

# Evaluation of a Mission Statement: Creative Commons

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## Part One

### Background

Creative Commons (CC) was founded in 2001 with the aim of making it easier to legally share and modify creative works. CC is best known for their copyright licenses which allow content creators to easily permit others to share or modify their creations. Many individual authors and artists use CC licenses as do large sites such as Wikipedia and Flickr.

### The Mission

CC's mission, as stated on the "About" page of the website, is:

*Creative Commons develops, supports, and stewards legal and technical infrastructure that maximizes digital creativity, sharing, and innovation.*

CC also has a concise, punchy slogan featured on their homepage: "Share, Remix, Reuse – Legally"

I will evaluate the effectiveness of this mission using the "Making Missions That Won't Creep" framework.

### It is Focused

The CC mission is focused yet highly ambitious. The first half of the mission statement narrows the mission to legal and technical infrastructure. The second half of the mission, "maximizes digital creativity, sharing, and innovation." is a goal that, while enormous, can be tackled via the infrastructure.

### It Solves Unmet Public Needs

The internet has the ability to allow universal access to cultural, educational, and scientific content. Copyright law is outdated and prevents easy, legal sharing and remixing of that content. CC empowers authors and artists to publish their works with modular, easy to use licenses which are more permissive than existing copyright.

### It Leverages Unique Skills

CC has very specific legal and technical needs due to the nature of the licenses and platform. The organization seems to command these skills as evidenced by CC Licenses holding up in recent trials and being highly searchable. CC should have no problem attracting people with the necessary expertise who are passionate about the mission.

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### **It Guides Trade-offs**

By specifically narrowing the focus to legal and technical infrastructure, the mission can help CC employees and board members turn down adjacent opportunities such as creating a marketplace for CC work.

### **It Inspires and is Inspired by Stakeholders**

The mission of maximizing digital creativity, sharing, and innovation is very inspirational. It is also broad enough to speak to those with passions specifically related to culture, education, or science. It is well aligned with the artists and authors who will be using the licenses as they likely care deeply about the goal.

### **It Anticipates Change**

Despite being focused on legal and technical infrastructure, the CC mission is worded such that it will remain relevant as the needs of the stakeholders change. While copyright law is most relevant to current online creative output, the rise of 3D printers may create a need for CC-style patent licenses. CC could begin addressing this need without deviating from the mission.

### **It Sticks in Memory**

While the full mission is concise and clear, it is not particularly memorable. The slogan, “Share, Remix, Reuse – Legally” however is both catchy and captures the spirit of the organization.

### **Conclusion**

Creative Commons has a well crafted mission which fulfills criteria of the framework. The organization appears to be spending the bulk of its resources refining the CC licenses and increasing awareness and utilization through various initiatives. The mission should serve the organization well as technological innovation continues to disrupt established methods of creative production and enables new forms of collaboration around culture, education, and science.

## Part Two

### Interviewees

#### **Mike Linksvayer – Vice President**

Mike joined CC in 2003 as CTO. In 2007 he became Vice President and runs most of the day-to-day operations. He was the first CC employee I spoke to and he provided a great overview of the organization's structure, activities, and vision.

#### **Esther Wojcicki –Board of Directors, Vice Chair**

Esther teaches journalism at Palo Alto High School and is a professional journalist, contributing to several blogs. She served on CC's education committee before joining the board. Until recently she was Chair of the CC board; Joi Ito became Chair after stepping down as CEO. Esther and I discussed the role of the Board as well as CC's education initiatives.

#### **Jane Park – Education Coordinator**

Jane joined the Creative Commons Learning Team in 2008. She is now Education Coordinator and reports directly to Mike Linksvayer. We discussed the details of CCs education initiatives and her views on the mission.

#### **Cory Doctorow – Author (users of CC Licenses)**

Cory's novel, *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom*, was the first book published under a Creative Commons license. He has since become a major proponent of CC and copyright reform. While I did not have the chance to speak with him, I read many of his articles on the subject.

### Mission Alignment

I asked each interviewee to define CC's mission in their own words. Their responses were very similar to the defined mission though their emphasis was slightly different; Mike stressed maximizing creativity, Esther focused on helping people share, and Jane highlighted current copyright hindering open access to culture, science, and education.

While it is important for board members, management, and employees to have the same understanding of the mission, it is also critical for an organization's activities to align as well. Mike described CC's programs as falling into three categories:

- Creating the licenses and maintaining the related technical infrastructure
- Building trust in CC's legal expertise and the legality of the licenses
- Educating creative, educational, and scientific communities about the tools

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All three of these seem critical to the mission. The licenses allow authors and artists to overcome the limitations of the current copyright law that is preventing the maximization of creativity, sharing, and innovation. Building trust in the licenses encourages their adoption and discourages others from violating them. The education initiatives increase the adoption and usage of the licenses; without active usage, the licenses would be meaningless.

### Revised Mission Statement

After conducting the interviews and participating in the class discussion last week, I still believe that CC has a well constructed mission statement. The one weakness is that the mission may be confusing to someone who lacks any familiarity with the organization and the licenses. This could be cleared up by articulating “legal and technical infrastructure” in more simple terms. The mission also does not make the education component explicit. The following is my attempt at a revised statement:

*Creative Commons develops and supports licenses that empower authors, artists, and institutions to control how their content is shared, remixed, and reused. The organization actively expands the awareness and adoption of these licenses, thereby enhancing creativity, sharing, and innovation.*

While a bit longer, this version of the mission covers a broader range of stakeholders, is more accessible to a newcomer, and covers a broader scope of the organizations activities. The sacrifice in brevity could be alleviated by use of the slogan “Share, Remix, Reuse – Legally” when needed.

Randy,

This is a very good analysis of Creative Commons’ mission statement, both pre- and post-interview. You are correct in your assessment that the mission statement is well crafted, and further that it actually reflects and guides the work and aspirations of the organization. Your revision does help clarify for the ‘lay’ observer a little more detail about CC’s work, and given that ‘education’ seemed important to internal stakeholders, you are wise to include that intent in the mission as well.

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