



Building a mission

What is a mission statement?

A mission statement is a brief proclamation describing the intent and/or purpose of the group. It's brief, to the point, and effectively conveys a synopsis of the group's objective. The language used in a mission statement is concise and specific, yet broad enough to generalize the scope without specifics about the group's activities. Keep in mind that it is important not to be redundant in your wording.

Why is a mission statement important?

A mission statement is of particular importance because it sets defined parameters for the group. A group without boundaries is one without defined objectives or clear direction. Imagine a cattle ranch without a fence around the grazing grounds. The owner could awake one morning with his cattle scattered about the countryside, wondering aimlessly. A mission statement sets the focus for the group by erecting boundaries and providing a clear course for the organization to proceed. This may appear restrictive to some, however, one organization can take on the entire world. It is important to remember that when building a mission statement, one must keep it specific and focused to ensure efficient productivity, yet broad enough to allow the organization room to grow at a healthy pace and in the right direction.

In setting these parameters, a mission statement unifies members and around common goals. Imagine a windmill without an axle. The blades would not rotate in unison and would scatter about. The mission statement is the organization's "axle"; it keeps the group goal-oriented and functioning as a connected unit.

Getting Started

What's the first step?

Come together. Bring the core organizers of your youth or student group together and share ideas and aspirations. It is especially important to involve the core organizers during the formation of the group and its mission statement. This is healthy for several reasons. First, it allows for members to feel apart of a collective group. Secondly, it allows for a more comprehensive and polished finished product – two heads are better than one. Your mission statement will be

inclusive of member ambitions, and representative of a larger future congregation that you hope to recruit.

When you bring the core of the group together, make sure you discuss what each of you, as individuals, hope to accomplish. This will clarify and “personalize” the mission statement. In so doing, make sure that individual ambitions do not take away from the heart of your collective objectives. Usually youth and student groups form to benefit a greater congregation, which should not revolve around one single individual’s ambitions. Individual aspirations are only relevant to an organization when they are contributory to the benefit and well-being of the organization as a whole.

Useful tip: Make sure that you keep a record of the groups’ brainstorming sessions. This will be useful when formulating a vision and for future planning.

Common Pitfalls: Getting too many people involved, especially those who may not share in the same vision as the rest of the group. For instance, if you and your associates would like a youth organization that provides religion-based educational programming, inviting others that want a more cultural or socially oriented group may hinder your progress in drafting a mission and formulating goals.

What do I do after the group has come together and thoroughly discussed the group that we would like to form?

Find and agree upon on a common ground to build your foundation. This will set the framework for your mission statement. But, do not pour the cement just yet! After you all have agreed on the common objectives of the group, it’s time to put it in writing. Organizing your collective thoughts in writing is no easy task. It may get a bit trying at this point, but tough it out: You are well on your way to building an organization with longevity and purpose!

Useful Tip: If you are going around in circles trying to figure out the proper wording for the mission, have everyone sum up what they think about the group in one sentence. If your members are on the same page, you have basically stated your mission in plain language. For example, if the group is all in agreement that they want to form “A student group that creates awareness about Islam and the Muslim world”, the mission of your group has been summed up in one sentence. Now you can polish it up to make it more professional and stylistic. Presto - You have your mission statement!

We all agree about what we want our group to be about, what’s next?

Formulate a proper statement, or statements that represent the group’s position.

Useful Tip: Get your peers to meet in a place with a chalk board or a projector so you can write out the mission statement and allow your peers to contribute as you write down what you agree upon. Remember, it is important to have an accurate record of what you have agreed upon and what you have agreed to leave out.

Common Pitfalls: Sometimes a group may spend too much time trying to figure out the 'perfect' or most proper word usage. It is important not to get caught up with trivial semantics. In the larger scheme of things, these little differences are meaningless.

Some groups may want to cater to a specific group of individuals or carry out specific goals. As such, their mission may want to briefly make mention of this. It is beneficial in this instance to portray your group as sensitive and inclusive. This is when semantics may become important as you want to be careful in choosing the right terminology.

What if my group has been functioning for a while without a mission?

If your group has been up and running without a mission, don't panic, the herd hasn't made its way down the river bank yet (but don't wait too long!). If your group has been quite active and successful it may have an assumed mission, one that is not yet written, but inherent within its members. What you need to do is come together, take stock of what your group has accomplished and build your mission from there.

What if we cannot agree on a mission statement?

If your group has been up and running for a while or is just getting started and cannot agree on a mission statement, a red light should go off in your head. This may mean your group is taken on too many different types of projects, or too many individuals are moving in different directions. In such a situation, several things can be done: Broaden the parameters of your proposed mission statement, allowing for flexibility when it is examined and also when it is put into action. You may also want to define a core group of individuals that will draft the mission. If too many individuals are involved, especially those who are not active or plan to depart from the group soon, this would not aid in formulating a solid mission statement encompassing longevity.

Written by: Brother Ali H Dabaja

Edited by: Brother Jamal Jouney, PhD, MS

Currently Br. Ali Hassan Dabaja is Medical Student at Michigan State University College of Osteopathic Medicine. A co-founder of both the Young Muslim Association and the Allied Muslim Youth of North America, he has dedicated much of his time to youth and faith-based activism. For questions or more information, please contact Br. Ali at alidabaja@yahoo.com.