

Ask the Consultant: Relevant, Unfiltered Responses to Your Most Pressing Questions

Thurlow/Associates recently fielded the following questions on a topic that is relevant and important to all nonprofit organizations. We felt the issue was worth exploring in this month's column.

Question: Why is the mission statement of a nonprofit organization important? Does it really matter?

Response: An organization's *mission statement* specifies its purpose or "reason for being." The statement serves as a guide for board and staff members as they engage in planning and decision-making. It's the primary standard against which organizational plans and programs should be tested to ensure alignment with core institutional identity.

If your mission statement and programs aren't aligned with each other, there can be unintended consequences. Without a clearly defined mission, board and staff members risk spending more time "barking up the wrong tree"—creating programs and/or pursuing funding streams that aren't central to the organization's purpose. Funding prospects are meanwhile less likely to lend support if they see that the work you're proposing isn't consistent with (and helping you reach) your stated mission.

Other mission-statement risks can include:

- A mission statement that is *too narrow*. This might in turn narrow your potential pool of funding prospects. At the same time, staff who provide services that fall outside the narrow scope of the mission may feel like "second-class citizens," weakening your organizational culture.
- A mission statement that is *too broad*. In this case, staff and volunteer leaders may find it difficult to prioritize finite resources.

Thoughtfully crafted mission statements help frame your work and tell your story. When was the last time your organization re-evaluated its mission statement? Is 2015 the year to take another look? Thurlow/Associates would be pleased to help.