

Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc.
Affiliate Chapter Relations Committee

Affiliate Chapter Handbook
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Section 22

Charting Your Course:
Defining Your Mission, Setting Goals

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Charting Your Course: Defining Your Mission, Setting Goals

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Introduction

In order to be most effective, every organization needs a mission statement and clearly defined goals. Mission statements and goals help to focus the energy of individuals and the organization as a whole. After all, if you don't know where you are going, how will you know when you get there? How will you know if it is a place you want to go? How will you know if it is worth your time and effort to travel the route? How do you know if you can even get there from here?

Well-crafted mission statements and goals benefit an organization in a variety of ways. They:

- Define your organization to others as a statement of who you are and what you value;
- Inspire and motivate your members;
- Help recruit new members;
- Keep the focus on the really important;
- Measure success; and
- Guide decisions of the organization.

Therefore, taking the time to develop your mission statement and goals is well worth the effort. But, where do you start? There are numerous consulting companies whose sole purpose is helping organizations and businesses to develop statements and goals. A search of *amazon.com* for materials on creating a mission statement finds references to over 56,000 books and materials. The Internet provides a number of products to download to help you develop your mission statement and goals. Obviously, this Handbook section does not attempt to be a comprehensive guide on the subject. Rather, its purpose is to share some basic concepts and activities to get your organization started.

Creating a Work Group

So, you have decided to write a mission statement and set of goals for your chapter, or rather, to have them written—but, by whom? You want to have input from all the people interested in your organization, commonly referred to as stakeholders, and especially from the members. Yet, you know that the larger the committee, the less that gets accomplished. Inclusion and efficiency must be balanced.

The first step is to determine who will be represented on the committee. A partial list might include members of the Deaf community, current interpreters, including those who are new to the field and those who are seasoned veterans, students, employers of

interpreters (school systems, businesses, referral agencies, government agencies), and individuals with experience in group planning.

Referring to this list, recruit individuals who have the perspectives that you need. Start by brainstorming names (see hints on brainstorming elsewhere in this document). Define what you want them to do before inviting them to participate. For example, you may decide that you want to have a series of not more than five face-to-face meetings of three hours in length over the next three months, with additional discussions via e-mail. Or, you might opt for a weekend retreat, followed by three follow-up meetings on Sunday afternoons until the end of the year. You will get a much more positive response if the people you invite know the details about their commitment.

When you have a list of possible committee members and a well-defined purpose for the committee, make contact with the potential committee members. A phone call is often most effective, for its personal touch, and its immediacy. (In other words, it is harder to say no to a person than to an e-mail or letter.) Follow-up this call with a letter containing details.

When you have assembled your committee you will need to decide on a chair. The chair is usually appointed by the president of the board, or elected by the members of the committee. The chair is responsible for setting the time and place of the meetings, preparing an agenda, coordinating arrangements for any speakers or consultants, arranging for minutes of the meetings, facilitating the meetings and reporting back to the board or other organization delegate.

Getting Down to Business – the work of the committee

One might think that creating the organization's mission statement would be the first order of business. Many consultants advise working on the mission statement first and letting the goals evolve from that statement. However, it is hard to create an effective mission statement without having an understanding of the needs, interests and expectations of the stakeholders. Therefore, I recommend working from a different perspective, starting with brainstorming, followed by conducting a needs assessment, then developing appropriate goals, and, finally, crafting a strong mission statement.

Brainstorming

Your first working meeting might start with a brainstorming session. In brainstorming the topic is specified (What do you think are the most important things for our organization to be doing?) and all group members throw out ideas. There is neither discussion nor evaluation during the initial brainstorming. Spontaneous and even wild ideas are encouraged. Piggybacking and expansion of others' suggestions is promoted.

Brainstorming increases member participation by reducing fear and making the activity more fun. Most of us are taught to think analytically, not creatively, and in a brainstorming group we are given a chance to exercise other parts of our brain. Experiments with group thinking have shown that a participant can think of significantly more ideas when working in a group than when working on his or her own.

Divide the committee into groups of no more than six members. Designate a recorder/reporter to write down the suggestions on poster paper. Members can take turns naming items for the list, or, if the members prefer, can call them out whenever they think of them.

When the task is completed, bring the groups together. Each group reports their ideas, either reading their entire list, or going round robin, each group reporting one idea before moving on to the next. A recorder should compile a master list for all to review.

The next step is to do preliminary evaluation and ranking. In small groups again, participants discuss the items, determining whether they are legitimate purposes/activities for the organization. Those that are not are eliminated. The group members also discuss if the items are do-able by the organization. Those that clearly take funds, resources, or influence that the organization has no ability to access need to be eliminated, or shunted to a more appropriate organization.

Next, the group ranks the items from most to least important. At this point in the process, an exact ranking is not necessary. Items can be sorted into categories:

- Vital to the organization,
- Desirable but not essential,
- Nice if we can do it,
- Unimportant or marginal to the purpose and success of the organization.

When the small groups complete this task, the results are again shared with the entire committee. Through discussion, a master list of ranked items is created.

Needs Assessment

The committee has done the first level of a needs assessment for the organization. Before proceeding further, it is advisable to involve the entire membership and community of stakeholders. People will participate in pursuing goals that they believe in and that they know they had a voice in setting.

This wider input can be achieved through several means.

1. A community forum can be called, inviting all stakeholders to assemble and share their ideas with the committee,

2. A written survey can be developed and mailed to members. In this survey the goals the committee has developed can be listed, and members can be asked to rank them with a similar system that the committee used:
 - Vital-4 points,
 - Desirable-3 points,
 - Nice if you can do it-2 points,
 - Marginal-1 point,
 - Not appropriate-0 points.

By assigning a number system to each rating an average for each item can be computed. Members could also be invited to add to the list if they think an important item has been omitted.

3. The survey can be distributed via e-mail or in a newsletter.
4. Telephone trees can be set up to call members and elicit their ideas for goals. The important point is to gather input from the broadest base of stakeholders that you can access, and give members a clear opportunity to be part of the process.

Setting Goals

Once the data from the needs assessment has been gathered and collated, the committee can get down to setting the actual goals for the organization. These goals will determine what the organization will do and where it will invest its time, energy, and human resources. In this way, your goals lead to the creation of a mission statement.

First, review all the ideas from the needs assessment. Prioritize them based on the members' responses and the committee's opinion. Concentrate on those deemed "vital" and "desirable." Consider eliminating those that are "marginal" unless they can be accomplished simply with little drain of the organization's funds or human resources.

Have the ideas posted or distributed in a handout in no particular order. In groups of 4-6, list the goals in order of importance from top to bottom. It is generally easiest to work from both ends toward the middle. In other words, ask the group "Of all these ideas, which do you think is the MOST important for this organization? Which is the LEAST important?"

When complete, each small group reports to the committee as a whole, and the results are compared. From there, the master list is created.

SMART Goals

Up to this point, no attention has been given to the format of the goals the committee has selected. You have been dealing with ideas and concepts. Now is the time to turn these

concepts into specific, clear, actionable goals. The name for this type of goal is a “SMART Goal.” There are many proponents of SMART Goals in the business, service and educational communities. SMART is an acronym, each letter standing for a characteristic of a good goal. When developing a goal you want it to be:

Specific
Measurable
Attainable
Realistic (or Relevant) and
Time bound

- **Specific:** Many goals fail because they are too general. “I will lose weight” or “I will exercise more” are too vague, and lose momentum. “The affiliate will provide continuing education” while laudable, is also too ambiguous. How? What type? For whom? When?
- **Measurable:** How will you know what determines success in your goal? If you do it one time, have you succeeded? Do you need to do it daily for a period of six months? Think in terms of numbers that can be recorded and graphed or otherwise represented. Eventually, you will be accountable to the members and stakeholders for the goals you have set. Have the data ready.
- **Attainable:** Can it be done? “I will lose 30 pounds in the next month” may be theoretically possible, but at what cost to your health? “I will work out daily with a personal trainer” may be an effective way to develop an exercise routine, but it may be cost prohibitive. “The affiliate will offer monthly workshops presented by experts from around the country” may be an excellent dream, but may bankrupt the affiliate unless a corporate sponsor can be found.
- **Relevant/Realistic:** The goal may be attainable in theory. But, if is not something that you think is truly important, you may not have the commitment to follow through. Being realistic, we know that we can’t have it all at the same time. Goals to work out daily with a trainer, to spend more time with the kids, and to take extra after hours training for a promotion cannot all be achieved at the same time. So, too, there may be laudable goals for your affiliate that, individually, can be accomplished, but together would put too much of a drain on your resources.
- **Time Bound:** Set a time frame. Set a beginning and end time. Most of us operate on the axiom, “Never do today what you can put off until tomorrow.” Deadlines impel us to get started, keep going, and wrap it up. They force us to get it done.

Examples of SMART Goals

“I will lose a pound a week for the next six weeks by eliminating desserts, snacks, and sugar drinks, and by walking a mile everyday.”

“I will do one hour of exercise five days a week. I will alternate between walking, free weights, water aerobics, and cycling.”

“The affiliate will offer at least four full-day workshops in the area of Professional Studies as defined by the RID CMP. These workshops will be designed for professional development of certified interpreters. At least two of them will be taught by non-local experts, and at least one will be offered outside of the metro area.”

Mission Statement

If you have done your goal setting well, moving on to the mission statement will be simple. You have stated goals you intend to achieve, and upon review, they should point toward what you consider the most valuable work of your organization. They are your guide for your mission statement.

A mission statement communicates the essence of your organization. In it you state your organizational **purpose**, the main activities through which you fulfill your purpose (the **business** of the organization), and the principles that guide your work (your **values**).

Experts recommend that mission statements be no longer than one paragraph. They can be as short as one sentence. Key components to consider including in your statement are:

- A statement of purpose
- A statement of actions to achieve the purpose
- A statement of the values you embrace in your organization

With your organizational goals clearly in mind, a first step in the creation of a mission statement is to review the mission statements of other organizations, in order to get a feel for the various ways they can be structured and phrased. Since your chapter is an affiliate of RID and should be in sync with the mission of the national office, start with the mission statement of RID. RID actually divides their statement into two paragraphs. One addresses the philosophical perspective of the organization (what it values), and the other addresses the mission. Your organization may want to consider doing the same.

Philosophy Statement - The philosophy of RID is that excellence in the delivery of interpretation and transliteration services among people who are Deaf, or Hard of Hearing, and people who are hearing, will ensure effective communication. As the professional association for interpreters and transliterators, the RID serves as an essential arena for its members in their pursuit of excellence.

Mission Statement - It is the mission of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc., to provide international, national, regional, state, and local forums and an organizational structure for the continued growth and

development of the professions of interpretation and transliteration of American Sign Language and English.

The National Association of the Deaf (NAD) mission statement reads:

The mission of the National Association of the Deaf is to promote, protect, and preserve the rights and quality of life of deaf and hard of hearing individuals in the United States of America.

The Conference of Interpreter Trainers' (CIT) statement is more lengthy and detailed. However, you will note the same points included. It starts with the organization's beliefs and values, then states the purpose of the organization, and finally, outlines the business or action of the organization. It reads:

The CIT recognizes the minority status of D/deaf people and the long history of linguistic and cultural oppression that have endured. We therefore publicly proclaim our respect and support for D/deaf people's right to self-determination and true communication access.

The mission of the CIT is to promote quality education for interpreters working with American Sign Language and English (including English influenced forms of signing).

As a professional association of interpreter educators, the CIT

- Provides opportunities for the professional development of interpreter educators;
- Serves as a vehicle for sharing information among interpreter educators;
- Promotes high standards in institutions, faculties, programs and curricula for the education of interpreters;
- Advocates for research relevant to the practice and instruction of interpretation;
- Encourages collegial relationships with professionals in other related disciplines and organizations.

The CIT welcomes participation by other educators of foreign-signed languages, foreign-spoken languages and other professionals who feel an affinity for our goals and an interest in our activities.

There has been a trend toward shorter and catchier mission statements. These resemble slogans that everyone can remember and quote. Some of the most striking mission statements have been some of the most succinct. Can you guess the company connected to each of these mission statements?

- To benefit and refresh everyone who is touched by our business
- To make people happy
- To bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete* in the world.
*If you have a body, you are an athlete.
- To enable people and businesses throughout the world to realize their full potential
- To solve unsolved problems innovatively

The companies are Coca-Cola, Disney, Nike, Microsoft and 3M, respectively. While these statements are not comprehensive, they are snappy, ambitious, and appropriate for their companies. Your organization may want to consider developing one of these “mission slogans” as well as a more formal statement.

Many companies and organizations have web sites these days, and post their vision/mission statements and goals on their sites. Individual committee members can surf for examples of statements they like, and share them with the committee. Use these examples as a starting point for your creative process.

Use a brainstorming activity to start the drafting process of your mission statement. Compile a list of words and phrases that represent your organization. List them under purpose, business, and values. Take your time and let your creativity flow. Work toward consensus in purpose, business and values.

Then, stop. Committees are great for creating ideas and concepts, but they are terrible at writing specific statements and documents. With so many people involved, the discussions can quickly deteriorate to debates over whether to use a comma or a semicolon, and where to put the paragraph break. Once the committee has the concepts decided, one or two individuals with talent in word crafting can much more efficiently create drafts for the committee to review and approve.

Once the “final draft” has been agreed upon in committee, go one step further. Share it with members and request input. Also, share it with people not associated with your organization or its function. What seems clear from the inside may be confusing jargon from the outside. Ask these people to review not only your mission statement, but also your goals.

After consideration of all the feedback, you are finally ready to bring your mission statement and goals to the board or the membership for final approval. The board will obviously have some questions and suggestions for the committee. The smart board, however, will not duplicate the discussions and work of the committee. If the board did its job of selecting committee members well, the board should trust in the work the committee has done.

From Planning to Reality

The committee, the board and the organization have done the hard work, taken the time, consulted with the stakeholders, and created a document about which to be proud. So, now is the time to stop tweaking. Adopt it, embrace it, and publish it. No, it may not be perfect. You may have omitted something important or included something trivial. There may be some individual or group who was not consulted in the crafting of the document. It will always be that way. That is why documents are on paper--not tablets of stone.

Use your mission and goals to guide the organization's activities and meetings. Inform members that the mission and goals are living documents to which they can refer. Keep them in front of you, your members and your stakeholders. Put them on your web site, on your promotional materials and post them at meetings and activities. This will ensure that you never lose sight of what you want to achieve and what you value as an organization.

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