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Mission and Vision Statements

The mission statement and the vision statement provide the overarching themes for a library's goals and objectives. Both statements engage in big picture thinking and should be inclusive of the community's diverse perspectives. The library's values support the mission and vision by outlining the core beliefs of the organization and what it stands for.

Although seemingly similar at first glance, the mission and vision statements each serve specific and distinct purposes:

Mission Statement - declares what the library does, and for whom, in simple and straightforward language. The mission statement outlines, within a short and concise statement, where the library is at, right now, and what its purpose is. The power of the mission statement comes from its simplicity, the fact that these few words make it absolutely clear why the library exists, and what it contributes to the community. Mission statements are more precise, and based in action, than vision statements. As a general rule, mission statements use one or two sentences to describe what the public library does that is unique or different from other organizations.

Examples:

Bruce County Public Library - "We provide the information, knowledge and entertainment resources you need to achieve your goals, foster your interests, and realize your dreams."

The Blue Mountains Public Library - "The Blue Mountains Public Library is a dynamic centre of community engagement where everyone can connect, explore and create."

Vision Statement - describes the library's ideal future. A strong vision statement describes how the community will be improved as a result of the library achieving the future it has imagined. Think of a vision statement as describing where the library wants to be by the end of the Strategic Plan's lifespan.

If the library already mission and vision statements, it's recommended to give them a thorough review in order to update and adapt for the library's current reality. What does the old mission statement mean now? Has the organization's purpose in the community shifted over time and is no longer accurately reflected in that statement? **In order to serve as an effective mission, the mission statement must be currently true.**

The work of developing a vision statement--an appealing vision of the future--is that of being creative and unrestricted. The library's vision is imagining what total success will look like approximately 10 years in the future. **In order to serve as an effective vision, the vision statement must not yet be true.**

Examples:

Manitouwadge Public Library - "The Manitouwadge Public Library is a modern, growing community hub keeping our residents connected and informed; preserving the past and creating a gateway to innovation."

Ottawa Public Library - "To build community and transform lives."

There are many approaches to crafting and expressing the library's mission and vision. The process ideally allows all participants to think together by engaging in genuine conversation that is free flowing, creative, and diverges into multiple possibilities. Once all possibilities have been named, the work of the participants is to be selective, to consider all the possibilities in light of community awareness and other relevant information, and to decide collectively what one, two, or three ideas best capture the library's purpose.

The steering committee should reflect on and review the information gathered during the situational analysis at regular points during the strategic planning process. Doing so allows the group to identify priorities, test assumptions, and view all elements from an objective position.

Further Resources

- Building Your Company's Vision - Harvard Business Review
- Libraries of the Future Trends - American Library Association
- How Public Libraries Play a Vital Role in Restoring the Economy - The Globe & Mail

Values

The Library's values are an expression of the fundamental principles that the organization holds to be of primary importance through everything it does. Values are the areas in which the Library is not willing to make sacrifices. They define the baseline of what is and is not acceptable within the organization.

Common examples of public library values include:

- Intellectual Freedom
- Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)
- Customer Service Excellence
- Respect
- Accountability

In choosing a new path with the Strategic Plan, it is important to ensure that the chosen path aligns with and conforms to the values every step of the way.

Further Resources

- What Are Your Values? - MindTools
- How to Define Your Organization's Values - Forbes

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