Mission Statements: Creating a Common Purpose

Background Notes

One of the first tasks facing a network is to agree on a mission statement. This short statement is needed to focus the efforts of the network. Its purpose is to define the network’s philosophy, recruit and motivate members, and guide specific activities. Decisions on activities and more specific goals are reserved for later—after the network has been formed and members have assessed the political climate and built alliances with other individuals and organizations. A mission statement, however, is needed at the outset of organizing efforts. It clarifies—in the broadest of terms—what the network hopes to achieve. The statement should appear in newsletters, press releases, brochures, proposals, publications, and other documents.

By the end of this unit, participants will be able to
• Describe the interests that make the group a network or potential network;
• Define “mission statement” and describe its components; and
• Draft a network mission statement.

2 hours and 15 minutes

• Newsprint, markers, and tape
• Copies of handouts
  I.5.1 Background Notes
  I.5.2 Mission Statements
  I.5.3 Guidelines for Writing a Mission Statement
  I.5.4 Examples of Mission Statements
  I.5.5 Sample Logos

Select five different mission statements from Handout I.5.4. Write each statement on a separate sheet of newsprint, leaving space at the bottom of the sheet for comments. Hang the newsprint sheets around the room.

What Is a Mission Statement?
Time: 15 minutes

Note to Facilitator: The participants have come together because they share an interest—whether vague or well defined—in advocating for improvements in reproductive health. In this unit, we will try to define that interest in precise terms.

1. Ask participants to define “mission statement.”
2. Write their responses on newsprint.
3. Revise and refine the definition until everyone agrees with it. The final definition should include the elements in the following statement:

Mission Statement: A declaration of organizational purpose.

4. Discuss why mission statements are needed.
   - To guide the efforts of the network and its members.
   - To clarify what the network hopes to achieve.

Characteristics of Good Mission Statements
Time: 45 minutes

1. Refer participants to the examples of mission statements that are displayed around the room.
2. Ask the participants to circulate around the room, read each statement, and write comments on the newsprint about the positive and/or negative aspects of the statements.
3. When participants finish, review the comments on the newsprint and summarize with the group the characteristics of good mission statements.
4. Write the characteristics on a flipchart and be certain that the list includes the following:

   Mission Statements are...
   - Clear and concise
   - Short—a few lines or a short paragraph
   - Representative of the organization’s identity
   - Motivational or inspirational

5. Ask participants to share their own organizational mission statements.
6. If time allows, write a few of the statements on newsprint and post them.

Writing a Mission Statement for the Network
Time: 45 minutes

Note to Facilitator: The purpose of the exercise is to develop a preliminary draft of a mission statement. Several hours and often days may be needed to discuss fully the content of the statement and to arrive at consensus. Furthermore, key members of the network may not be present at the workshop. They must have an opportunity later on to contribute to the statement.

Triads (30 minutes)

1. Distribute and review Handout I.5.3, Guidelines for Writing a Mission Statement.
2. Divide the participants into triads and ask each group to draft a mission statement for the network that is represented at the workshop.
3. After each group has finished its draft mission statement, ask the groups to post their statements around the room.
Group Discussion and Consensus  (15 minutes)

1. Guide a discussion of each proposed mission statement in turn. Indicate in colored markers the elements of each statement that the participants like or do not like.
2. Help the group reach consensus on a draft mission statement.
3. Write the new mission statement on the newsprint and post.

Note to Facilitator: Help reach agreement on one mission statement by starting with the most well-liked statement and adapting it to the suggestions of the group or by writing with all the participants, a new mission statement that includes various components of the statements liked best by the group.

Transition

Developing a network mission statement is an important step in creating network identity. There are other network characteristics that can contribute to a sense of identity for members, particularly the network’s name and logo. The name and logo send a clear and concise message about the network’s areas of interest and even its general character. Deciding on a name and logo that accurately represent current members and will help attract prospective members is a task demanding the input and agreement of all members.

Creating a Network Identity: Name and Logo

Time: 30 minutes

1. Divide participants into four groups.
2. Ask two of the groups to come up with 2-3 potential names for the network; ask the other two groups to design 2-3 sample logos for the network.
3. Write the suggested names from the small groups on the newsprint. Ask the participants for general reactions to the various names.
4. Post the logos designed by the other two groups and ask for the participants’ reactions.
5. Use the following questions to facilitate a general discussion of the proposed names and logos:
   - Does anyone have strong opinions in favor of any of the names and logos?
   - Why are those names preferred?
   - Why do people like certain logos? What messages do the different logos convey?
   - Why is it so important to choose the right name and design the right logo?

Members of a network must participate in answering questions of who they are, as an organization, what they do, and so on. A mission statement that grows out of the discussions about these questions will be a key element in recruiting, retaining, and motivating members and guiding the work of the network. Distribute handouts for Unit 5.

In the final unit of Section I, participants will work together to make decisions about how the network does its work—its structure and management.
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Mission Statements*

Members of networks are called on to make hard decisions. They may have to decide whether to take on a controversial issue (one that has little popular support), whether to set limits on activities because of limited resources, or whether to join forces with competitors or adversaries for the sake of achieving a common goal.

The best single guide for making these decisions is the network’s mission statement.

**Definition:** A mission statement is a declaration of organizational purpose.

**Purpose:** Its purpose is to guide the decisions of the organization, motivate or inspire its members, and inform the public of its philosophy.

**Development of a Mission Statement:** A mission statement distills the discussions that are carried on to answer the following questions:

1. **Who are we?** What is the identity of the organization in the eyes of its members? What makes this organization different?

2. **In general, what are the basic social or political needs that we hope to address?**

3. **In general, what do we do to recognize, anticipate, and respond to these needs or problems?** Answering this question means that the organization must listen to the needs or problems of the outside world.

4. **How should we respond to our key stakeholders?** What do stakeholders value and how can the organization provide them with what they value?

5. **What are our philosophy, values, and culture?** Clarifying its own philosophy, values, and culture helps an organization develop consistent strategies and maintain its integrity.

6. **What makes us distinctive and unique?**

Reaching consensus on answers to these questions takes hours and even days of discussion. Handout I.5.3 provides guidelines for writing a mission statement after discussions have taken place.

Guidelines for Writing a Mission Statement*

The choice of the specific words that go into a mission statement can and should generate intense discussion. These words give the statement its character and distinguish the organization from all others.

**Preparation.** Before writing your mission statement, consider the following:

1. **Deciding who will write the statement.**
   People who participate in developing the mission statement will have a deeper understanding of its message. Therefore, participation in the process by all members of the network is desirable. If this is not practical because of the number or geographic location of network members, those who do not write the statement must review and approve the final wording.

2. **Setting a deadline for completing the draft and final statements.**
   Deadlines will keep the writers on target and limit lengthy philosophical discussions.

3. **Developing a plan for reviewing draft statements and reaching consensus on the final wording, publication, and dissemination.**

**Drafting the statement.** Focus initially on answering the six questions posed in Handout I.5.2. Then, to get started on the statement itself, brainstorm a list of key words and phrases and begin to create a mission statement from the words and phrases.

**Reaching consensus.** The following are some guidelines for reaching agreement:

- Make sure that everyone who wants to speak is heard from and that his/her position is considered.
- Encourage members to express differences of opinion.
- Talk through the issue under discussion until reaching agreement.
- Ask questions and make sure that everyone's opinion is understood before reaching a decision.
- Recognize that agreement may mean that everyone can support the decision, even if the decision does not reflect his or her first preference.

Examples of Mission Statements

Examples of mission statements from organizations working in FP/RH and development include the following:

♦ We want to gain the support of influential community groups (religious bodies; doctors; women’s organizations; teachers; the press) as well as the general public, especially parents, in our efforts to influence our political leaders to make services available to young people.

♦ We are working to support the basic and internationally recognized right of all women and men to the knowledge and means to make reproductive choices.

♦ To empower women at all levels of society to be full partners in development (CEDPA).

♦ The Ghana Social Marketing Foundation uses the techniques of social marketing to empower and inspire families and individuals to achieve an improved quality of life. We do this by making available effective, affordable and accessible family planning and maternal and child health products and services and providing correct information to enable families and individuals to make informed choices.

♦ InterAction, a membership association of 152 U.S. private voluntary organizations, exists to enhance the effectiveness and professional capacities of its members engaged in international humanitarian efforts. Further, InterAction exists to foster partnership, collaboration, leadership, and the power of this community to speak as one voice as we strive to achieve a world of self-reliance, justice, and peace.

♦ To unite knowledge, resources, and skills of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) working on women’s issues to advocate for policies and programs that will improve the quality of life of women in Turkey (KIDOg, Advocacy Network for Women).

♦ To support the building of national and international women’s health movements (International Women’s Health Coalition).
Sample Logos

The AIDS Control an Prevention Project, Family Health International
Arlington, VA, USA

Ucan Supurge (Flying Broom)
Ankara, Turkey

Amman, Jordan

The Jordanian National Committee for Women (JNCW)

Association of Women’s Rights Protection
Istanbul, Turkey

Advocacy Network for Women
Istanbul, Turkey

Amman, Jordan

National Network for The Promotion of Women
Lima, Peru

Romanian Association Against AIDS
Bucharest, Romania