

# CHARITIES' HIDDEN VISIONS

**Over one in five [22%] charities communicate no clear vision, values, or purpose about themselves to their staff or public - at least through their own websites - according to a new report and reference guide out today.**

The *'Mission Impossible?'* report and guide – conducted by leading not for profit sector think tank nfpSynergy – surveys how, and with what success, over 80 of the UK's largest charities communicated their “**essence**” through clear statements of **vision, values, beliefs, mission or purpose**. It also found that the five most common words used in such statements are, in descending order: “support” [used 126 times], “respect” [50 times], “partner/partnership/collaboration” [48 times], “local” [43 times] and “equal/inequalities” [36 times].

**nfpSynergy's Driver of Ideas, Joe Saxton, said:**

“A charity with a strong ‘essence’ is one where staff, beneficiaries and supporters all know and understand its vision, purpose, mission, values and beliefs. When strong, it can shape direction, inspire support and delivery and effect intended change. However, it is staggering that a significant proportion of even the larger UK charities still lack either any, or any effective, statement of their essence – at least on their publicly accessible websites. I hope our new reference guide will help showcase some of the best practice that thankfully does exist; and encourage others to get their act together.”

## **Some Examples of Best Practice:**

**The following are examples of clear and effective statements of a charity's visions** (how they ideally wish the world to be), **purposes** (what specific part of that vision they themselves strive to fulfill), **missions** (their practical mechanisms for achieving this), **values** (internal principles, demonstrably manifest in all activity), **beliefs** (factual statements about the external world that inspire and guide action) and **straplines** (short, powerful statement to be imprinted in the public's mind), **as extracted from their own websites:**

- **VISION** – “A society that promotes good mental health for all; and that treats people with experience of mental distress fairly, positively, and with respect” [*MIND*]
- **PURPOSE** – “To encourage a better understanding of autism and to pioneer specialist services for people with autism and those who care for them” [*National Autistic Society*]
- **MISSION** – “By providing an enjoyable and attractive scheme of progressive training, based on the Scout Promise & Law, and guided by adult leadership” [*The Scout Association*]
- **VALUES & BELIEFS** – “We value the family, in all its various forms, as a source of love and support for individuals and as the basis of a caring society. We believe all human beings are unique and have the potential for spiritual, moral and intellectual growth; and we should be ambitious for our children. We believe in partnerships between families and the services that support them.” [*NCH*]

- **STRAPLINE** – “Saves lives at sea” [*RNLJ*]; “For ever, for everyone” [*National Trust*]; “For a living planet” [*WWF*]; “Sharing skills, changing lives” [*VSO*]; “Poverty, together we can end it” [*World Vision*]

## **nfpSynergy’s Top Tips for Creating a Powerful Charity “Essence”**

**Good statements of vision, mission, purpose, values or beliefs should:**

- **Start with the heart and soul of your organization** – this should not be a mere paper/textbook exercise!
- **Act as a pole star** – providing a clear and inspiring reference point to all stakeholders!
- **Be for everyone** – not just for CEOs or marketing teams!
- **Convey what is unique and distinctive about your organisation** – not what’s important but ubiquitous!
- **Secure wide-ownership, but not be written “by committee”** – get wide buy-in and input up front and on the final result; but leave the process in between to one or two individuals with flair!
- **Not be too wordy** – less is more, so delete the superfluous! Isn’t *all* meaningful support “practical”? Isn’t *all* hoped-for change “positive”?
- **Be lived and breathed** – not merely left in a draw; or pinned up on some wall!

**A full copy of the ‘Mission Impossible?’ report and reference guide is downloadable from:**  
[www.nfpsynergy.net](http://www.nfpsynergy.net)