

Creating a Mission Statement for Your Unit

Why is a mission statement so important?

A mission statement can be a powerful leadership tool. A strong mission statement not only communicates strategic intent, but it also creates meaning for employees. It gives them a shared sense of purpose and direction. This is essential for increasing employee engagement. As two influential strategists have noted, “Most people won’t go the extra mile unless they know where they are heading.” (Hamel & Prahalad, 1996). And it is the leader’s responsibility to provide that direction. To do that, a leader’s first step is to create a compelling mission statement.

While crafting an effective mission statement is vitally important, it is not enough. Even when it is well written, it may be forgotten unless the leader finds ways to infuse it into the culture of the organization or business unit. Indeed, that is the next step: the leader must find ways to bring the statement to life. The mission statement needs to be a part of recruitment and hiring, performance management, and rewards and recognition. By incorporating the mission into these core practices and systems, the leader can positively impact organizational behavior and realize the full benefits of a highly committed workforce.

What is a mission statement?

According to Wikipedia, a “**mission statement** is a short statement of an organization's purpose... A mission is not simply a description of an organization, but an expression, made by its leaders, of their desires and intent for the organization. The purpose of a mission statement is to focus and direct the organization itself... It communicates primarily to the people who make up the organization—its members or employees—giving them a shared understanding of the organization's intended direction.”

In short, mission statements articulate what you are supposed to be doing. If you don’t know that, no one else will either.

What are the key elements?

A good mission statement contains five things:

- **Name** of the office, department, or unit
- The **primary purpose** of the unit (why do you do what you do?)
- The unit’s **primary functions or activities**
- The unit’s **stakeholders or customers**
- **Reference to the broader mission** of the organization, department, and division

A basic template including these five elements would be: “**In support of the organization’s mission to** (*broader organization mission*), **the mission of** (*your office name*) **is to** (*your primary purpose*) **by providing** (*your primary functions or activities*) **to** (*your stakeholders*).”

Additional clarifying statements may be provided and the order of the elements of the mission statement may vary.

Examples

“The University of Chicago is a world-class institution of higher education. Its mission is to produce a caliber of teaching and research that regularly leads to advances in fields such as medicine, biology, physics, economics, critical theory and public policy. Our Facilities Services team supports that mission through efforts to maintain and enhance the University campus and environment and provide superior client service to our community including faculty, students, staff, neighbors and visitors.”

“In support of the CUIMC overall mission to provide clinical care, research, education and community service to make CUIMC a destination campus, CUIMC HR is committed to delivering the highest quality services, strategic partnerships and collaborative solutions that focus on our valued clients’ business initiatives while working together as a team to energize our campus community every day”

Tips

Make sure you have senior management buy-in before embarking on creation – or revision – of a mission statement. What you create will need to align with the broader mission statement(s) of your organization, department, and division.

Ask yourself, or your team members, these questions as you consider what to include in your mission statement:

- Why does this area exist? What is it supposed to accomplish?
- What does this area do to carry out that purpose?
- Who does this area work for?
- What do we want to become as an area?
- What is our unique contribution? How can we distinguish ourselves as an organization?
- What legacy do we want to leave on CUIMC as individuals / an area?
- If we were wildly successful in this area, what would we have done?

Ask customers, stakeholders, staff, and others in and outside of the organization for insight as you create your mission statement and for input when you are ready to propose a mission statement.

For additional support with your mission statement

If you would like support in developing - or revising - a mission, vision, or values, contact the CUIMC-HR Talent Management team. We will work with you to create valuable and effective mission, vision, or values statements.

For consultation services, contact Sophie Oberstein, Associate Director of Learning & Organization Development, at so2558@cumc.columbia.edu, or 212-305-0974.