DRAFT - IT Project Guidance

Vision, Mission, Purpose, Problem Statements

Version:

0.1

## Purpose

This document provides a common reference point to support consistent understanding, analysis, and system design across programmes and workstreams. It aims to clarify key concepts and structures, reduce ambiguity, and enable alignment across technical and non-technical stakeholders. The content may be reused or referenced in other documents to support coherent planning, delivery, and review.

## Synopsis

The document introduces a structured approach to defining and relating core elements such as domains, entities, capabilities, and functions. It includes guidance on application, worked examples, and reference definitions. While not specific to a single project, it is intended to support ongoing initiatives by providing terminology and models that improve interoperability, traceability, and reuse.

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# Introduction

This document provides structure and terminology that can be used directly or by reference in related work. It introduces concepts progressively, allowing readers to dip into relevant sections or follow a complete path from foundational principles to worked examples.

It is designed to assist both technical and non-technical audiences. Where appropriate, definitions and models are intended to be reused without needing to be re-explained in future documents. The appendices include cross-references, terminology, and supporting material.

# Document Background

This document was developed to provide enduring reference material in support of ongoing programmes and system initiatives. It builds on prior analysis and aims to consolidate foundational concepts so they do not need to be repeated in future work.  
While not directed by a single initiative, the document supports long-term alignment across programmes through the consistent use of terms, structures, and framing.

# Context

# Strategic Intent

This section defines the long-range intent of an organisation and its programmes. It begins with the Vision—a broad aspirational view of a better future—then grounds that direction in the Organisation Mission and Programme Mission. These components provide consistency, purpose, and alignment across evolving projects and roles. Strategic Intent helps prevent short-termism and platform-led thinking by maintaining focus on what the organisation is ultimately here to enable.

## Vision

Vision describes the future state the organisation or programme aspires to, independent of specific solutions or constraints. It is typically defined at the organisational level, but can and should be visible or refined at the programme, product, or project level where relevant. The Vision provides orientation and coherence, anchoring the broader effort to a shared long-term direction.

Vision operates almost like a primary principle: it does not prescribe implementation but defines the kind of world the organisation intends to help bring about. It is directional, not operational. A strong Vision ensures alignment across changing leadership, technologies, or delivery approaches.

A meaningful Vision depends on a general understanding of the organisation’s core mandate and purpose. It benefits significantly from early engagement with leadership or trusted sector voices, especially when aiming for alignment across diverse programmes or stakeholder groups.

A clearly articulated Vision grounds the basis for downstream framing of the Organisation and Programme Missions and all downstream rationales for actions. It provides a reference point for then defining Purpose, guiding requirements, and evaluating whether proposed changes support the intended future state.

A strong Vision should inspire commitment without resorting to fantasy. It must be plausible and achievable in spirit, even if not yet in detail. A good Vision should outlast any single initiative or leadership cycle, remaining durable over time. It needs to be abstract enough to remain relevant across diverse initiatives, but not so vague that it becomes meaningless. It should also avoid anchoring itself in any particular technology, methodology, or product—remaining agnostic to implementation paths.

Common mistakes include confusing Vision with project-specific goals or deliverables, which narrows its reach and undermines its longevity. Equally problematic is making the Vision so vague or grandiose that it becomes ineffective as a guide, or the use of lofty language without clear relevance to the organisation’s domain, resulting in a statement that is motivational but directionless.

Examples:

* Too general: "To make the world a better place."
* Too output specific versus vision defining: “To launch a new student dashboard”
* Too vague as to be ineffectual: “To become the world leader in education”.
* Too ungrounded: ““To illuminate the pathway of possibility for future generations”
* Sector-specific: "To enable all learners to succeed in their education journey."
* Contextualised and aspirational: "To ensure every learner is prepared to survive, thrive, and shape an unknowable future."
* For integration efforts: "To enable information to move freely, securely, and meaningfully across systems in support of trusted effective decisions."

The first three illustrate common pitfalls: being too general, too vague, or too ungrounded. The final three are stronger examples, demonstrating how a Vision can be sector-specific, contextualised, and aligned with the broader direction of integration and interoperability efforts.

## Organisation Mission

An Organisation Mission statement describes the ongoing role, mandate, and commitment of the whole organisation, often derived from its legal, sectoral, or social purpose. It tends to remain constant across changes in leadership or structure.

The Organisation Mission depends on a clearly articulated Vision to establish directional clarity and long-term aspirations. It must also be anchored in statutory, legal, or sector-specific mandates that give it authority and legitimacy.

A well-defined Organisation Mission in turn provides the grounding for programme and project missions. It ensures internal consistency and alignment by setting boundaries and priorities for major initiatives.

A strong Organisation Mission is enduring and high-level, not tied to individual projects or leaders. It is often externally visible or published to affirm public accountability. It serves as a stable anchor for programmes, reflecting the parent body’s purpose and responsibilities.

Common issues include being too vague or aspirational, which obscures the real role of the organisation and confuses its mandate. Another is misusing the mission space to describe projects or initiatives, which are transient and do not reflect the organisation’s sustained obligations.

Examples include:

* Vague: "To make education better for everyone."
* Project-oriented: "To build an online enrolment platform."
* Unanchored: "To become a digital leader in global learning innovation."
* Broad: "To serve and strengthen education outcomes for all New Zealanders."
* Specific and role-anchored: "To steward the equitable distribution of public education funding and ensure all learners are supported."
* Legitimised by mandate: "To maintain national oversight of learner identity, enrolment, and participation across the education sector in support of equitable service delivery.""

The first three illustrate common pitfalls: being too vague, method-focused, or transient. The final three demonstrate durable, purpose-aligned missions that support long-term programme relevance across evolving projects.

## Programme Mission

A Programme Mission statement reflects the specific, stable identity of a major initiative within the organisation. It is narrower than the organisation’s mission, but not as specific as a project purpose.

A clear Programme Mission depends on direction inherited from the Organisation Mission. It must also align with the programme’s governance structure, intended scope, and longevity to ensure strategic relevance.

A well-articulated Programme Mission enables consistent framing of project Purpose statements. It also supports strategic coordination across related workstreams, ensuring coherence between initiatives.

A strong Programme Mission is anchored in the organisation’s mission but tailored to the programme’s scope. It remains relevant over several years, even as individual deliverables shift. It makes explicit the programme’s service role in enabling sector outcomes.

A well-articulated Programme Mission enables consistent framing of project Purpose statements. It also supports strategic coordination across related workstreams, ensuring coherence between initiatives. It provides a shared reference point for assessing scope proposals, clarifying priorities, and aligning tactical plans under a common strategy. This helps governance bodies validate decisions and ensures new or evolving work remains within the intended domain. By articulating a durable role, it allows delivery methods to evolve while keeping long-term outcomes on course. It also provides a narrative for engaging stakeholders and communicating the programme's value proposition clearly over time.

One common error is focusing on what the programme builds rather than why it exists—framing the mission as an output. Another is reducing the mission to a series of deliverables, which risks limiting the programme’s adaptability and long-term value.

Examples:

* Vague: "Delivering sector-wide insights."
* Too focused on methods: "Building a database for education analytics."
* Project-centric: "To develop reporting tools for Ministry staff."
* Role-aligned: "To provide a trusted source of operational education data that supports decisions made across learners’ lifespans."
* Sector-anchored: "To coordinate the consistent integration of learner data across education providers in support of timely, effective interventions."
* Identity-focused: "To maintain a coherent, national-level view of enrolment and participation to inform education policy and operational response."

The first three illustrate common pitfalls: being too vague, method-focused, or transient. The final three demonstrate durable, purpose-aligned missions that support long-term programme relevance across evolving projects.

# Actionable Rationale

This section builds the logical justification for change. It begins by identifying the existing problem, then states the immediate purpose for initiating the effort, and finally outlines the value expected from addressing the issue. This structured rationale ensures that the effort is grounded in real conditions, directed by relevant intent, and justified through benefits. Each component contributes to a traceable and testable basis for future requirements.

This section establishes why change is necessary, and why now. It begins with the Problem Statement, which defines the current condition that is no longer sufficient. It then introduces Purpose, which explains why a specific initiative has been initiated in response, and concludes with the Value Proposition—the justification for investing time and resources to solve the problem. Together, these provide a logically sequenced rationale that all downstream requirements must align to.

## Problem Statement

The Problem Statement defines the current condition that is insufficient, undesirable, or needs to be changed. It focuses on what is wrong, missing, or preventing progress, without proposing solutions.

A well-written problem statement ensures that requirements are rooted in real-world context, not assumptions, interpretations, or stakeholder opinion.

Dependencies:

* Grounded in real-world observation, sector feedback, or user pain

Enables:

* Purpose definition
* Risk framing and scope control

Qualities of a strong Problem Statement:

* Describes a real, observable condition, not just a feeling or interpretation
* Uses evidence or reference points where possible (e.g. data, missed outcomes, systemic inefficiencies)
* Avoids suggesting a solution
* Is bounded and specific, but not overly narrow
* Reflects the perspectives of affected users and stakeholders, not only system owners

Common mistakes to avoid:

* Embedding the preferred solution in the problem ("We need a dashboard because...")
* Making it too broad or abstract ("Our system is broken")
* Using value-laden or inflammatory language
* Omitting the consequence or impact of the current state

Examples:

* Weak: "Our staff can't see what's happening."
* Misleading: "We need a new integration engine."
* Better: "Operational decisions are delayed because data about learner enrolments arrives late, is inconsistent between systems, and cannot be easily resolved."
* Sector grounded: "Education providers and agencies are unable to confidently determine which learners are currently enrolled, pre-enrolled, or have exited, resulting in duplication, missed service eligibility, and inconsistent reporting."

A strong problem statement is a foundation. It enables clear framing of Purpose, justification of Value Proposition, and testable alignment with User, Capability, and Functional Requirements.

## Purpose

Purpose refers to the core reason for undertaking a specific initiative, project, or capability build. It explains what the effort is intended to achieve and why it matters.

It defines why this particular effort matters, now.

It is often confused with a Vision or Mission Statement, the distinction is important.

Where Vision offers a future aspiration, and Mission defines the enduring role we commit to within our sector or mandate, Purpose translates that shared direction and duty into actionable intent.

Purpose is specific and contextual to the change at hand, whereas Mission is broader and enduring, tied to an organisation’s long-term identity and mandate.

Dependencies:

* Requires a defined Problem Statement and clear Mission

Enables:

* Justification of the Value Proposition
* Delimiting Business and Capability Requirements

Qualities of a strong Purpose:

* Specific to the initiative or context
* Understandable by both technical and non-technical stakeholders
* Grounded in organisational relevance, but not a restatement of the Mission
* Connects clearly to the problem being solved and the intended change

Common mistakes to avoid:

* Repeating the Mission or Vision
* Making it too vague to guide evaluation (e.g. "improve outcomes")
* Embedding too much solution detail before requirements are established
* Failing to show why the effort matters now

Examples:

* Too vague: "To modernise our systems."
* Solution-focused: "To implement an enterprise data warehouse."
* Strong: "To enable decision-makers to act on accurate learner participation data by providing timely, integrated enrolment visibility across education providers."
* Contextualised: "To reduce service duplication and funding waste by resolving inconsistencies in learner identification across operational systems."

## Value Proposition

The Value Proposition articulates the tangible and intangible benefits expected from the initiative. It builds on the Problem Statement and Purpose by explaining why addressing the problem is worthwhile.

A well-formed Value Proposition makes a case for investment by connecting the proposed change to meaningful organisational, sectoral, or social outcomes.

It is not simply a restatement of Purpose. Where Purpose justifies action, the Value Proposition justifies the value of that action. It answers the question: "If we do this, what do we gain?"

Dependencies:

* Requires a well-framed prior Problem Statement and Purpose

Enables:

* Business case development
* Prioritisation of Requirements and Acceptance Criteria

Qualities of a strong Value Proposition:

* Explicit about who benefits, and how
* Balanced across qualitative and quantitative gains
* Tied to the problem and purpose without redundancy
* Avoids unjustified or exaggerated claims

Common pitfalls:

* Too generic ("will improve everything for everyone")
* Mistaking outputs for value ("deliver a new portal")
* Ignoring opportunity costs or trade-offs
* Repeating Purpose or Benefits without showing why it matters

Examples:

* Weak: "To deliver a new system that integrates student data."
* Inflated: "To revolutionise all education outcomes through data consolidation."
* Clear and compelling: "To improve service targeting and funding accuracy by enabling agencies and schools to share real-time, consistent learner identity and enrolment information."
* Sector-specific: "To reduce time spent reconciling student data across agencies, enabling staff to focus on interventions rather than validation."

A strong Value Proposition supports investment and delivery decisions. It shapes programme design and delivery priorities, and serves as a framing tool for evaluating change impact, risk appetite, and sequencing.

Appendices

Appendix A - Document Information

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### Versions

* 1. Initial Draft

### Images

[Figure 1: TODO Image 2](#_Toc144995112)

### Tables

[Table 1: TODO Table 3](#_Toc145048484)

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### References

**There are no sources in the current document.**

### Review Distribution

The document was distributed for review as below:

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### Audience

The document is technical in nature, but parts are expected to be read and/or validated by a non-technical audience.

### Structure

Where possible, the document structure is guided by either ISO-\* standards or best practice.

### Diagrams

Diagrams are developed for a wide audience. Unless specifically for a technical audience, where the use of industry standard diagram types (ArchiMate, UML, C4), is appropriate, diagrams are developed as simple “box & line” monochrome diagrams.

### Acronyms

API

: [Application Programming Interface](#Term_ApplicationProgrammingInterface).

DDD

: Domain Driven Design

GUI

: [Graphical User Interface](#Term_ApplicationProgrammingInterface). A form of [UI](#Acronym_UI).

ICT

: acronym for Information & Communication Technology, the domain of defining Information elements and using technology to automate their communication between entities. [IT](#Acronym_IT) is a subset of ICT.

IT

: acronym for Information, using Technology to automate and facilitate its management.

UI

: User Interface. Contrast with [API](#Acronym_API).

### Terms

Refer to the project’s Glossary.

Application Programming Interface

: an Interface provided for other systems to invoke (as opposed to User Interfaces).

Capability

: a capability is what an organisation or system must be able to achieve to meet its goals. Each capability belongs to a domain and is realised through one or more functions that, together, deliver the intended outcome within that area of concern.

Domain

: a domain is a defined area of knowledge, responsibility, or activity within an organisation or system. It groups related capabilities, entities, and functions that collectively serve a common purpose. Each capability belongs to a domain, and each function operates within one.

Entity

: an entity is a core object of interest within a domain, usually representing a person, place, thing, or event that holds information and can change over time, such as a Student, School, or Enrolment.

Function

: a function is a specific task or operation performed by a system, process, or person. Functions work together to enable a capability to be carried out. Each function operates within a domain and supports the delivery of one or more capabilities.

Person

: a physical person, who has one or more Personas. Not necessarily a system User.

Persona

: a facet that a Person presents to a Group of some kind.

Quality

: a quality is a measurable or observable attribute of a system or outcome that indicates how well it meets expectations. Examples include reliability, usability, and performance. Refer to the ISO-25000 SQuaRE series of standards.

User

: a human user of a system via its UIs.

User Interface

: a system interface intended for use by system users. Most computer system UIs are Graphics User Interfaces ([GUI](#Acronym_GUI)) or Text/Console User Interfaces (TUI).