

Vision: Leadership Focus



January 2009

Fast Focus Tips

- Exceptional Boards shape and uphold the mission.
- They articulate a compelling vision.
- They ensure congruence between decisions and core values.

Find the book,
*www.boardsource.org

“To find your mission in life is to discover the intersection between your heart’s deep desire, gladness, and the world’s deep hunger.”

– Frederick Beekner

Mission Driven

What do Compass Points and Coxswains have in common?

Think fast! What’s the handiest, most important, possibly the most inspiring measure for all that your organization is and does? Well, it’s not your current fund raising amount raised nor your latest special event theme. And, it’s not the flashy marketing vehicles or taglines, as wonderful and effective as they may be. And, just to be sure, it’s not your most successful initiative showing real change and improvements for the community. It’s your mission. More importantly, it’s the way your organization uses its mission as a guiding compass, keeping you on target and, while allowing flexibility to explore, ensuring forward movement. In the best cases, the vision brings the mission to life. Exceptional boards develop a clear and compelling vision of where the organization is going.



Visualize this: You are on a rowing team, gliding at great speed down a powerful river. Like the coxswain’s role, the mission statement helps to steer the board and provides motivation and encouragement to the crew. Each crew member has a role and is vital to the goal of crossing the finish line in good time.

Exceptional boards are mission-driven, as noted in the book, *The Source: Twelve Principles of Governance that Power Exceptional Boards*, published by BoardSource*. Your board’s starting responsibility is to put into words why your organization exists and what it hopes to accomplish. It’s a way to be accountable to the community it serves. It gives voice to the meaningful stories and aspirations that shape the organization. In the process, core values are articulated and crucial for guiding major decisions and day-to-day activities. Illustrating your mission with a compelling mission statement is an additional challenge worthy of your board’s time and attention.

Remember that the chief executive assists exceptional boards in developing, protecting, and advancing a clear mission they can use as a platform for advocacy, fundraising, fund distribution, and marketing. Read on to learn best practices and reasons to review and refresh your mission so you can continue implementing exceptional board and organizational work.

Indiana Association
of United Ways
3901 North Meridian, #306
Indianapolis, IN 46208
800-457-1450
www.iauw.org

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12 Principles of Governance That Power Exceptional Boards

1. Constructive Partnership
2. **Mission Driven**
3. Strategic Thinking
4. Culture of Inquiry
5. Independent-Mindedness
6. Ethos of Transparency
7. Compliance with Integrity
8. Sustaining Resources
9. Results Oriented
10. Intentional Board Practices
11. Continuous Learning
12. Revitalization

Vision features one 'power' principle in each issue.

Is it Time to Refresh Your Mission Statement?

Take this quick quiz.

- Is it short and powerful (17 words or fewer is a good guide) and sharply focused? Would it fit on a T-shirt?
- Do board members and staff know the mission statement and their role in fulfilling it? Is it clear and easily understood?
- Does it define why you do what you do?
- Does it provide direction for doing the right things?
- Does it inspire your passion and commitment?
- Does it say, in the end, what you want to be remembered for?
- Have you revisited your mission statement in the last three years? (To stay responsive, review every 3 to 5 years.)

United Way of America's Standards of Excellence # 4.1 addresses mission. It notes that all organizational activities are to be consistent with the mission, and all who work for, or on behalf of, United Way understand, articulate, and support its stated purpose. Ensure your mission statement is consistent with the United Way system mission, in meaning, if not in language.

Here is a handy process for re-assessing. Carefully select an assessment team of your full board and possibly other key volunteers and staff.

1. Start fresh with new visioning. What is the very best you can be? What does that look like, feel like, sound like? What are staff and volunteers doing with their time? What is happening in neighborhoods and with partners?
2. What is your mission?
3. Who is (are) your customer(s)? Whom are you serving?
4. What does the customer value?
5. What are your results? How are you serving?
6. What is your plan? How is each activity related to or supportive of mission? How is mission promoted?

Responsible Boards x	The Source of Power =	Exceptional Boards
Articulate clear statement of mission Uphold organizational values	Use of mission, vision, and values in decision-making Congruence between mission, vision, values, and day-to-day work Willingness to refocus mission	Sharply address community needs Inspire staff to reframe strategies and elevate goals Improve advocacy, fundraising and marketing Maximize the value of grants and contributions

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A Tale of Two Core Values

Can you recall a story about your United Way that illustrates its core values? What's your favorite story for building momentum with a new partnership, drawing in talented volunteers, or making a difference in a single individual? Every organization is rich with stories of institutional history. Stories from the founding days along with pivotal and meaningful events along the way often are rooted in illustrations of the core values. Core values keep the mission alive through changing times. Knowing and documenting your core values is also essential to the process of re-evaluating your mission. Ask each board member for a story of why they believe in the work they are doing.

Tale One: Maribeth stops in Michael's office for a quick question. In the ensuing conversation, an opportunity is explored, a story is told about a new loyal contributor, and a modest problem is resolved.

A common office practice is an 'open door policy.' But have you thought about why? You may be encouraging collaborative discussions or a feeling of trust so that issues can be discussed with openness and informality. The important thing is to get clear on what your core values are, as an organization, why and how you support or demonstrate them by your organization's key strategies. Core values should be

evident in your programs and activities as well as your long-term goals.

Tale Two: It's 7 pm. Tonja gathers with Ted, Tina, and Travis for a promising discussion about an emerging Hispanic neighborhood and a growing senior population. A plan evolves. A commitment is made.

A frequently-noted core value is diversity. It may have evolved from the passionate commitment to assist a wide range of persons in need through many challenging stages of their lives. It may be rooted in a single conversation among like-minded people from various business, educational, governmental, philanthropic, and social sectors all coming together to change lives for the better. Make a list of your organization's core values and re-define or re-commit to them. Then ensure that they help bring your service to the community alive. What are your greatest wishes for supporting diversity, or another core value, in your work?

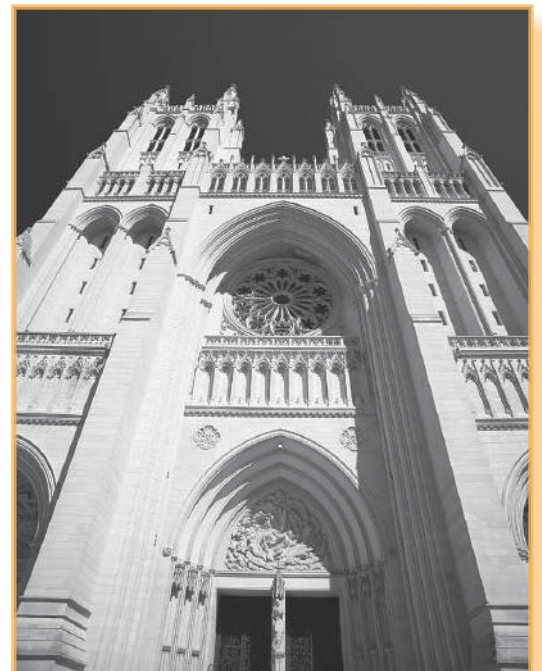
Most importantly, use your firm core values in your conversations about mission and vision and apply that frame to making any serious decisions. When issues are cloudy, use core values as your compass to test your direction.

Appreciative Corner: The Cathedral or the Brick?

You know the story – two workers steadily lay bricks each day. One worker is passionate, with light in his eyes, picking up energy brick by brick, day by day. He is building much more than a wall. He is building a cathedral, notes how much is already accomplished each day, and envisions the end result. He is inspired by his role in the big picture.

Keep your mission alive. Take a few minutes at your next board meeting to encourage a fresh look at your vision.

1. What book have I read in the last six months that sparked a new awareness about our work? Was there a favorite quote or anecdote that caught my attention? What did it tell me about setting great goals or staying the course? Keep up on current reading and relationships as tools to support your mission.
2. As a board member, what do I bring to the table, to each meeting, to my committee work or board decisions that makes our vision, our mission, come alive?
3. What example of organizational culture or core values draws me to this work? How can I share that story with others to draw in their excitement and engage their partnership?



Indiana Association of United Ways...Bringing Indiana United Ways together to help them create a successful future.

Relationship/Association - Members actively engage with their IaUW neighbors and peers around issues and experience, contributing to higher performance.

- 63 member organizations
- 4community2 matching grant program
- Roundtables and collaborative assistance

Learning/Training - Members involved with IaUW learning opportunities are strengthened to improve organizational functioning.

- State Leaders Conference and recognition programs
- 4community2 technical assistance and training
- Regional conferencing and national program hosting
- Software user groups
- Vision Leadership Focus newsletter
- Indiana Nonprofit Resource Network

Research & Development/Innovation - Members have improved capacity to engage organizational technology with confidence.

- NP&AS, Nonprofit Processing & Accounting Service
- www.iauw.org and other Web site features

Representation - Members receive substantial grant support and have strong state-level relationships.

- Partnerships and strong relationships with Indiana University Center on Philanthropy, Indiana Coalition for Human Services, Indiana Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster
- Public Policy
- United Way Council of States and other national involvement
- Indiana 211
- Youth Philanthropy Initiative of Indiana
- United Way of America

Indiana Association of United Ways Staff

Roger Frick, President
317-921-1399
Mike Cabat
317-921-1395
Lisa Hanger
317-921-1393
Lucinda Nord
317-921-1394
Sue Koralewski
317-921-1390
Iverne Russell
317-921-1391
Kimberly Sokolow
317-921-1398

Nonprofit Processing & Accounting Services Staff

Lucy Abshear
317-921-2241
Briann Black
317-921-1358
Emily Campbell
317-921-7526
Stephanie Coon
317-921-7507
Kathy Downing
317-921-7509
Cheryl Mitchell
317-921-2240
Sue Odom
317-921-1359
Rita Wootton
317-923-1882

Give it a Try: Guiding Light Bulbs



Try this: You are holding an ordinary old-fashioned light bulb. Without a care in the world, you hold it about waist high, from the metal base, and casually drop it on the floor. What do you

imagine will happen? Surprisingly the strong metal base absorbs most of the impact. Once it lands, it bounces around, but unless someone kicks it, the force isn't enough to break the glass.

What could this have to do with mission and your organization? It's a very effective illustration of the importance of a strong foundation. We assume light bulbs are fragile and breakable, but the base is an excellence cushion if the glass falls. In our work, we have cushions, financial cushions, staff and volunteer support, board leadership, loyal contributors, and back-up plans. By keeping your vision, mission, and core values alive, fresh, and responsive, you are building and sustaining your cushion to support your United Way in both joyful and challenging times.

IaUW Supports: Need Help becoming Mission Driven?

- Use your core values in your advocacy work. Ask for public policy guidance and assistance.
- Ask for board development and retreat activities to bring your mission and vision alive.
- INRN directors facilitate mission, vision, and strategic planning work. Reach them at www.inrn.org.