

## What are your vision, mission and values and why are they important?

Social entrepreneurs are driven people. They want to create a vehicle that will allow them to change, or improve, an existing product or way of doing something. Underlying this is an overall “dream” that explains why they think bringing about this change is so important.

This dream, or vision, is very significant. It remains the guiding principle for why a social enterprise has been established. It is therefore important when setting up a social enterprise that you define your vision, mission statement and associated values from the start.

Any activities of your organisation will be measured against your vision. This vision is also what inspires others to join you and remain committed to what you want to achieve.

When planning new projects you therefore need to consider whether they allow you to realise your vision. If they don't, you should question whether you should be doing them at all.

## How do you create your vision and mission statement?

Vision and mission often get confused.

Your vision statement needs to be something inspiring and aspirational. It needs a “hook” that engages others to get involved. It is for this reason that Martin Luther King sought to engage a vast number of stakeholders by starting his famous speech with the words “I have a dream...” He was asking the others to share his dream, or vision, with him.

A shared vision needs to be simple and memorable. It has to have a long life expectancy, that is, it needs to be your guiding principle for quite a few years.

A mission statement on the other hand is a practical statement. It tells you how and what you are going to do to deliver your vision. The mission statement has a shorter life expectancy than a vision statement. Your mission may change with time but your vision should remain the same.

When questioned about their vision, most people actually come up with a mission statement. For example, this was a recent piece of dialogue in a workshop that helped clarify a participant's vision statement:

**Social entrepreneur (SE):** “I want to create a school”.

**Workshop leader (WL):** “This is not particularly inspiring and what will happen when the school has been created?”

A common method for clarifying the vision behind the mission statement is to keep asking the question, “why?” until you have discerned the dream behind the delivery mechanism. In this case, the vision was found as follows:

**WL:** “Why do you want to build a school?”

**SE:** “Because none of the existing schools in the area are any good”

**WL:** “Why is that important to you?”

**SE:** “I want the children in the area to get a better education”

**WL:** “Why?”

**SE:** “Because we are never going to get out of the cycle of deprivation, poor health, unemployment that plagues this area until we do”

**WL:** “Why is that important?”

**SE:** “Because I want all the children in this area to have the best chance to improve their lives”

This final statement is the vision. Building the school is the mission, the business plan, for fulfilling the vision.

## How do the vision and mission statement work together?

“We are going to build a school for 500 children, to provide excellent learning opportunities, staffed with the best teachers and with the best equipment.”

This is effectively the mission statement, the business plan explanation that allows the vision to be fulfilled.

When the school is built that particular mission is completed but the vision behind it remains in place. What will be the next mission to allow the vision to be fulfilled – building a children’s clinic? Your team then creates the next mission statement, checks that it is still relevant for delivering the vision, and gets on with it.

When you start you keep your vision as the guiding principle and it should remain so. The vision is what is communicated to all the people in the enterprise, and conveyed to all stakeholders, supporters and potential supporters – “We want to ensure that all the children in this area have the best chance to improve their lives”.

	<b>Vision</b>	<b>Mission</b>
<b>What is it?</b>	A dream	A business plan
<b>Characteristic</b>	Inspiring, short, easily remembered, easily communicated	Mechanistic explanation of the dream that will be fulfilled
<b>Time line</b>	Long term	Short to medium term

## Value statements

All social enterprises should also have value statements. These statements are communicated to and used by the whole team and anyone who comes into contact with them. They underline the positive things you want to accomplish as stated in your vision and mission statement.

For example:

- we will always operate in an ethical manner
- we will only trade with other ethical businesses
- we will constantly strive to reduce our environmental impact
- we will not discriminate against anyone because of their gender, age, faith, sexual orientation etc.
- we will not accept investments from any one who is involved in arms manufacturing, involved in the tobacco industry etc.

## Further information

**Read our guide to the First steps of setting up a social enterprise:**

<http://www.blondon.com/SocialEnterprise/SettingUp/Firststeps/Firststepstorunningasocialenterprise.aspx>

Examples of vision, mission and values from other social enterprises:

**View the Forth Sector’s vision, mission and values:**

[http://www.forthsector.org.uk/our\\_aims.htm](http://www.forthsector.org.uk/our_aims.htm)

**See the vision, mission and values page of RISE, the voice for South West social enterprise:**

[http://www.rise-](http://www.rise-sw.co.uk/modules.php?op=modload&name=Sections&file=index&req=viewarticle&artid=2&page=1)

[sw.co.uk/modules.php?op=modload&name=Sections&file=index&req=viewarticle&artid=2&page=1](http://www.rise-sw.co.uk/modules.php?op=modload&name=Sections&file=index&req=viewarticle&artid=2&page=1)

**View the vision, mission and values of Happy Computers:**

<http://www.happycomputers.co.uk/abouthappy/mission.asp/>