

Mission Matters

By Paul Jan Zdunek, MBA, PROSCI® Change Management Certified

This article originally appeared in BDO USA, LLP's "Nonprofit Standard" newsletter (Spring 2018). Copyright © 2018 BDO USA, LLP. All rights reserved. www.bdo.com

A mission statement is more than mere words plastered on a website or at the top of an annual report — it represents everything an organization stands for and all that it can accomplish. It drives the organization and its work.

There is a cyclical *ad infinitum* relationship between a nonprofit organization's mission, its impact, and its fundraising efforts.

Developing a powerful mission statement is critical to clarifying:

- the **core purpose** for why the organization exists and its goals
- what makes the organization **different** than the other 1.5 million nonprofits operating in the U.S., and
- **directional focus**, serving as a guidepost for decision-making to keep actions on-point and avoid *mission creep*

While a powerful mission is critical to a nonprofit's success, mission alone won't bring funding to your door.

Prove Your Worth

How is your organization delivering on its mission? With [fewer donors giving to fewer organizations](#) today and [donor retention declining](#), it's more important than ever to

A strong mission statement must *have* impact and *communicate* impact.

showcase the impact of fundraising contributions. Donors are closely examining *ROI*— Return on (their) Investment — when deciding where to give. In this new Impact Era 2.0:

- Successful nonprofits are using rigorous, *data-driven evaluation* to measure impact
- Foundations are funding based on a nonprofit's impact and also providing the *tools to measure it*
- Overhead is finally being recognized as *critical* to an organization's ability to achieve maximum impact
- Board governance and executive leadership are being scrutinized for both *effectiveness and efficiency*
- *Performance-based bonuses* are becoming an influential part of the new nonprofit workplace culture

Bake Impact into Mission Statements

A strong mission statement is more than a description of the organization or a plethora of cleverly constructed words and sentences that sound important. It must *have* impact and *communicate* impact. An effective mission statement:

- **Gets to the Point:** be clear, clean and crisp about the unique mission and actions of your organization
- **Addresses What the World Needs:** if your organization did not exist, would it matter?
- **States the Differentiator:** compared to similar organizations in your space
- **Serves as a Guidepost:** ensure mission creep, chasing money, never happens
- **Inspires:** speak to the heart of your potential investors; where will their dollars go and why are their donations important?
- **Sticks:** like an elephant in a tutu, your mission should be hard for stakeholders to forget

One Organization Getting it Right

charity: water is a force to envy in the nonprofit world. Their mission, work and impact are highly transparent, simple and powerful.

Let's do a quick analysis of charity: water's mission statement — it's *raison d'être*: **bringing clean and safe drinking water to people in developing countries**:

- **Gets to the Point:** 11 carefully-chosen words articulate the organization's focus without getting mired in details
- **Addresses a Need:** giving people access to a fundamental human need
- **Differentiates:** "developing countries" indicates the work is in high-need areas that have limited resources
- **Inspires:** this gets above politics, infrastructure challenges, and other problems with a simple message that stresses water is a basic human right
- **Sticks:** both the name of the organization and its mission are simple and clear

How does this translate to charity: water's influence and impact? The transparency and clarity used in the mission statement shines through in their website, communications and annual reports. They make it very easy to track how dollars are being put to use. It's also clear that charity: water isn't just "talking the talk." Nearly every dollar donated goes directly to their projects, and founder Scott Harrison even has a separate fundraising initiative to cover organizational overhead.

The result? Donations have [continuously increased since 2007](#).

Getting the mission right and articulating a powerful impact can help organizations elevate their voice above the noise — but will it lead to donations? *How* you ask for dollars can have a major influence on how many donations come through the door. (See Andrea Wilson's article entitled, "[Survival Tips for the New Era of Fundraising](#)".)

If your organization finds itself with a need to create or re-write its mission statement, remember the words of the great Martin Luther, "*If you want to change the world, pick up your pen and write.*"

So, pick up your pen and write an impactful mission statement that will change the world.

For more information, contact Paul Jan Zdunek, managing director, at pzdunek@bdo.com, or email CapinCrouse at info@capincrouse.com.

About CapinCrouse

As a national full-service CPA and consulting firm devoted to serving nonprofit organizations, CapinCrouse provides professional solutions to organizations whose outcomes are measured in lives changed. Since 1972, the firm has served domestic and international outreach organizations, universities and seminaries, foundations, media ministries, rescue missions, relief and development organizations, churches and denominations, and many others by providing support in the key areas of financial integrity and security. With a network of offices across the nation, CapinCrouse has the resources of a large firm and the personal touch of a local firm. Learn more at capincrouse.com.

CapinCrouse is an independent member of the BDO Alliance USA.

