

# Mission – Vision – Values: Toward Common Definitions

In working with organizations over the last three decades, we have learned that there is sometimes considerable ambiguity about what represents the core planning elements—or what we call “foundations”—for an organization. Specifically, we have seen the definitions of “Mission” and “Vision” interchanged between different organizations.

Our belief is that clarity and consistency are helpful in setting consistent direction and in beginning to align how organizations use these terms in planning. To begin to operationalize this belief, we have created the following definitions which have guided our support of numerous organizations’ planning efforts over the last twenty-five years.

## Definition of a Mission

A mission is a *statement of the reason or reasons for the existence of the organization, the ultimate purpose the organization serves in society, and the boundaries within which it operates.* A mission is one of the four key building blocks of an organizational plan. The other three are vision, goals, and strategy. A mission sets direction and defines the boundaries, both of which are critical to the organization's effectiveness and success.

## Definition of a Vision

If the mission describes your reason for being, then the vision describes what you want to become or how you want to be. It is the “dream” toward which you are moving. You hear star baseball players talk about as children seeing themselves on the pitcher’s mound or at the plate in the World Series or football players envisioning playing quarterback in the Super Bowl. Those are visions.

## Definition of Values

Values include beliefs and attitudes that guide behavior and relationships with others. They are often unspoken as well as difficult to universally define. For example, one value a team might choose is “respect.” You can look up the definition in the dictionary, but the key question is how the team demonstrates respect for other members of the team and for those outside the team with whom they deal.

### Some possible values in the work place include:

- Respect
- Integrity
- Loyalty
- Innovation
- Honesty
- Trust
- Cooperation
- Quality