

# Get Together - A Guide to Building a Shared Mission

It's sometimes hard to understand the importance of a mission statement. If your library's mission statement is well-crafted to your needs, it will be the decision maker on possibly contentious issues of policy, programming, and expenditure priorities. Well-crafted is used here, not to mean something really wordy or pretty to read, but rather, something that reflects the values of the library and the way it serves the community.

LaManda Joy (*Start a Community Food Garden*, 2014) calls the mission statement "the story" of the organization. Even though it will act as a guide through Board decisions and Director operations, it isn't a prison. If the library community's needs change over time, the mission should be reviewed for relevance. And you'll be totally ready for it.

## Mission Questionnaire (adapted from LaManda Joy)

Answer the following questions

1. What are the geographic boundaries or limitations of your service area?
2. Who do you serve? Are there limits to who you serve within the geographic boundaries? Are there targeted or special populations that require mentioning in the mission?
3. Do your funders/club/governance require mentioning or special inclusion in the language in your mission?
4. What are your unique assets? How do they impact how you serve your community?
5. What don't you do? What do you do?
6. What is your priority goal?

## Use your answers

You'll notice that many library related mission statements name their community (New York library) and their desired impact (center of learning). There is nothing in the mission statement rulebook that dictates that your mission be super short, but almost all are one sentence. We shouldn't confuse your mission with a tagline, if it is going to work for you in decision making. It needs to be broad enough to cover all your services and detailed enough to leave some activities out.

*NYLA leads, educates, and advocates for the advancement of the New York library community.*

*We are the People's University, the center of learning for a diverse and inclusive community. (Cleveland Public Library, OH)*

*The mission of the Queens Library is to provide quality services, resources, and lifelong learning opportunities through books and a variety of other formats to meet the informational, educational, cultural, and recreational needs and interests of its diverse and changing population.*



# Case Studies in practice – Dundee Library Mission Building Retreat

Agenda distributed to Dundee Library Board

**Overview:** The Dundee Library has secured sustainable funding for their community library. Unfortunately, so many years as an underfunded institution, among other challenges the library has faced, has left the board exhausted. They need renewed energy and would like to build a vision for their library that includes new board members. To this end, they’ve invited STLS to facilitate a Mission and Vision retreat to kick off their strategic planning process on February 13, 2015.

## Schedule

<b>Coffee, tea, muffins</b>	8:30 – 9:00
<b>Greetings &amp; goals</b> • You’ll talk about biggest aspirations for the day & we’ll give a road map	9:00 – 9:30
<b>Vision building</b> • We’ll exercise our powers of imagination and develop the ideal library	9:30 – 10:30
<b>Break</b>	10:30 – 10:45
<b>Mission questionnaire</b> • What are the boundaries of your vision and your focus	10:45 – 12:00
<b>Lunch</b>	12:00 – 1:00
<b>Mission crafting</b> • Draft a mission that fulfills your aspirations and focuses you on action	1:00 – 2:00
<b>Break</b>	2:00 – 2:15
<b>Present your mission</b> • Each board member will talk about the mission from their perspective	2:15 – 2:45
<b>Wrap-up and Next Steps</b> • Vision and mission are just the first steps - make a plan for planning	2:45 – 3:30

**Before you arrive:** Do some library shopping – either in person or virtually, to check out the services, facilities, and behaviors of other libraries in our region, and recognized libraries around the nation.

**What to bring:** Please bring a desire to grow and build a service organization that is continually striving for excellence.

**What you will leave with:** You will leave as a unified board with a single vision for what success in your library will look like, a mission statement that will guide your strategic planning process, and a set of time bound goals to develop that plan.



Detailed Script of the Dundee Board Retreat

**Overview:** The Dundee Library has secured sustainable funding for their community library. Unfortunately, so many years as an underfunded institution, among other challenges the library has faced, has left the board exhausted. They need renewed energy and would like to build a vision for their library that includes new board members. To this end, they’ve invited STLS to facilitate a Mission and Vision retreat to kick off their strategic planning process on February 13, 2015.

**Materials:** 3 Post it flip charts, regular flip chart, 3 sets markers, two different color little post-it notes, 2 easels for flip charts, laptops, projector, screen, bossy chocolates, packets of mission statements for the deconstructing, one page strategic planning template, a goal timeline with dates and champions/leads to be filled in during the wrap-up.

**Greetings & goals** • You’ll talk about biggest aspirations for the day & we’ll give a road map 9:00 – 9:30  
 [On flip chart: Vision ⇒ Mission ⇒ Plan] Margo introduces herself and gives context for why she is facilitating. Margo introduces Hope and why she invited her partnership and participation. We give thanks, affirm the abilities of the assembled groups. We talk through the road map indicating Vision, Mission, and that doing the hard work of developing those today will make building a Strategic Plan within your reach.

**Vision building** • We’ll exercise our powers of imagination and develop the ideal library 9:30 – 10:30  
 [Adapted from R. David Lankes, SCRLC Annual Meeting Keynote/Workshop November 2014]

We can’t make a plan without a vision of the destination. To create that shared vision, the vision specific to your community, we will have to account for the people who live here. Here are some members of the community that Hope and I came up with [have two listed on flip chart]. Each of these groups has interests, needs, desires, and aspirations that come with their membership in this group [write Conversations in next column]. So, what does a parent of a toddler talk about with other toddlers’ parents? [write the conversations] What services can an organization, it doesn’t have to be a library, provide to the parent of a toddler to help with that?

Now, let’s break into three groups. You each have markers and pads on your table. You’ll begin by listing as many community groups as you can in 10 minutes. Please just focus on the listing the groups for right now. [circle like vultures, but helpful ones].

- Conversations 20 min
- Services 20 min

Pull them back – good job everybody. It’s time to take a much deserved break. Please leave everything you’ve done on your tables. Hope and I will hang up your work and we’ll take a gallery tour after the break. Thanks for your good work!

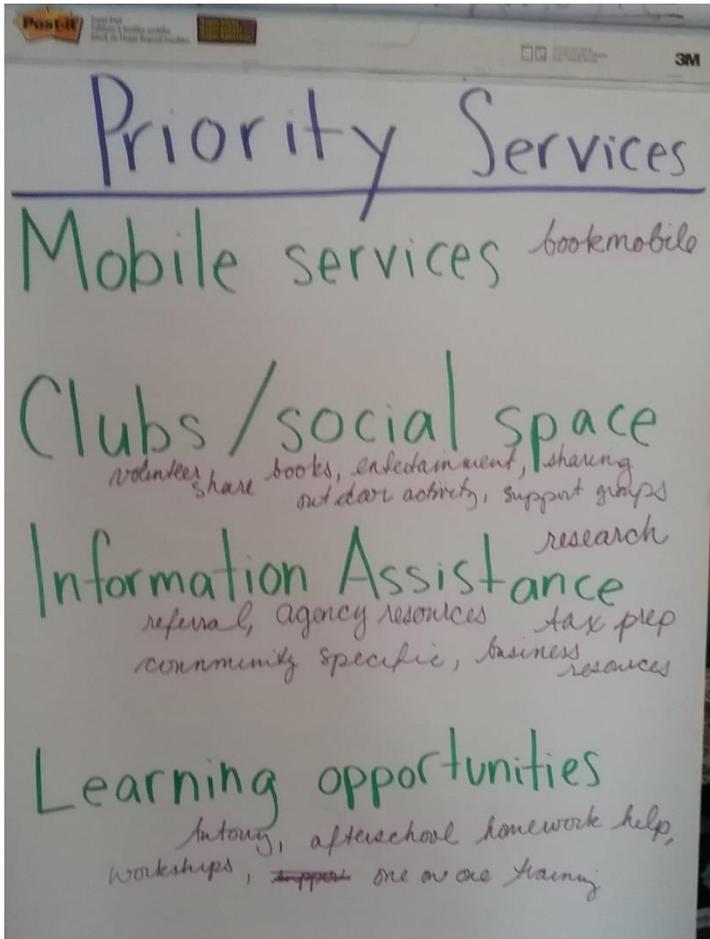
**Break** 10:30 – 10:45

**Gallery Walk** • What do you need and what do you want 10:45 – 11:00

We hope you’re feeling refreshed and ready to dig into next step in the process! There are piles of sticky notes on your tables and your work so far today is hung on the wall. Let’s pull out your favorites. Each of you please take three x color and three y color post-its. Take a tour of the groups, conversations, and services developed by your colleagues and identify what, to you, seem like “must have” services and what seem to you

like really important “aspirational” services. Please use x color for must haves and y color for aspirations. You don’t need to just pick one from each paper (they could all be used on one sheet if you wanted). If there is something you think we need to all take notice of, grab a marker from your table and circle it. It’s okay if you pick what other people have picked – we just want to see what you think.

**Make a choice** • We will distill the most needed and wanted for use in crafting our mission 11:00 – 12:00



[Hope busily gets to work on collecting and making readable the results of the pre-break work] Wow. Do you know what you’ve done so far today? You’ve identified key stakeholders in your community, described their aspirations, and brainstormed services to help the folks of Dundee reach their goals. That’s pretty impressive stuff.

How are you feeling? (if needed, restate that they’re engaged in the hardest stuff right now)

What were your impressions? Did anything surprise you? Did you notice any trends in what your group was saying? How about when you did the gallery walk?

[Hope plugs her laptop into the projector trained at the screen] Hope describes what is displayed and asks for feedback? What is everyone noticing? I notice \_\_\_\_.

Is anything surprising here?

Out of all this, what are the five (too few? too many?) services that we want to take with us to the next round?

As we move through the strategic planning process, you’ll hear us use the word conversations and the term community conversations a lot. What we want you to notice is that center column on our charts, the conversations of our different community groups, really point to their aspirations. The conversation about which pre-school is the best indicates that providing the best education for their kids is an aspiration of your community. When we come back from lunch we’ll translate all this great thinking into mission statements we can live with.

**Lunch** 12:00 – 1:00

**Mission crafting** • Draft a mission that fulfills your aspirations and focuses you on action 1:00 – 2:00

Welcome back! After lunch is always tricky for people to get thinking, so we’ll ease you back into it. You did most of the big thinking earlier, now you just need to translate it into a mission statement that will guide your board in decisions, actions, and services.



Let's start by tearing a couple mission statements from other libraries and organizations apart using our tools from earlier. We want to identify the group, aspirations, and services in the mission statements we collected. This will help us take what we've described and turn it into something useful.

Here's the NYLA mission [have the mission written out on the flip chart. Also have the words Group, Aspiration(s), and Service(s) written with their key (circled, boxed, underlined)]: NYLA leads, educates, and advocates for the advancement of the New York Library community.

Hope reads out the mission and talks about what each word (group, aspiration, service) means in context of a mission statement and deconstructs the statement.

Let's do a couple more. [Queens Library next]

Any questions?

You each have a sheet of statements at your tables. Take a minute deconstructing these.

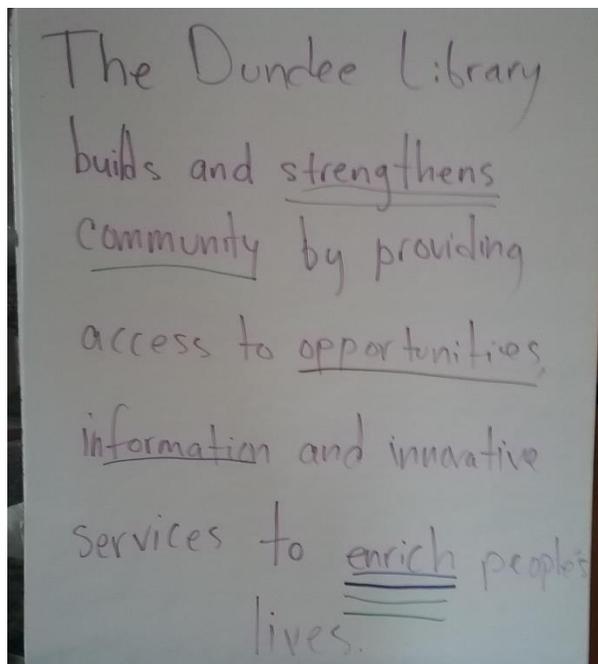
What do you notice about these missions?

Here are your top groups, aspirations, and services. In your groups of three, we want you to make up to 5 mission statements. They must use at least one, but can also incorporate all, of the priorities on the board. While working, as a group, pick a person who will speak on behalf of the mission to the room at large when we get back from our break. Also, try to determine, as a group, which mission you think would work best for the Dundee Library and the community it serves.

When you've filled a piece of paper, please hang it on the wall.

**Break**

2:00 – 2:15



**Present your mission** • Each board member will talk about the mission from their perspective 2:15 – 3:00

[Another gallery walk] Post-it note time again! X color is your number 1, Y color is your runner up, and take a marker to circle an element you think is so super good – even if it's in a mission that isn't your favorite. One best and second best per person per group.

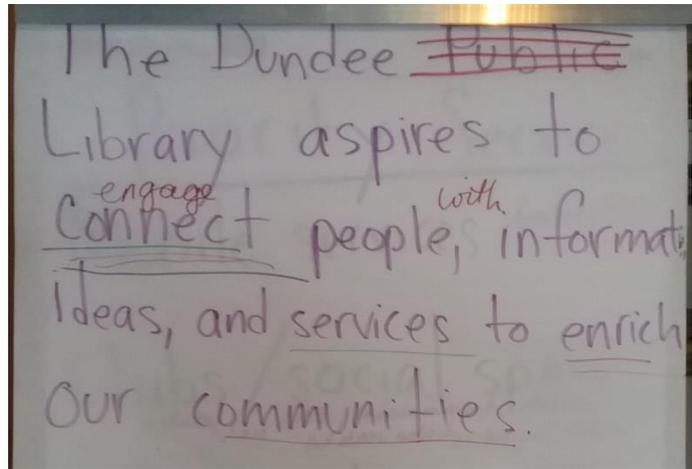
Great. Look at how many people circled that phrase! (or some other such commenting on the work happening).

Group one, come on over. Tell us which mission statement you thought would be the best fit for your community. Which one was voted most favorably by the room at large? (talk about the differences or similarities)

Repeat for other two groups.

Large group mission crafting is nearly impossible because we can get bogged down in wordsmithing and minor grammar changes. What you did is the most important part – discovered and described the what, why, and how of your library mission.

**Wrap-up and Next Steps** • Vision and mission are just the first steps - make a plan for planning  
3:00 – 3:30



Here is what we've heard: your vision of your library is one that serve \_\_\_\_\_, facilitates their \_\_\_\_\_ goals, by providing \_\_\_\_\_ services. We would like you to select two people on your board to take your top draft mission statements and refine them into one succinct and guiding statement to be discussed and approved at your March meeting.



### Mission Deconstruction Activity Sheet:

#### Mission Take Apart

Identify the group, the aspiration, and the service in each of the following missions.

*NYLA leads, educates, and advocates for the advancement of the New York library community.*

*The mission of the Queens Library is to provide quality services, resources, and lifelong learning opportunities through books and a variety of other formats to meet the informational, educational, cultural, and recreational needs and interests of its diverse and changing population.*

*The Fort Worth Library welcomes and supports all people in their enjoyment of reading and recreational materials and their pursuit of learning and information.*

*Lincoln City Libraries fosters the power of reading and provides open access to all forms of information to enrich people's lives every day.*

*Madison Public Library provides free and equitable access to cultural and educational experiences. We celebrate ideas, promote creativity, connect people and enrich lives.*

*Omaha Public Library strengthens our communities by connecting people with ideas, information, and innovative services.*

*Providence Public Library inspires lifelong education among all Rhode Islanders, fostering personal fulfillment and enhanced quality of life for an informed, enlightened and engaged citizenry.*

*The Seattle Public Library brings people, information and ideas together to enrich lives and build community.*