Mission, Vision, Values: What is the Difference?

Although it is well beyond the scope of a short course such as this one, going through a strategic planning process may be a necessary part of the growth of your program, and deserves attention. At the very least, read through this exercise and try to answer as many of these questions as you can, preferably with others involved in your garden program.

It is easy to become confused about the differences between these words:

Vision: over-arching short term goal in fulfilling the mission of your program.

Mission: your reason for being -- what you do, and why you are here.

Values: behavior you model in carrying out your mission.

It is well worth setting aside some time for strategic planning. There are many processes for effectively developing each of the above, resources exist at the web, and many books available on the topic. Engaging in collective brainstorming and then fine-tuning to points of agreement are typically part of the process.

Engage in a visioning exercise with others in your program. We offer here an approach for getting you started, and for gaining understanding of how a diversity of participants view the short term objectives of the program. You may want to read through this, below, before engaging in it fully.

Be prepared to brainstorm -- all ideas are good ones! Imagine answers to the following questions. Ask all participants to write each answer on "sticky notes" or small pieces of paper. Give people time to be thoughtful about the answers.

> Five years from now, as a result of our work, we will be most proud of....
> When people talk about our program, they say....
> What we enjoy most doing is....
> Our program participants are happiest when....
> We want to be known for....

After generating answers to these questions, gather all the responses, and read them together. Then sort into similar categories, clustering into "like" groups. The sorting process may take some time, as you consider which responses are more similar, which are quite different from one another.

Review the groups. You should have several -- perhaps 5, give or take -- categories of responses.

Which groups of responses are specific enough to be "do-able?" Which are relevant? Measurable? In other words, are there categories that, in looking at them, it is apparent

that you can really manage over the short term, whereas others are more nebulous or unattainable? Programs often falter when they try to be all things to all people. Which categories seem to most speak to what your program can do over the short term?

Which 2 categories do participants believe to be the most important for the vision of where you put your energy in the coming 5 years? Ask participants to "vote" on the most important categories.

From this point, you can continue to fine tune. Within each category, look at similar wording, pull out relevant phrases, discuss as you progress. Often this process is described as broadening, then narrowing. Look broadly at words that best define your short term goal, then focus, narrow to a succinct phrase.

Your goal should be to complete the process with a short statement that defines your over-arching short term program goal. Easier said than done!

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