

## MISSION STATEMENTS FOR CORPORATE FOUNDATIONS

Through Ask CMF, CMF staff regularly receive questions about how to develop or re-design a foundation's mission statement. For corporate foundations, these questions are particularly driven by the challenging balance between business obligations and philanthropic aims.

### Mission Statements – An Overview

Similar to other foundations, corporate foundations and corporate giving programs have a specific purpose for their existence. Whether the corporation's philanthropic activity is intended to serve the local community, represent the corporation's international markets or fund specific goals, the purpose of that philanthropic activity should be stated in a concise format, namely as a mission statement.

A mission statement is typically one to two sentences long. It is used to define and focus the corporation's philanthropic efforts while serving as an important tool for communicating its underlying purpose. This statement should be easily understood by a broad audience and used to guide internal decision making while providing clarity to key stakeholders regarding the organization's unique role in society. A mission statement oftentimes appears within marketing and communications materials, as the mission should be a central element in developing and cultivating an organization's brand and reputation in the marketplace.

**Example:** The corporate purpose of toy and board game maker Hasbro is to “make the world a better place for children and their families.” Their philanthropic statement: “We stand up for children, passionately working together to create a universe where every child experiences hope, kindness, and joy.”

Corporate philanthropy programs should seek to develop a mission statement that applies to their work over a relatively long period of time. However, they should also be willing to periodically revisit the statement and make changes to ensure that the organization's purposes align with it.

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## Tips for Creating or Revising the Foundation's Mission Statement

- **Define primary purpose:** Include the foundation's key goals and fields of interest while explaining why the organization exists.
- **Define parameters of the organization's work:** The mission statement should define the geographic region, market and other boundaries of the corporation's philanthropic efforts.
- **Be concise:** A mission statement should be only one to two sentences long.
- **Be forward thinking:** Rather than describing the organization's history, the mission statement should explain the goals and future aspirations of the foundation's work.
- **Be specific:** Mission statements are designed to bring clarity to the organization's philanthropic efforts. Using highly intentional language that precisely describes the organization's purpose will make for a more useful tool for internal and external needs.
- **Think broadly:** The mission statement should focus on the broadest goals of the organization, leaving detailed information for grant program descriptions and other materials that are more frequently updated.
- **Define the audience and what the organization does for them:** Use broad terms to define the corporation's philanthropic audience or market. Some foundations specifically serve children or families, while others aim to assist the underserved or impoverished in their communities through their specific programs.

## Sample Mission Statements

Looking at mission statements from other corporate philanthropy programs can serve as a useful tool in developing or updating a corporate foundation's mission statement.

**Anthem Foundation:** As the philanthropic arm of Anthem, Inc., the Anthem Foundation promotes the organization's commitment to improving lives and communities. Through strategic partnerships and programs, we are addressing the social determinants that will help create a healthier generation of Americans.

**Bungie Foundation:** The Bungie Foundation reduces distress and suffering in children through entertainment and partners with humanitarian aid organizations in times of natural disaster and crises.

**Caterpillar Foundation:** The Caterpillar Foundation's mission is to alleviate poverty and place people on the path to prosperity.

**Cisco Foundation:** The Cisco Foundation supports Cisco's efforts to team with nonprofit and non-governmental organizations around the world to develop technology-based solutions in our investment areas. We focus this work on underserved communities and look for solutions that harness the power of the Internet and communications technology.

**Deloitte Foundation:** The Deloitte Foundation, a 90-year old not-for-profit organization, supports education through initiatives benefitting middle/high school students, undergraduates, graduate students and educators that help develop future talent and promote excellence in teaching, research, and curriculum innovation.

**Duke Energy Foundation:** The Duke Energy Foundation is committed to making strategic investments to build powerful communities where nature and wildlife thrive, students can excel and a talented workforce drives economic prosperity for all.

**New Balance Foundation:** To drive change in our global communities with an enduring commitment to preventing childhood obesity and championing the future success of today's youth.

**Newman's Own Foundation:** Newman's Own Foundation uses the power of giving to help transform lives and nourish the common good.

**Scripps Howard Foundation:** The Scripps Howard Foundation strives to create a better-informed world through journalism education and childhood literacy.

## Using Sample Documents

With widespread access to sample mission statements and other sample documents, it is important to keep in mind a few key tips to ensure that you choose the most useful templates that best apply to your organization.

- **Find sample documents that fit your organization's size and structure:** Mission statements (like any sample document) vary widely, depending on the organization that developed it. Try to find examples that originate from foundations or corporate giving programs that share at least some of the traits of your organization.
- **Look for multiple samples:** Organizations should review multiple examples of the sample document that they need, in this case mission statements. In looking across several organizations' versions, it becomes increasingly apparent how the writers customize the general concept to their particular needs. These variations may take the shape of different formats or language that reflects the organization's internal structures, capacity or purpose. In the case of mission statements, these should directly reflect the unique emphasis of the corporation's philanthropic focus, whether that is specific to a certain market, geographic region, industry or other form of emphasis.
- **Expect to make changes:** A sample mission statement, like any sample document, is not a one-size-fits-all template and will need to be adapted to your organization's particular needs. Plan to draft a version (or several) with the help of staff or board members, using the samples for suggestions of language, format or structure. Also, consider having several people review the draft mission statement before finalizing it. In some cases, the final version may also need to be approved by foundation leadership or the board, so plan for additional changes that may come along during those review periods.

## Additional Resources

- Board Source. Nine Characteristics of a Mission Statement. <https://boardsource.org/mission-statement-characteristics/>
- Board Source. Tips for Developing a Mission Statement. <https://boardsource.org/developing-nonprofit-mission-statement/>
- Greater Cincinnati Foundation. Steps in Developing a Mission Statement. <https://www.gcfndn.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/2019%20-%20Steps%20in%20Developing%20a%20Mission%20Statement.pdf>
- National Center for Family Philanthropy. Crafting Your Charitable Mission Statement: A Guide for Donors. <https://www.ncfp.org/knowledge/crafting-your-charitable-mission-statement-a-guide-for-donors/>
- National Center for Family Philanthropy. Key Questions in Developing a Mission Statement. <https://www.ncfp.org/knowledge/key-questions-in-developing-a-mission-statement/>

## Ask CMF

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