

## MAKE YOUR MISSION MORE USEFUL

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Organizations often have inspiring missions, but those missions often fail to provide the strategic direction that allows boards to measure the value and success of their organization.

Let's look at an example of the American Society of *Appraisers* ([www.appraisers.org](http://www.appraisers.org)):

*The American Society of Appraisers is an international organization of appraisal professionals and others interested in the appraisal profession. The American Society of Appraisers:*

- *Helps the public and professionals find an ASA accredited appraiser*
- *Is the only professional valuation organization that accredits members in every appraisal discipline*
- *Works to grow the appraisal profession*
- *Fosters professional excellence in its membership through education, accreditation, publication and other services with an emphasis on professional ethics to protect the public*

This is a typical mission statement and it is not bad, but from a governance perspective, it can be better. For our purposes, let's focus on the first bullet point, "helps public and professionals find an ASA accredited appraiser." Imagine you are a board member and you want to make sure the organization is achieving the results desired by the members. Would you be satisfied if the organization is achieving its mission if the organization has a website with a searchable database listing all of the ASA appraisers? After all, they are "helping the public and professionals" through the database. Should the Board be satisfied with this? Given its ambiguous directions, on what basis would the Board have to complain?

Here is a better way to structure a board statement that is clear and ultimately measurable.

The trick is to start with a very broad policy that contains three elements:

1. What situation or group will benefit or improve from the work of your organization?
2. How will the situation or group benefit or improve?
3. What is the relative worth or priority for each benefit?

### START BROAD

Consider this policy.

*ASA accredited appraisers will work in a business environment that is conducive to their success at a cost comparable with similar professional organizations.*

From this we can see who will benefit (ASA accredited appraisers), in what way (work in a conducive business environment), and at what cost (comparable to other professional organizations). However, like other mission statements, it is still very general and will have to be interpreted by someone. After all, what do we mean by a conducive business environment?

## NARROW AS NECESSARY

The Board can leave it to the Executive Director to interpret what this means, or if they mean something more specific, they can define it themselves. A “conducive business environment” may mean that the public and professionals can find an ASA accredited appraiser. Will the board accept any interpretation of who “the public and professionals” are? It is within their right to do so, but a strategic board will want to examine the issue further.

## SPECIFY AS DESIRED

The Board may discover through their research that only 15% of insurance agents use accredited appraisers. If the association was able to increase the percentage of insurance agents who require the use of accredits appraisers, it would be of great value to the members. Their research suggests that, over a few years, it would be reasonable to increase their market share by 20%. And so, they define this broad statement even more by saying

*Over a two year period, an additional twenty percent of insurance agents will utilize accredited appraisers.*

How would the Board evaluate the organization’s success? Well, simply having a searchable database of accredited appraisers would not be sufficient. Because the old mission focused on the *actions* of the organization rather than on *the results*, the Board might be satisfied knowing that the organization has a database even though few people utilize it.

## CONCLUSION

Rather than focus on actions, these policies focus on the *results* that an organization is supposed to produce. These policies should begin generally and become as specific as the Board feels necessary. These policies are better than the old-style mission because the Board is able to provide strategic leadership and crystal-clear direction to the Executive whose job is to accomplish the desired outcome. A large part of the work of the Board should be to review and update these policies annually. Doing so will provide a better strategic leadership on behalf of the organization and its members.

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