

## Mission to Vision

Defining Your Nonprofit's Purpose  
Stating Its Intention

Oliver Tessier & Associates www.otessier.com February 1, 2008

## Understand the drivers

- The issues are likely to have come to you—presented themselves as causes demanding a response. Strong emotions are often attached to them.
- Knowing and understanding the issues—in the context of the community served—are essential to building an effective organization.
- The issues may grow and change. To remain relevant, your nonprofit will have to do the same.

Oliver Tessier & Associates www.otessier.com Slide 4

## Primary Topics

**Mission**  
Your nonprofit's purpose

➔

**Vision**  
The impact you intend to make

Surely there's more to it than that....

Oliver Tessier & Associates www.otessier.com Slide 2

## Master mission distinctions

<p><b>Mission</b> Magnetic North</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Abstract</li> <li>▪ Static</li> <li>▪ Enduring</li> </ul>	<p><b>Mission Statement:</b> Lively Expression</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Purpose                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We are here <b>because</b>...</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Action                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>We will</b> do these things...</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Result                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our goal is to <b>achieve</b>...</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
---	--

Oliver Tessier & Associates www.otessier.com Slide 5

## Find the path to your vision

**Issue**  
*because*

**Mission**  
*we will*

**Planning**  
*analyze  
prioritize  
strategize*

**Action**  
*engage  
evaluate*

**Vision**  
*achieve*

Oliver Tessier & Associates www.otessier.com Slide 3

## Master vision distinctions

<p><b>Vision</b> The destination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Clear</li> <li>▪ Ambitious</li> <li>▪ Optimistic</li> <li>▪ Rational</li> </ul>	<p><b>Vision Statement:</b> Succinct Expression</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Definition                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>We intend</b> to...</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Challenge                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>We can</b> accomplish...</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Inspiration                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>We will</b> succeed...</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
---	--

Oliver Tessier & Associates www.otessier.com Slide 6

## Expect some long discussions

I'm not sure how to put it into words, but I'll know it when I see it.

*I have made this [letter] longer, because I have not had the time to make it shorter.*  
—Blaise Pascal, "Lettres Provinciales", 1657

Oliver Tessier & Associates [www.otessier.com](http://www.otessier.com) Slide 7

## Anticipate the issues

### Know the givens

- What do we **do**?
- What does everyone feel passionate about?
- What must be included to avoid misrepresenting the organization?

### Know the hot buttons

- What uncertainties are likely to need the most attention?
- Where is there dissent?
- Are there topics or perspectives that are considered taboo?

Oliver Tessier & Associates [www.otessier.com](http://www.otessier.com) Slide 10

## Identify the participants

### Who will participate in the process?

- The board owns the mission; they make the final decision.
- The staff has everyday responsibility for achieving the mission. They have critical information, and you want the buy-in their participation will earn.
- Constituents (such as clients or funders) can bring a valuable perspective.

*Create a task force of people who are interested in both process and outcome. Keep it small; keep it agile.*

Oliver Tessier & Associates [www.otessier.com](http://www.otessier.com) Slide 8

## Structure the discussion

- Identify the key questions to be considered
- Prepare participants with backup materials
- Create and distribute an agenda that includes the topics to be discussed

- Review the process
  - The goal
  - Topics to be covered
  - Ground rules for participation
  - How decisions will be made
- Vary your means of exploring information to accommodate different personal styles

If you have the means, invest in a professional facilitator.

Oliver Tessier & Associates [www.otessier.com](http://www.otessier.com) Slide 11

## Define the process

- A task force of the most creative thinkers and writers available drafts an initial statement.
- Task force presents the draft to the board for *general* comment on message and tone.
  - Caution! Wordsmith detour ahead!
- Task force incorporates board comment into a second draft.
  - If you have access to a professional writer, use it now.
- Task force presents the second draft for preliminary approval.
- Task force makes any necessary adjustments.
- Task force presents the mission statement for the board to adopt.

Oliver Tessier & Associates [www.otessier.com](http://www.otessier.com) Slide 9

## Agree on the ground rules

### We are pursuing a shared goal

- All ideas are welcome
- I will listen carefully to what I resist most
- Equal participation from everyone is key
- There are no taboo topics
- I will uphold the confidentiality agreement (if there is one)

*Encourage productive disagreement; you'll have a better outcome. To unify the group and advance the effort, focus on the goal.*

Oliver Tessier & Associates [www.otessier.com](http://www.otessier.com) Slide 12

## Tackle the questions

Open questions will encourage discussion.

- What needs to be done that only we can do, or that we can do better than anyone else?
- Who benefits from our products/services and how?
- How do we accomplish our work?
- What do we value most?
- How broad or narrow is our focus?

What are the most important questions for your nonprofit to address?

Oliver Tessier & Associates www.ottessier.com Slide 13

## Use what you've created

Congratulations!  
You've got a mission and vision statements.

Use them to:

- Define your organization to the world
- Guide your decision making
- Inspire your constituents (clients, community, board, staff, funders)
- Promote your cause

Oliver Tessier & Associates www.ottessier.com Slide 16

## Consider others' mission statements

*Organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful.*  
—Google

*...provide relief to victims of disasters and help people prevent, prepare for, and respond to emergencies.*  
—The American Red Cross

*...to strengthen the nonprofit sector by advancing knowledge about U.S. philanthropy.*  
—The Foundation Center

*To enable people and businesses throughout the world to realize their full potential.*  
—Microsoft

Oliver Tessier & Associates www.ottessier.com Slide 14

## Plan to achieve your vision

**Strategic plan**

- Agreed upon priorities and broad means of achieving them over the next -three years
- Tool for evaluation progress toward significant goals

**Business plan**

- Organization-wide activities to take place during the business year, as supported by the annual budget
- Tool for evaluating staff performance at individual and team levels

**Personal plan**

- Each staff member's plan for his/her own performance
- Tool for evaluating individual performance and growth

Oliver Tessier & Associates www.ottessier.com Slide 17

## Consider others' vision statements

*A world without Alzheimer's disease.*  
—Alzheimer's Association

*Current and future media and telecommunications technologies promote, and do not impede, democratic values.*  
—Media Access Project

*Every child will be a wanted child.*  
—Planned Parenthood

*A personal computer in every home running Microsoft software.*  
—Microsoft

Oliver Tessier & Associates www.ottessier.com Slide 15

## Take action

**Implement your program activity**

- Deliver products and services
- Monitor progress
- Adapt and improve based on what you learn
- Share learning with others


**Connect to your community**

- Seek collaborative opportunities

**Advocate for your cause**

- Educate your audience and the general public
- Educate lawmakers


Oliver Tessier & Associates www.ottessier.com Slide 18

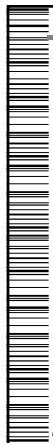


## Are we there yet?

How will we know when we've achieved our vision?

- Keep asking yourself how close you are, over and over.
- Ask your clients, donors, members of the community— anyone with a genuine interest in your nonprofit.
- Learn from your successes and your failures; modify your activity for constant improvement.
- Don't be afraid to say, "We've done it! Our work is through."

Oliver Tessier & Associates  www.otessier.com Slide 19




## For more information

Visit [www.otessier.com](http://www.otessier.com) for:

- A [library](http://otessier.com/library) of articles related to nonprofit leadership and management (<http://otessier.com/library>)
- [Q&A for Nonprofit Professionals](http://otessier.com/questions), a wide-ranging series of short essays on topics of interest to nonprofit leaders (<http://otessier.com/questions>)

Email [oliver@otessier.com](mailto:oliver@otessier.com)

Oliver Tessier & Associates  www.otessier.com Slide 20