, and recreation.

River Action (IA)

To help communities in the Quad Cities enhance their river-fronts through a festival, fundraising projects, design principles and educational services.

Rivers Alliance of Connecticut (CT)

To protect and restore rivers in Connecticut through public policy development, grassroots and volunteer action, and public education.

Tualitin Riverkeepers (OR)

Tualitin Riverkeepers is dedicated to promoting advocacy, awareness, appreciation of and education about the Tualatin River through sponsoring and leading river trips and other educational activities.

Willamette Riverkeeper (OR)

Working to make the Willamette River Watershed healthy for fish and wildlife and safe for fishing and swimming forever and for all.

Some organizations begin their mission with a short, concise statement which can easily be repeated, and then provide a few more specific sentences describing their conservation efforts.

Nine Mile Creek Conservation Council (NY)

To protect the watershed ecosystem associated with Nine Mile Creek from degradation, and to support continued recovery of this area to realize its full potential value to the community. We are dedicated to promoting stewardship for this area in the local community, creating educational

programs, recovering appropriate recreational use, and caring for and monitoring this watershed area.

River Network (OR, DC)

To help people organize to protect and restore rivers and watersheds. We support river and watershed advocates at the local, state and regional levels, help them build effec-

tive organizations and promote our working together to build a nationwide movement for rivers and watersheds. River Network also acquires and conserves riverlands that are critical to the services that rivers perform for human communities: drinking water supply, floodplain management, fish and wildlife habitat, recreation and open space.

Other watershed council groups and their mission statements, which are not listed in the River Network publication but might be of interest, include:

McKenzie Watershed Council (OR)

To foster better stewardship of the McKenzie River watershed resources, deal with issues in advance of resource degradation, and ensure sustainable watershed health, functions and uses.

Grande Ronde Model Watershed Program (OR, ID)

The Board of Directors of the Grande Ronde Model Watershed Program are of the conviction that it is in the best interests of the people to preserve and protect the fisheries and the multiple natural resources of the Grande Ronde Basin for the general welfare of the local communities, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Nez Perce Tribe of Idaho, the people of Oregon, and the citizens of the United States.

Henry's Fork Watershed Council (ID)

The Henry's Fork Watershed Council is a grassroots, community forum which uses a nonadversarial, consensus-based approach to problem solving and conflict resolution among citizens, scientists and agencies with varied perspectives. The Council is taking the initiative to better appreciate the complex watershed relationships in the Henry's Fork Basin, to restore and enhance watershed resources where needed, and to maintain a sustainable watershed resource base for future generations. In addressing social, economic and environmental concerns in the basin, Council members will respectfully cooperate and coordinate with one another and abide by federal, state and local laws and regulations.

Nisqually River Council (WA)

To protect and enhance the Nisqually River basin through collaboration, advocacy, and education.