

**Creating A Mission Statement**

A document to assist Social Services Ministry Units

with the creation of a local Mission Statement.

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# What is a Mission Statement?

An effective Mission Statement conveys the following information externally to the community and internally to staff, volunteers, clients and other stakeholders:

Why **–** Why does this ministry unit exist?

Who **–** Who does this ministry unit serve?

What and How **–** In what ways does the ministry unit serve the intended clients / community?

Where **–** the location is not always included in the mission statement but it may be especially in situations where there is a specific catchment area or funding requirement.

# Why Do We Need A Mission Statement?

A Mission Statement is primarily a communication tool. It can be used internally and externally to communicate the purpose and driving force behind the work of a ministry unit.

A Mission Statement outlines the purpose and direction of the ministry unit. It communicates that purpose and direction to all people, both inside and outside the Ministry Unit. It can assist in keeping everyone focused on our reason for being.

A Mission Statement is used to ensure that the ministry unit’s strategic planning, goal setting and decision making are reflective of the overall purpose and mission of that unit.

A good, well written, Mission Statement can inspire, unify and motivate your staff and volunteers.

A Mission Statement, when well written, portrays a powerful and solid message to the members of the community.

# What Is The Difference Between A Mission And A Vision Statement?

Many people struggle to understand the difference between a Mission Statement and a Vision Statement. While there can be some similarities between the two statements, there are also key differences.

A vision statement is future oriented. It captures the overall goal of the organization in terms of where you want to be in the future. One way to think of it is to consider what your ministry unit would look like in 5 years if you successfully met all of your mission and strategic planning goals. The main purpose of a vision statement is to inspire everyone involved in your ministry.

An example of a Vision Statement might be:

**“We will be a major force in the war against Human Trafficking.”**

In contrast, a Mission Statement is about the present time. It outlines your plan to move your ministry unit towards the successful completion of your vision. It informs everyone who reads it what you are doing and why.

An example of a Mission Statement might be:

**“Booth Shelter addresses homelessness by providing emergency shelter and transitional housing to men in crisis.”**

# What Is The Criteria For A Good Mission Statement?

Clearly Worded – the Mission Statement should be understandable to everyone who reads it. Consider that people whose first language is not English may need to understand your mission statement. Write your Mission Statement in such a way that a twelve year old child could explain to you what it means.

Concise– many people write Mission Statements that are much too long. They should ideally be one sentence or two simple sentences at most. When creating your Mission Statement, aim for a total of 5 – 15 words. There should be an absolute maximum of 20 words. The Mission Statement does not need to contain everything that you do with details. It simply covers the main points and the message that you want to convey.

Informative – the average person who reads your Mission Statement should understand the basics of what your Ministry Unit does.

Memorable – Everyone who works for your Ministry Unit should know the Mission Statement. It should be written in a way that is easy for people to remember. A general guideline to remember is that should you ever have to recite your Mission Statement, while under duress, you would be able to do so.

Focused On People – The Mission Statement for your Ministry Unit should be focused on the people that you serve not on the Ministry Unit itself. Who are your target population and what do you do to assist them?

# What Is To Be Avoided When Writing A Mission Statement?

Generalities– Your Mission Statement should be specific enough that people really understand what you do. Try to avoid vague and nebulous statements. “We make the world a better place” is an example of a vague and nebulous statement. This would not be a good component of a Mission Statement. An example of a statement that is not nebulous and general might be:

“We provide support and counselling to women who have experienced trauma.”

Formal Language Or Jargon–The work that we do is full of jargon and often professional language. In The Salvation Army, we have acronyms for everything (eg. DC, THQ, DDWO). We also have terminology that we use internally (eg. Ministry Unit, Citadel) that would not have a clear meaning to someone outside the organization. These kinds of terminology, that we understand completely, but that other people might not understand, **should never** be used in a Mission Statement.

Here is an example of a statement containing too much formal language, jargon and acronyms:

“We transform the lives of HT women using a strengths based, outcome focused, CBT model of Social Work.”

This kind of language is only understood by people with a background and training in Social Work or related fields or those who work in your environment. It would not be easily understood to people from outside of your organization. It is also doubtful that a 12 year old child would be able to explain what it means. Keep your language easy to understand and simple.

Boring Language–The more boring your Mission Statement is the less likely people will be to read it. If your Mission Statement is dull, it will not fulfill its purpose. The Mission Statement should use language that is lively and catchy.

Taglines– Many organizations use taglines as communication tools. Our Territory’s tagline is “Giving Hope Today”.Taglines can be a useful communication tool. They are brief and catchy and very commonly used. But they should not replace your ministry unit’s Mission Statement.

# What Is The Process For Creating Mission Statements?

There are a variety of ways to create effective Mission Statements. All of them require time and participation. A Mission Statement should never be written just by one person. It is very important that the Mission Statement is created by a group or team of people. If you include a team of people, you will end up with a much better and understandable Mission Statement and the likelihood of buy in from participants will be greater. If your team knows that they had a part in crafting the Mission Statement, they are much more likely to embrace it than if it was imposed on them.

Outside Facilitator - It is very helpful to have an outside facilitator lead you through the process of creating a Mission Statement. If you have someone from outside of your Ministry Unit, it allows everyone to be able to participate because no one on your team has to lead the discussion. While there certainly are a variety of consulting companies who would be happy to lead this process, they often come with a fee scale that may not be affordable. However, many times there is a staff member in another ministry unit or resources at DHQ/THQ who could lead you through the process of creating a Mission Statement.

**Here is one way to create a Mission Statement:**

Don’t Rush The Process - It takes time to create an effective Mission Statement. Depending on the size of your team / group, it can take anywhere from 4 hours to 2 days to do a thorough job. Do not rush the process. You do not have to complete your Mission Statement in one meeting. In fact, it may be helpful to give people time between meetings to think about what has been discussed in those meetings.

Brainstorm - Most of the processes used to create Mission Statements begin with a brainstorming exercise. There are several ways to do this. One commonly used way is to ask people to think of words that describe the organization and write these on a board, or flip chart or sticky notes. It is important at this stage not to censor anything. Stay open to everything that people say. All words should be recorded.

Clarify - Once the words are out there, ask your group to clarify any words that are not clearly understood by all.

Narrow Down The Results - Depending on the size of your group and the volume of the words generated, ask your team to narrow down the choices by selecting their top 3 – 5 words that describe what you are about. The resulting words then become your shorter list of words to work with. Depending on the size of your group and the volume of the words, you might need to narrow down the choices further using the same process. This process could be done a few times if necessary to get to a workable list of words. Check to see if there are similar words that mean essentially the same thing that can be combined into one word. Keep only the words that you absolutely need.

Write Statement Using The Words – Once you have a workable list of words to use, begin asking people to write short, clear statements using those words. You do want to end up with an action oriented Mission Statement so experiment writing statements using action words.

Narrow Down The Results Again - Once you have a series of action based statements, again look to see if there are commonalities or statements that mean the same thing. Try and get agreement from your group as to which statements are the most important and the most reflective of what it is that you want to say about who / what you are.

Wordsmith Your Draft Mission Statement - Combine your statements into one or two sentences that fit within the guidelines of 5 – 20 words total maximum. This will become your draft Mission Statement. You will need to have someone who is good with wordsmithing at this stage in the process. Where you have a large team, you might want to wordsmith the draft Mission Statement a few different ways and then have team members vote on which one they like best. At this stage in the process, majority rules. However, the senior person on the team, usually the Ministry Unit lead, has the responsibility to ensure that a Mission Statement meets the standards, guidelines and values of The Salvation Army.

Test Your Draft Mission Statement- Once you have a draft of your Mission Statement, test it in the following ways:

***Read It Out Loud*** – Is it easy to say or do you get tongue tied. Can you say it all in one breath? How are you feeling as you read it? Is it interesting and catchy or are you bored reading it?

***How Easy Is It To Remember?* –** In casual conversation, read it to a friend. Do not explain to the friend why you are doing this or give them warning. Make sure your friend is someone from outside of your Ministry Unit. Go on to do and talk about other things. Two hours later, ask your friend if they can remember your Mission Statement. You may want to do this with a few different people as some people are better at memory skills than others are. This could perhaps be a team exercise. Ask everyone on your staff or management team to do this exercise with one person and report the results back to the larger group.

***Ask For Feedback*** – Ask a variety of people what they think about your draft Mission Statement. The most helpful feedback will come from people outside of your Ministry Unit. You may want to draft a few questions to ask people as a way of gaining feedback. Try and get feedback from a diverse group of people. Try to include people of different age groups, gender, and cultural and ethnic background. Try to include professional people within your discipline and others who are not from your discipline. Ask them if they have suggestions for change. While you may not be able to incorporate all their changes, be open to the feedback and suggestions that you receive. Where there is common feedback, seriously consider making the suggested changes.

Create Your Mission Statement – Once you have tested your Mission Statement and incorporated the feedback and any agreed upon changes, you should have arrived at a Mission Statement that meets the criteria and is one that your team can embrace.

Divisional Headquarters Approval – In The Salvation Army, all Mission Statements must be approved by DHQ before being implemented. Submit your new Mission Statement to your Area Commander or Divisional Secretary for Social Services for their approval. Once their approval is received, you are free to use the Mission Statement as written. If they request changes, you will need to go through the change process with DHQ until such time as the Mission Statement Is Approved.

Living Document – A Mission Statement is never meant to be static. It should change over time as your Ministry Unit adapts to new realities, programs, and needs. Etc. Set up a schedule to review your Mission Statement to ensure that it is still up to date and relevant.

# What Are The Accreditation Standards Pertaining To Mission Statements?

There are two Accreditation Standards that pertain to Mission Statements. They are below:

## Standard 1.2.1

The ministry unit shall have a process to create and review a local mission statement that defines its purpose and ministry.

The process of creating the mission statement shall include staff, management, and other stakeholders.

The local mission statement is to:

* include a link to the territorial mission statement;
* define the end result of the ministry not the means; and
* align with the values of The Salvation Army in Canada and Bermuda

The local mission statement is to be approved by DHQ.

## Standard 1.2.2

The territorial and local mission statements shall be clearly displayed in the ministry unit in a location accessible to the public.

The mission statements shall be available to all stakeholders engaged with the ministry unit, including community council, employees, volunteers, clients, and the community served.

The mission statements shall be included in the employee handbook and all funding proposals.

The territorial mission statement shall be included anywhere the local mission statement is produced or displayed.

# How Do We Link To The Territorial Mission Statement?

There are different ways to link your local Mission Statement to the Territorial one. Since both the Territorial Mission Statement and your local Mission Statement must be posted together, you can include a note to indicate that your Ministry Unit functions under the umbrella of the Territorial Mission Statement as well as your local one.

Another way to link the two Mission Statements is to post the Territorial one and then include a sentence showing how your ministry unit fulfills the Territorial one.

An example of this is:

**The Salvation Army Territorial Mission Statement**

The Salvation Army exists to share the love of Jesus Christ, meet human needs and be a transforming influence in the communities of our world.

**Booth Shelter** does this by:

Providing emergency shelter and transitional housing

to men in crisis.

There are of course, others ways that Ministry Units have found to link the two Mission Statements. The above examples are not the only ways in which it can be done but given as suggestions only.

**Finally…**

**Once you have an approved Mission Statement:**

**Use It – Don’t Hide It!!!**

Sometimes our programs are a best kept secret. Your Mission Statement should be used everywhere. It must be posted all over your facility. It should also be included in any publicity, websites, and brochures that you produce. It must be included in your employee handbook and available to all employees, volunteers, students and all other stakeholders. It must also be available to members of the public.

**Online Resources:**

This is a list of resource websites that might be helpful to you in creating a Mission Statement:

https://donorbox.org/nonprofit-blog/nonprofit-mission-statement/

https://snowballfundraising.com/nonprofit-mission-statements/

https://www.thebalancesmb.com/how-to-write-the-ultimate-nonprofit-mission-statement-2502262

https://smallbusiness.chron.com/purpose-mission-vision-statements-strategic-planning-13161.html

https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/library/nonprofit-management-tools-and-trends/mission-and-vision-statements

https://www.classy.org/blog/10-killer-nonprofit-mission-statements-to-learn-from/