

## Mission-Driven Governance

### Practice Guide



The governing Board of incorporated nonprofit organisations has many important functions including overall strategic direction, guidance and control. A key responsibility of the Board is to shape and uphold the vision and mission of the organisation.

The vision is the broad overall result sought by the organisation (the big dream). The mission is the method, objective and plans (written and implicit) that need to be carried out in order to achieve the organisation's vision. Vision and mission statements should be both aspirational and inspirational to management, staff, volunteers and supporters.

Mission is your present and vision is your future, your reason for existence.

If the mission statement is well written, it can become a catalyst for action and a tool that guides the strategic direction and decisions that are made by the organisation. If mission statements are not written well, they often become too hard to remember, no-one pays attention to them and no-one lives them.

Mission-driven governance describes an organisational culture that uses its mission and vision to guide the organisation's operations and direction. It is a philosophy that creates an environment where the Board, management, staff and volunteers work together to build a common purpose and sense of achievement throughout the organisation.

A mission-driven focus is different from a governance framework that is preoccupied with indiscriminate growth, power, structures and rules. These organisations can experience incongruence between their mission and decision making, often resulting in poor communication, constant change, conflict within the Board and dissatisfied employees.

Mission-driven governance uses approaches and strategies to continually revisit and reaffirm the mission of the organisation. The Board consistently communicates the mission and regularly evaluates it to ensure it remains relevant and responsive to the community's needs. Mission-driven organisations live and breathe their mission. They find a way to make it part of their organisational DNA.

Turn your mission into a mantra that people translate into action every day.

*I find the great thing in this world is not so much where we stand, as in what direction we are moving – we must sail sometimes with the wind and sometimes against it – but we must sail, and not drift, nor lie at anchor.*



Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.

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### How to Build a Mission-Driven Culture

#### Articulate the organisation's mission

A clear and compelling mission is a critical factor in focussing, motivating and inspiring the Board and staff. A mission statement should be incorporated into all internal and external communications.

#### Agree on a definition of success

The Board and Executive should agree on a definition of success that is focussed on the organisation's mission and performance towards the vision.

#### Have a sound decision-making process

Board and management decision-making processes should be inclusive and consultative. Day-to-day decisions should always be made with a commitment to the organisation's mission.

#### Engage the Board and management to achieve a shared responsibility

When all leaders in the organisation are engaged and excited about the mission, productivity will be high and achievements will be easier to identify.

#### Create a mission-driven brand

Ensure that everybody knows the mission, understands it, and lives it. Staff should be able to translate the mission into action every day.

#### Be responsive to the changing needs of clients and the community.

Build a culture that listens to the community. The Board should be open to revisiting its mission from time to time so that it remains relevant, accurate and inspirational.

### Characteristics of a Mission-Driven Board

- Has clarity about its vision and mission
- Understands its roles and responsibilities
- Structures Board work to further its mission
- Thinks and acts strategically
- Makes decisions that are congruent with the mission and vision
- Communicates its mission regularly, openly and honestly
- Provides mission-driven role models
- Uses its mission to drive performance
- Works together as an effective team with common goals and values
- Strategically recruits new Board members who support the mission

#### REFLECT

Do we have a clear and compelling mission statement?

Are we achieving our mission?  
How do we know?

Do we use our mission and vision to help educate, inspire and motivate new Board members and staff in our organisation?

What plans and strategies will build an organisational culture that is mission-driven?

How will being mission-driven benefit our workforce and clients?



Good governance strengthens the organisation and, in turn, the community it serves.