

Mission Impossible II Summary

A revised and updated
report on a reference
collection of essence
statements from eighty
charities

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Table of Contents

Part 1: A revised and updated report on a reference collection of essence statements from eighty charities	5
How we compiled this document	3
Introduction: How strong is your essence?.....	5
<i>Vision</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Purpose</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Mission</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Strapline</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Values.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Beliefs.....</i>	<i>8</i>
Analysis with examples of good practice	9
<i>Vision</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Purpose</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Mission</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Mission into strategy: Strategic goals and strategy documents.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Straplines.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Values and beliefs.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Popular words</i>	<i>22</i>
A simple guide to creating a powerful essence statement.....	23

Part 1: A revised and updated report on a reference collection of essence statements from eighty charities

How we compiled this document

Analysing the essence statements of 80 charities

This compilation of essence statements is intended to highlight good practice and to provide charities with a benchmark against which they can evaluate the way in which they currently present their own essence. By 'essence statement', we are referring to the text that encapsulates the vision, mission and other elements of an organisation's essence. Rather than asking charities to provide this information, we used their websites, so giving us the same access as any member of the public with an internet connection.

Where charities had clearly labelled their vision, mission, values etc., compiling this document was relatively straightforward. However, there were many cases where essence elements had to be inferred from elsewhere on the website, particularly:

1. The 'about us' / 'what we do' webpages
2. By searching for the words 'vision', 'purpose', 'mission', 'values' and 'belief'
3. The organisation's annual report

Use of language and nomenclature

In order to analyse the essence statements, we identified six elements that make up an organisation's essence, as defined in the next section. Inevitably, the way in which charities presented their essence did not always fit neatly into these categories. It is important to note that this categorisation was done for the purposes of clarity and comparability only – we are not suggesting that charities should get hung up on the semantics of which part of their strategic essence should be labelled what. It is not a problem if an organisation's vision and purpose is incorporated into their mission statement or if they don't have a section clearly labelled 'beliefs'. What is important is that anyone who reads the information made available by the charity is provided with a clear and inspiring picture of what the charity stands for and how it goes about acting on this. Potential supporters should not have to take the time or the effort to trawl through copious amounts of information in order to understand the essence of what a charity does. Language should also be consistent between charities, and each charity should understand how they use terms such as 'mission' or 'values', and what it means for that charity. In this case each charity can be an island!

The changes a decade makes

Ten years ago, it was not possible to infer any clear vision or values for over a fifth of the charities surveyed. Overall, charities were now more likely to have a clear vision, purpose and mission. There is evidence that the popularity of straplines may be slightly decreasing, as just under three quarters of charities had a strapline ten

years ago, combined to just under two thirds now. Perhaps most surprisingly, there were two or three charities which had previously described a clear vision and now no longer did so.

If we've got it wrong we apologise – please email us at reports@nfpsynergy.net and let us know the correct version.

Introduction: How strong is your essence?

An organisation's essence is made up of six elements which, when used effectively, showcase the dreams, character and direction that distinguishes the charity from all others.

These are:

- Vision
- Purpose
- Mission
- Values
- Beliefs
- Strapline

An organisation with a strong essence is one where staff, trustees, volunteers and supporters are aware of these various elements. It is a place where they are used as yardsticks against which to make strategic decisions, and where each staff member and supporter understands how their contribution is feeding into the organisation's greater goals. It is also a place where staff and supporters feel a keen sense of pride about being affiliated with an organisation that distinctly stands for something bigger than any individual or issue. Clearly, it is important for a charity to have a strong essence statement. Indeed, many UK charities have powerful essence statements at their heart.

We thought it would be useful to compile the visions, purposes, missions, values, beliefs and straplines of 80 of the UK's larger charities as a reference work. We don't claim that these 80 organisations are better or worse than the sector as a whole – they are picked to be a cross-section of better known charities. The purpose of this document is not to highlight where organisations are getting their essence statements wrong. Rather it is to flag up good practice and to provide charities with a benchmark against which they can evaluate the way in which they currently present their vision, mission, and values etc. We did not contact charities directly to ask for information but used their websites (see below). This means we have an outsider's perspective, as we have the same access as any member of the public with an internet connection.

Defining the elements of a strategic essence

Below we have defined the six main elements that we felt were critical to an organisation's strategic essence – vision, purpose, mission, values, beliefs and strapline.¹

Vision

The main purpose of an organisational vision is to provide a superordinate goal towards which everyone who shares a similar dream can strive. It provides an inspirational picture of what the world could be like with some cooperative effort and (in an ideal world) unites employees, supporters, beneficiaries and similarly oriented organisations in an effort to bring the vision to life.

An organisation's vision is its guiding star – it defines what the organisation believes in and the kind of world it wants to see created. Importantly, a vision conveys a larger sense of purpose so that employees and supporters see themselves as building a magnificent monument, rather than just lugging heavy stones. A vision is not restricted by the organisation's role or capacity; in fact, it is usually much bigger than what any individual organisation can achieve in isolation. It is a compelling description of what ultimate success looks like and should be challenging but achievable. It should appeal to people's hearts and minds and inspire a practical but creative and impassioned approach.

A good starting point when conceiving an organisational vision is to ask trustees and employees, "What sort of world would you create for our beneficiaries if you were handed a magic wand?"

Purpose

If the vision is the overarching dream, the purpose is the specific part of the dream that the organisation hopes to make real. A charity's purpose outlines why the organisation was established in the first place and identifies the piece of the puzzle that it is trying to fill. Regularly referring back to a clearly defined purpose helps an organisation to make strategically appropriate decisions and to remain focussed in its activities.

In determining organisational purpose, the following questions can be considered:

- What contribution do you want your charity to make to the organisation's vision?
- Which pieces of the puzzle are currently being done well?
- Which are being done badly or not at all?
- What piece of the puzzle is your organisation well-positioned to fill? (What are the strengths, skills and strategies that your organisation can harness in working towards the organisational vision?)
- If you could look back in 20 years' time, what would you have liked to have seen the organisation achieve?

Mission

If the vision defines the end point, and the purpose defines the specific part of the vision that the organisation is striving to fulfil, the mission operationalises the way in which the charity plans to meet these overarching goals - it is the game plan, so to speak.

¹ For more information on charity branding see our free publications: *Branding Inside Out: a best practice guide* (2012) and *Branding: the jeweller's story* (2005). Available free from www.nfpsynergy.net

This distinction between vision, purpose and mission is shown by the following example from St Mungo's (our labelling):

Vision: *Our vision is that everyone has a place to call home and can fulfil their hopes and ambitions.*

Purpose: *We are here to end homelessness and rebuild lives.*

Mission: *We achieve our vision through:*

- *Providing direct support to our clients to prevent or respond to their homelessness and to enable their recovery*
- *Building relationships with communities and the wider public to increase understanding about homelessness and empathy for the people who experience it*
- *Combining the voices of our clients with evidence and knowledge about what works to advocate for policy change*

The mission outlines the mechanisms through which strategic goals will be achieved and sets the boundaries for the organisation's activities. In this way, it guides operations of the ground and focuses the charities resources.

It is important to remember that times change and new ideas and technologies are always coming to the fore. While an organisational vision may remain the same for years and even decades, the mission should be updated regularly to reflect new and improved mechanisms by which the organisation can achieve its purpose.

When revising a mission statement, the Council on Foundations (a philanthropy organisation based in the USA) suggests conducting the exercise in Box 1 with board members. In order to facilitate organisation-wide buy-in, it may be even more useful to conduct it with all staff members during a staff meeting or strategic planning day.

Strapline

The strapline is a short phrase or sentence which sums up the organisation – it highlights what makes the organisation special or unique and is a brief but powerful impression that the organisation wants its public to remember. Imagine a strapline as the part of the iceberg that can be seen above the water – but supported and underpinned by the rest of the essence statement that usually can't be seen.

A strapline is particularly important in terms of helping supporters, who know little about the organisation, and who will often be making a first impression about whether this is a charity they are interested in aligning themselves with. The beauty of the strapline is that it can be changed to reflect an updated strategic vision without the confusion and difficulties of a name change. Consider the way in which Sainsbury's changed the rather mundane strapline, 'Good food costs less at Sainsbury's', to the more emotionally powerful, if enigmatic, 'Making life taste better', to the thoroughly confusing 'Try something new today', when most people want to buy the same stuff week after week. Sainsbury has since replaced this with 'Live well for less', a message it hopes will resonate with customers suffering a squeeze on their wallets. Meanwhile, whilst Tesco's continuing dominance in the future has been called into question, it has stuck with the now idiomatic, 'Every little helps'. We don't claim that the strapline is the reason for Tesco's success in the UK to date, more that their values and vision permeate every aspect of what the organisation does and are distilled into the strapline.

Values

Values reflect the organisation's core ideology – they are the principles, standards and qualities that characterise the way in which a charity conducts its work. Values should be used to determine the appropriateness of suggested visions, strategies and actions. They create the organisational culture and will often determine the extent to which employees and supporters feel affiliated with the charity. Like mission and vision, an organisation's values are often formally defined on paper. But the real work involves putting them into practice. Senior managers need to target and support behaviours and activities that exemplify the organisation's values.

Beliefs

The organisational beliefs are a statement of what the organisation believes or accepts to be true. Often they will provide the context for the work the charity does. Like values, beliefs will often determine the extent to which employees and supporters align themselves with the charity.

It is often easy to confuse values and beliefs. For us, values are more about how the organisation conducts its business, the way in which it wants to behave, and the attributes that it would like to be seen as having. So a value might be that the organisation should be professional and authoritative in all that it did. Beliefs are more externally oriented than values which focus typically on how an organisation does its job. Beliefs are best seen as more about the cause or statements of how the world should or could be. So a belief might be that 'every child has the right to an education' or that 'young people should be encouraged to be active citizens'.

Box 1: Exercise for updating an essence statement

Divide trustees/staff into small groups of three to five people. Ask each person to read the current mission statement and then answer the following questions:

- Is the current mission statement short and clear? If not, what is the problem?
- Does it tell people what good the foundation is doing and for whom? If not, what is missing, or is too much included?
- Is it grounded in our values? If not, what is missing?
- Does the statement serve as an umbrella that covers all the things we do - our underlying strategies? If not, what is not included under the umbrella?
- Do our prescribed activities reflect contemporary and innovative ways of working towards our vision and purpose or are we being held back by history? Are there angles we haven't thought about?
- Does the statement encompass all the people to whom we target our services? If not, which clients or stakeholders are missing?
- Does the statement communicate who we are to the average person? If not, why not? For example, does it have too much jargon? Is it unclear or too abstract?
- Is this a statement we can get excited about and be proud of? If not, what must be done?

Once everyone in the group has finished, each person shares her or his answers with the group and then each group feeds back into the wider group

Analysis with examples of good practice

Vision

For the vast majority (85%) of charities surveyed, the organisation's vision was clearly described, or at least could be simply inferred from the text. As the numerous examples below show, a charity's vision enables the reader to visualise the world of which the charity dreams.

'Our vision is to realise Thomas Barnardo's dream of a world where no child is turned away from the help that they need.' (Barnardo's)

'Our vision: A country where children are free from disadvantage.' (The Children's Society)

'We work to make sure every child and young person has the love, support and opportunity they need to reach their potential.' (Action for Children)

'Our vision is a society in which all children are loved, valued and able to fulfil their potential. In other words, a society that will not tolerate child abuse - whether sexual, physical, emotional, or neglect.' (NSPCC)

'Our vision is a world in which every child attains the right to survival, protection, development and participation.' (Save the Children)

'Everyone should have the unique opportunity to discover, explore and experience something new.' (YHA)

'Our vision is of an inclusive Christian movement transforming communities so that all young people can belong, contribute and thrive.' (YMCA)

'Our vision: A world where disabled people have the same opportunities as everyone else.' (Scope)

'Our vision: A world in which all deafblind children and adults can be full and active members of society.' (Sense)

'Our vision: A world without dementia.' (Alzheimer's Society)

'Our goal is a better life for everyone affected by mental illness.' (Rethink Mental Illness)

'Our vision is a society where everyone has equal access to the same rights and opportunities.' (United Response)

'We want every person affected by breast cancer to get the best treatment, information and support.' (Breast Cancer Care)

'Our vision is a world where people don't die prematurely from heart disease.' (British Heart Foundation)

'Cancer Research UK's vision is to bring forward the day when all cancers are cured.' (Cancer Research UK)

'A better life for people and their families living with a terminal illness.' (Marie Curie)

'A world in which every birth is wanted.' (Marie Stopes International)

'Our vision is a world free from the effects of multiple sclerosis.' (MS Society)

'We believe in a world where everyone can love later life and we work every day to achieve this.' (Age UK)

'To end preventable loss of life at sea.' (RNLI)

'Vision: Everyone who needs it should receive first aid from those around them. No one should suffer for the lack of trained first aiders.' (St Johns Ambulance)

'Samaritans' vision is that fewer people die by suicide.' (Samaritans)

'A safe, secure, affordable home for everyone.' (Shelter)

'Our vision is that everyone has a place to call home and can fulfil their hopes and ambitions.' (St Mungo's)

'Royal Voluntary Service wants to help create a society where everyone feels valued and involved whatever their age.' (Royal Voluntary Service)

'Christian Aid has a vision - an end to poverty - and we believe that vision can become a reality.' (Christian Aid)

'A just world, free from poverty!' (Comic Relief)

'Oxfam's work is always rooted in a vision of a world where women and men are valued and treated equally, able to influence the decisions that affect their lives and meet their responsibilities as full citizens. A just world without poverty.' (Oxfam)

'Our vision is to strive for a world in which all children realise their full potential in societies that respect people's rights and dignities.' (Plan UK)

'For every child to be safe.' (Unicef UK)

'VSO's vision is a world without poverty.' (VSO)

'Our vision is a world where everyone everywhere has safe water, sanitation and hygiene.' (WaterAid)

'The underlying goal of all our work is a green and peaceful world - an earth that is ecologically healthy and able to nurture life in all its diversity.' (Greenpeace)

'Our ultimate goal has always been "people living in harmony with nature".' (WWF UK)

'Our vision is that every pet will enjoy a healthy life in a happy home.' (Blue Cross)

'Our vision is a world where every cat is treated with kindness and an understanding of its needs.' (Cats Protection)

'All dogs can enjoy a happy life, free from the threat of unnecessary destruction.' (Dogs Trust)

'Our vision is a world where animals are respected and protected.' (IFAW)

'For nature to have the home it needs.' (RSPB)

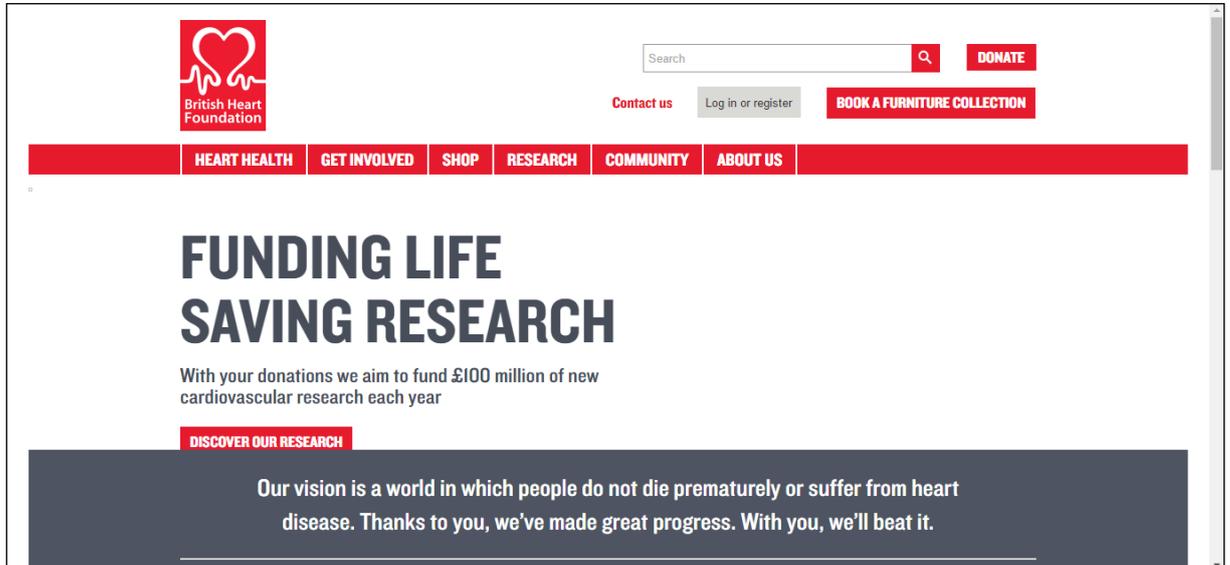
'Our vision is a world where all animals are respected and treated with compassion.' (RSPCA)

Several of these essence statements didn't exist in 2006, or have been improved in terms of clarity. For instance, Marie Curie's vision of 'A better life for people and their families living with a terminal illness' is both more concise and inclusive. A decade ago, it referred only to end of life and cancer, and was more wordy: 'At the end of life we want all patients with cancer to experience the best possible care with the choice of being cared for in their own home.' Previously Marie Stopes International did not state a vision, but had a very clear and concise statement of purpose, 'The prevention of unwanted births', which they seem to be no longer using. Instead, they now have the more positively worded vision of 'A world in which every birth is wanted'.

Since 2006, some charities had changed their 'vision' from being about the organisation to being about the cause. For example, RNLI now describe their vision as the clearly defined and inspiring goal: 'To end preventable loss of life at sea', rather than 'to be recognised universally as the most effective, innovative and dependable lifeboat service'. Similarly, St Johns ambulance vision is now: 'Everyone who needs it should receive first aid from those around them. No one should suffer for the lack of trained first aiders.' Previously they stated that 'Our vision for St. John is that we strengthen our position as the leading and most respected provider of First Aid and First Aid training in local communities, and develop selectively our other charitable activities such as transport and care where our distinctive skills and resources match community needs.'

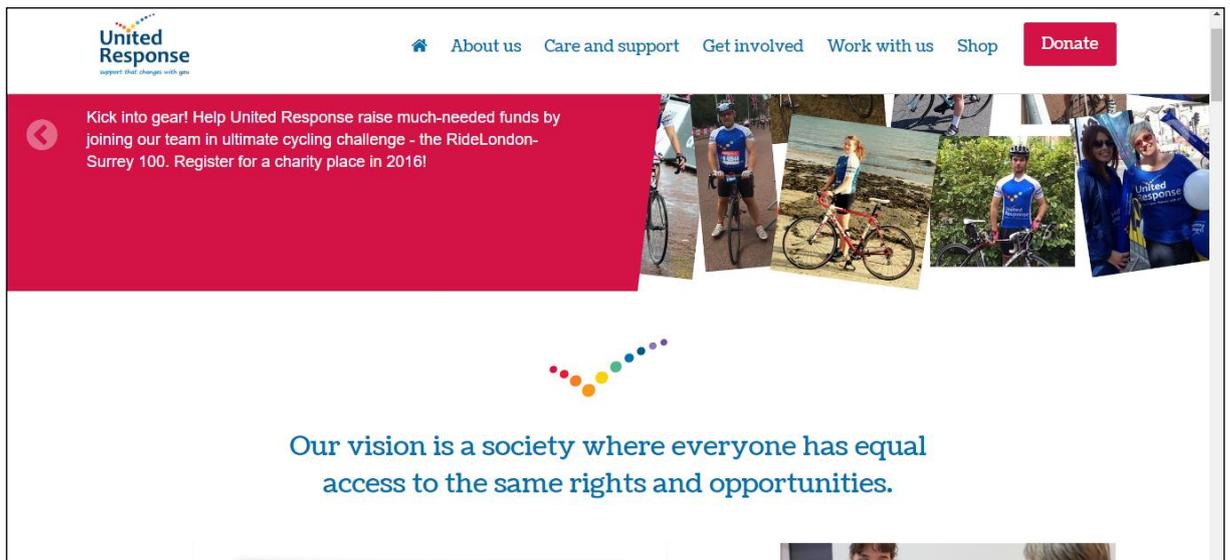
The ease and speed at which someone looking at a charity's website can see the charity's vision varied enormously. The British Heart Foundation displays their vision as a banner across their homepage, underneath their purpose 'Funding life changing research'.

Figure 1: British Heart Foundation homepage



United Response display their vision prominently on their webpage as you scroll down, which is particularly helpful given that their name alone does not clearly identify their area of work.

Figure 2: United Response homepage



Whilst not quite as prominent, Action on Hearing Loss' vision also appears on their homepage underneath 'Welcome', a section which is likely to gain the attention of somebody looking at the website for the first time. A clear vision is an excellent way to introduce people to the charity.

Figure 3: Action on Hearing Loss' homepage

Without naming names, other charities had clear and well thought-through visions, but finding this from the homepage was almost impossible due to a lack of clear signposting and it being hidden on FAQ or 'fact file' webpages. If you are going to declare an inspiring vision, we recommend you don't hide it away!

Purpose

As in 2006, it was not always easy to instantly ascertain each charity's statement of purpose from its website, that is, why the organisation was established and the overall objective the organisation is striving to fulfil. To avoid confusion, it should be noted that charities sometimes used the term 'mission' to refer to what we are here calling 'purpose'. As a reminder, we are using the term 'mission' to refer specifically to the way in which the charity plans to meet their overarching goals, the mechanisms through which strategic goals will be achieved. We are not suggesting that this is the only or best way to use these terms, but that it is useful for charities to tell potential supporters about both what they are aiming for and how they plan to do so.

A selection of good examples of purpose statements are included below:

'We find happy homes for abandoned or unwanted pets and we keep pets healthy by promoting welfare and providing treatment.' (The Blue Cross)

'WaterAid is an international organisation whose mission is to transform the lives of the poorest and most marginalised people by improving access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene.' (WaterAid)

'We are the only UK wide charity providing care, information and support to people affected by breast cancer.' (Breast Cancer Care)

'YHA's charitable objective forms the basis of all our work: "To help all, especially young people of limited means, to a greater knowledge, love and care of the countryside, and appreciation of the cultural values of towns and cities, particularly by providing Youth Hostels or other accommodation for them in their travels, and thus to promote their health, recreation and education"' (YHA)

'Our mission is to inspire change and create opportunities to enable blind and partially sighted people to have equal voice and equal choice.' (Action for Blind People)

'Barnardo's transforms the lives of the most vulnerable children across the UK through the work of our services, campaigning and research expertise.' (Barnardo's)

'Purpose: The RNLI save lives at sea' (RNLI)

'VSO is the world's leading international development organisation that uses volunteers to fight poverty and reduce inequality. VSO brings people together to fight poverty.' (VSO)

For some charities, the purpose is a direct reflection of the vision:

'Our vision: A world where disabled people have the same opportunities as everyone else.'

'Scope exists to make this country a place where disabled people have the same opportunities as everyone else. Until then, we'll be here.' (Scope)

'Our vision is a world where animals are respected and protected.'

'IFAW's mission is to rescue and protect animals around the world. We rescue individuals, safeguard populations, and preserve habitat.' (IFAW)

'All dogs can enjoy a happy life, free from the threat of unnecessary destruction.'

'Our mission is to bring about the day when all dogs can enjoy a happy life, free from the threat of unnecessary destruction.' (Dog's Trust)

Mission

In many cases, charities' missions had to be inferred from the 'what we do section'. Back in 2006, over a fifth of the charities surveyed did not have a clear mission. Whilst the level of detail and clarity given varied, when conducting this survey now it was possible to get some idea of the work being done by each charity surveyed to meet its overall goals.

However, although potential supporters can always read the 'what we do' section to clarify how an organisation carries out its purpose, not having a clear mission statement does weaken an organisation's strategic artillery. It is incredibly valuable for trustees and employees to have a clear statement about how the organisation plans to meet its goals which can be referred to regularly in determining steps forward.

A small selection of organisational missions which do their job well are highlighted below.

YMCA: 'The services each of our 114 YMCAs provide meet the needs of people in their area, reaching out to communities and engaging with young people from groups that might be hard to reach. YMCAs don't just provide a bed, but also seek to help young people gain the training, skills and confidence to go on to lead independent lives. Some YMCAs will work predominately with homeless people, while others focus wholly on physical activity or youth work and crèches. Together we are delivering services to 530 communities across the country.'

Leonard Cheshire: 'For over 65 years, we have supported disabled people in many different ways, to reflect what they tell us they want. This includes providing care in people's own homes, in supported rented accommodation, in residential homes, in day centres and through respite services. We make a difference to the lives of thousands of people by supporting them to develop skills through employment, education, enterprise, health, volunteering and digital inclusion projects. We campaign alongside disabled people to bring about changes for the better, and to challenge ignorance and unfairness in society. Internationally, we are part of a Global Alliance of Leonard Cheshire charities which works to improve the lives of disabled people in

54 countries. What we do goes far beyond providing social care. We deliver innovative services to help disabled people find and remain in employment. We build confidence through the provision of information, advice and guidance, and to break down barriers through access to computers and adapted IT equipment.'

Action on Hearing Loss: *'We're experts in providing support for people with hearing loss and tinnitus.*

- *We provide day-to-day care for people who are deaf and have additional needs.*
- *We supply communication services and training.*
- *We offer practical advice to help people protect their hearing.*
- *We campaign to change public policy around hearing loss issues.*
- *We support research into an eventual cure for hearing loss and tinnitus.'*

Sightsavers:

- *'Preventing blindness: Every year, we support our partners to carry out millions of eye examinations and refer people for treatment to prevent blindness and restore sight. Through community volunteers in developing countries, we enable the distribution of medication to prevent blinding diseases. We fund operations for people who need them, and train eye care workers and surgeons.*
- *Supporting equality: We work with partners to train specialist teaching staff; supply glasses, Braille kits and other learning tools; and educate communities to reduce stigma around visual impairment and blindness. Because of Sightsavers, people who are visually impaired or have other disabilities are supported to live independently, get an education and earn an income.*
- *Campaigning for change: We work with national governments, strengthening systems that tackle the problems at the root of avoidable blindness – the sorts of things most of us take for granted, like access to clean water, sanitation facilities and education. We make changes for the long term, and help change systems from the inside to ensure support continues to be given to the people who need it.'*

Asthma UK: *'We fight asthma in three ways:*

- *We fund world class asthma research.*
- *We campaign to improve the quality of care received by people with asthma.*
- *We help hundreds of thousands of people a year with our expert advice and support.'*

Marie Curie: *'We provide care and support for people living with any terminal illness, and their families. We've been carrying out this vital work for over 65 years – last year alone we cared for over 40,000 people across the UK. How we help people living with a terminal illness:*

- *Marie Curie nurses*
- *Our hospices*
- *Support Line and online help*
- *Helper volunteers'*

Samaritans: *'We [work to achieve our vision] by:*

- *Being available: 24 hours a day to provide emotional support for people who are struggling to cope, including those who have had thoughts of suicide*
- *Reaching out: to high risk groups and communities to reduce the risk of suicide*
- *Working in partnership: with other organisations, agencies and experts*
- *Influencing public policy: and raising awareness of the challenges of reducing suicide'*

ActionAid: *'Our unique approach: Helping people claim their basic rights to achieve lasting change is at the centre of our approach. Survival isn't enough. We help women and girls understand the power they have to change their own lives, for good.'*

How we're different

- *we empower women and girls to help themselves, and we fight what holds them back*
- *we work directly with and through local people*
- *we're on the frontline; we respond fast with practical hands-on support*
- *we do more than give short-term solutions; we build lasting change.*

Across the world we focus on five key areas of work to help people claim their rights:

- *Ending hunger*
- *Women's rights and gender equality*
- *Emergencies and conflicts*
- *Education*
- *Unjust tax and economic systems'*

PDSA: *'At PDSA, saving, protecting and healing pets is what we're all about. We are dedicated to improving pet wellbeing in three very special ways – by educating owners, preventing disease and carrying out life-saving operations. We are the UK's leading vet charity. Every year, the dedicated teams at our 51 Pet Hospitals and 380 plus Pet Practices work tirelessly to provide 2.7 million veterinary treatments – including 440,000 preventative treatments. This helps over 470,000 much-loved pets and brings peace of mind to 300,000 owners. And we are a leading authority on all things concerning pet health and wellbeing: whether its leading the debate on pet obesity, conducting Britain's biggest annual pet wellbeing survey, raising the status of animals or simply celebrating their contribution to our lives.'*

Mission into strategy: Strategic goals and strategy documents

In addition to the six key strategic essential elements compiled in this document, some organisations also had clearly delineated strategic goals to be achieved within a specified timeframe showcased on their websites. A growing number of charities had published separate strategy documents online. When this occurred, it provided the reader with a real sense that this was an organisation that had got its act together. It also provided a sense of transparency and strategic efficacy that made it easier for supporters to establish for themselves that the charity was doing a good job and using supporters' resources effectively.

Ten years ago we highlighted VSO's *'Focus for change'* strategy document, which as predicted at the time had a limited life span. It has since been replaced by *'People First'* (2010) which sets out their distinctive approach as well as six strategic directions for working towards their goal of a world without poverty.

Straplines

Straplines are generally the part of an organisation's essence that are the most visible and therefore most likely to be remembered. Therefore it is important for them to be memorable, inspiring and succinct. Just under three quarters of charities had a strapline ten years ago, compared to just under two thirds now. This suggests that the popularity of straplines may be slightly decreasing, or at any rate, it is not increasing. An inclusive approach was taken, and it may be that some of the fifty straplines identified in the reference

collection below were not necessarily intended to be seen as a strapline; for example, Shelter's current tagline 'at 50' referring to their birthday; Action for Blind People's emphasis on their partnership with a bigger charity ('working with RNIB'); or the YHA's '#LiveMoreYHA', which they describe as a philosophy and 'more than just a slogan'.

Most straplines are clearly identifiable because they appear as part of the logo, or sometimes on a banner opposite the logo. However, some such as the British Heart Foundation's 'Fight for every heartbeat' are not linked to the logo, but instead appears only directly inserted within the website's text, although in this case 'fighting' language and tone is used consistently throughout the website.

The nature of, and even perceived need for, a strapline is related to various factors, such as how well known a charity is, and how descriptive its name is. Six of the original charities surveyed have since renamed themselves, and a further two (Age Concern and Help the Aged) have merged. Taking on new, more descriptive names has meant that previous descriptive straplines have become unnecessary. Instead of needing a strapline to describe their work, they now want to emphasise their history and established reputation. For instance, the charity NCH's strapline was 'The children's charity', but once renamed Action for Children, the charity has 'since 1869' under their logo at the top of every webpage, which is mirrored by 'We've been helping children and young people for 145 years' under the logo on the footer of every webpage. Similarly RNID's strapline, 'Changing the world for deaf and hard of hearing people', has been replaced since their renaming as Action for Hearing Loss, with the statement, 'A national charity since 1911', under their logo on the website.

Interesting, just seven of the eighty charities surveyed had the same strapline a decade later. These were:

The Scouts' *'Be prepared'*
 Mind *'for better mental health'*
'We are Macmillan. Cancer support.'
 Groundwork's *'Changing places changing lives'*
'The RNLI is the charity that saves lives at sea'
 Cafod's *'Just one world'*
 The National Trust's *'For ever, for everyone'*

From the Scouts' famous motto to Cafod's vision-inspired strapline, compared with the RNLI's highly descriptive strapline and Macmillan's very simple but effective slogan, there is considerable variation between them.

Like Cafod, a few other charities reflect their vision with their strapline. Thus WWF UK's strapline is 'For a future where people and nature thrive' reflecting their vision of people living in harmony with nature. Unicef UK's strapline 'for every child in danger' focuses on the negative compared to the positive vision, 'For every child to be safe'.

For those charities which have changed their straplines, this is sometimes related to a bigger change in focus, approach or tone. For instance, NSPCC have made a deliberate decision to move from talking about the problems to focusing on the solutions, thus replacing 'Cruelty to children must end. FULL STOP' to 'Every

childhood is worth fighting for'. Meanwhile, Scope has changed from 'About cerebral palsy. For disabled people achieving equality' to the more inclusive 'About disability'.

Sense have made their strapline far clearer, changing it from 'touching people's lives' to the more descriptive 'for deafblind people'. Similarly Marie Curie's strapline has changed from the more emotional 'Devoted to life' to the more descriptive 'Care and support through terminal illness'. Since 2006, the Royal Voluntary Service have both changed their name and moved to more a descriptive strapline, from 'Make it count' to 'Together for older people'. Marie Stopes International's strapline 'Children by choice, not chance' is more memorable and less technical but still descriptive, compared with the previous version, 'Providing choices in reproductive healthcare worldwide'.

Interestingly Diabetes UK has moved from the descriptive 'The charity for people with diabetes' to a slogan emphasising actions rather than the cause: 'Care. Connect. Campaign'. Also moving further away from the charity's name, Turning Point's strapline has changed from 'turning lives around' to 'inspired by possibility'. RSPB's strapline 'Giving nature a home' seems to be more inclusive than might be expected, referring to 'nature' rather than birds. On the other hand, Plan UK have changed theirs from 'Children are at the heart of everything we do' to 'because I am a girl', so emphasising their focus on girls' rights.

Some more examples of clear and memorable straplines:

'Believe in children' (Barnardo's)

'Leading the fight against dementia' (Alzheimer's UK)

'The voice of learning disability' (Mencap)

'for better mental health' (Mind)

'Let's beat cancer sooner' (Cancer Research UK)

'The child first and always' (Unicef UK)

'Incredible hospice and neurological care' (Sue Ryder Care)

'Love later life' (Age UK)

'Supporting and empowering refugees' (British Refugee Council)

'The national charity for single homeless people' (Crisis)

'Ending homelessness Rebuilding lives' (St Mungo's)

'Change lives. For good.' (ActionAid)

'Working with the world's poorest people to transform their lives' (Concern Worldwide)

'Medical aid where it is needed most. Independent. Neutral. Impartial.' (MSF)

'We won't live with poverty' (Oxfam)

'Following Jesus where the need is greatest' (Tearfund)

'Help a vet. Help a pet.' (PDSA)

Values and beliefs

Values are the principles, standards and qualities that characterise the way in which a charity conducts its work, whilst the organisational beliefs are more externally-oriented and refer to beliefs in relation to the cause, often providing context for the charity's work. Both influence the extent to which employees and supporters align themselves with the charity. Our distinction between values and beliefs is not always reflected by charities' use of these terms, and given the similarities we discuss them together here.

The most effective value and belief statements were those that appeared to truly capture the ideological orientation of the organisation. They inevitably have a lower impact when they appear only as a few catchy words or statements that are otherwise unrelated to the charity's approach and work.

Therefore, value statements consisting simply of a list of words (e.g. dedicated, passionate etc.) can seem arbitrary and unsubstantiated – the proof is in the doing. If a list of values is given, the values should at the very least be reflected throughout the rest of the website, and most importantly, in the charity's work. On the other hand, it is not essential for an organization to explicitly state its values.

It is far more important to have values which permeate all of an organisation's promotional materials, activities and behaviour rather than simply hoping that explicit values emphasised on a webpage or in an essence statement will do the trick. Values and beliefs are for everyone, all of the time – not just to look good in external communications. Above all, saying does not make it so, doing does. As in 2006, no values were made explicit on Asthma UK's website, however it was evident from their strategy document that the organisation continues to value innovation and accessibility – they funded local, innovative initiatives and were creative in their utilisation of communication technologies in getting their resources to their beneficiaries.

Of course, for employees, an explicit statement of values can be a very important tool for ensuring that strategic decisions are made in line with the organisation's overall ethos and essence. Values that run along a consistent theme or ethos, or fit with the organisation's founding principles, appear more credible.

IFAW's description of its values and beliefs is effective because it demonstrates how they are put into practice in its work:

'We promise supporters and policy makers effective animal protection solutions delivered with intelligence, compassion and integrity. In order to achieve IFAW's vision of a world where animals are respected and protected, we follow key principles in our hands-on projects with animals and in our advocacy work to secure better animal welfare protection in policy, legislation and society:

- *It should be recognised that animals have intrinsic value and are sentient beings.*
- *Policy should be based on sound science and the ethical treatment of animals.*
- *Conservation decisions should be guided by ecological sustainability and biological sustainability, the precautionary principle and ethical treatment of animals.'*

Similarly, Greenpeace explains how:

'Through all our work, we always hold true to our core values:

Independence: We have no permanent allies or enemies. We don't solicit or accept funding from governments, corporations or political parties, or donations which could compromise our independence, aims, objectives or integrity. Instead, we rely on the voluntary donations of individual supporters and grant-support from foundations.

Internationalism: The environmental problems we face are usually global in nature, and their solutions must be too. We are committed to internationalism, and our presence in over 40 countries with 2.8 million supporters around the world allows us to bring enormous pressure to bear on power-holders.

Personal responsibility and nonviolence: We take personal responsibility for our actions, and we are committed to nonviolence. These principles are inspired by the Quaker concept of 'bearing witness', which is

about taking action based on conscience – personal action based on personal responsibility. We are accountable for our actions, and everyone on a Greenpeace action is trained in nonviolent direct action.'

Values/beliefs may refer to the origin of the charity, and the on-going motivation behind its work. For instance:

'Crisis was shocked into existence over 40 years ago by the revelation that in one of the world's most affluent countries people were still living on the streets. Today we remain shocked by the existence of homelessness. There are still too many people without a home of their own and, since 2010, all forms of homelessness have been on the rise. We are responding with a renewed commitment and action to end homelessness.'

A number of the charities we surveyed have religious links. This may provide a useful framework for explaining values and beliefs, but at the same time it is particularly important for potential supporters or employees to understand what this means for the charity.

For example, World Vision explain how Christian beliefs influence their approach:

'Our Christian identity underpins everything that we do. Motivated by our faith, World Vision is committed to following the teaching and example of Jesus Christ in his identification with those who are poor, vulnerable or forgotten. In practical terms, this simply means that we want to make a positive difference in the world around us as an expression and sign of God's unconditional love. Faith is widely recognised as an important aspect of the lives of the children, their families and their communities we work with. It crosses the boundaries of culture and society and is protected in documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is also acknowledged by many who work in international development that an understanding of spirituality is critical for effective poverty reduction and development.'

Christian Aid point out that the vision and purpose are shaped by Christian faith:

'Christian Aid's work is founded on Christian faith and powered by hope. It acts to change an unjust world through charity, providing practical love and care for neighbours in need. It is driven by the gospel of good news to the poor, and inspired by the vision of a new Earth where everyone lives in justice, peace and plenty ... We are proud of our Christian identity and heritage. It defines who we are and how we work ... We are committed to the Red Cross and Red Crescent Code of Conduct, meaning we never link aid with evangelism.'

As well as describing both what it means that 'We are professional' and 'We are Christian', Tearfund discusses their concept of 'integral mission':

'Local church: love in action – Acting with justice and loving mercy are central to the purpose of the Christian church. As a group of followers of Jesus, the church is a powerful and transformational force, vital to freeing people from poverty regardless of race, religion, nationality or gender... When Jesus connected with people, he changed their lives completely - spiritually, physically and emotionally. He knew that people were more than just their hunger, or more than just their despair. We always take our inspiration from the example of Jesus, and so our work focuses on the 'whole' person – working through churches to tackle both material and spiritual poverty. We call this integral mission.'

Popular words

Ever wondered what the 'hot' words were in charity essence statements? A rough and ready search to see which words came up most frequently in charities' essence statements shows a surprising level of similarity between 2006 and 2016. Whilst we attempted to take the same approach to identifying the relevant text for essence statements, this comparison is by its nature only approximate making this level of similarity all the more noteworthy.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the word 'support' came top of the list by far. 'Respect', 'partnership/collaboration' and 'local' were the next most popular in both 2006 and 2015. The most notable difference over the last decade is that 'diversity' was used just 6 times in the essence statements in 2016, compared to over three times as often ten years ago.

Table 1: Most commonly used words in charity essence statements

	2006	2016		2006	2016
Support	126	100	Honesty	9	14
Respect	50	41	Integrity	9	14
Partner/partnership/collaboration	48	48	Responsive	9	4
Local	43	42	Accountable	8	15
Equal/inequalities	36	36	Largest	8	11
Christian	35	33	Passion	7	8
Trust	32	29	Champion	6	3
Effective	30	27	Grow/Growth	6	8
Potential	28	31	Inclusion	6	8
Future	27	31	Imagine/imaginative	5	1
Dignity	22	24	Steward/stewardship	5	5
Diversity	19	6	Determination	3	4
Innovative/innovation	19	20	Enrich	3	2
Justice	16	14	Flexible	3	1
Empower	12	19	Cost-effective	2	2
Healthy	12	10	Harmony	2	1
Expertise	11	23	Neutrality/neutral	2	5
Responsibility	11	11	Friendly	1	0
Independent	10	22	Open-minded	1	1

A simple guide to creating a powerful essence statement

Start with the heart and soul of your organisation. Essence statements should come from the heart of the organisation. They are not a paper exercise out of a marketing textbook but the opportunity to distil and agree some of the essence of an organisation. Often the creation of an essence statement helps trustees and senior managers to establish what they see as some of the fundamental tenets of the organisation.

Good essence statements act as a pole star in the darkness. The best essence statements give every member of staff, every donor and every volunteer a reference point against which to measure their own experience. A vision should allow people from across the organisation to say, 'I believe I'm part of that', and feel empowered and proud to be part of what the organisation is achieving. Alternatively an essence statement may give people a reference point through which they can articulate and understand their frustration between their experience and the promise of the vision or mission.

Essence statements are for everyone. The essence statement shouldn't be for funders or trustees or major donors but for everyone. It's not just for the marketing or fundraising teams. It's not an elite document for the walls of boardrooms or CEOs. It's often easy to find out how powerful and relevant the vision document is – ask staff what it is. It's amazing how often staff don't know their own organisation's vision, mission or values.

Every charity wants to be caring, dedicated and friendly. Charities often use essence statements to confuse two things: features that make them distinctive, and features that are part of a universal charity value-set. For example most charities are caring towards their staff and their beneficiaries. It's good for a charity to be caring but hardly unique. 'Caring' as an attribute for a charity is the equivalent of marketing a car as 'silver'. So in any essence statement make sure the space that the charity occupies is more about what's unique and distinctive, than what's important but ubiquitous.

Secure wide ownership but don't write by committee. Essence statements need to inspire. They also need to feel relevant to the stakeholders of the organisation. The solution to this paradox is not to make essence statements feel like legal documents, or fill them with sub-clauses and subjunctives. The solution is to consult widely across the organisation before drafting or re-drafting an essence statement and then consult once the statement is complete. However, the drafting of this statement should be left in the hands of one or two people – preferably individuals with good, if not great, copywriting skills.

Less is more. Omit redundant words in essence statements. Do they really need to say 'registered' charity (is there any other kind?) Or practical support (not many charities provide impractical support)? Or positive change (who promotes negative change?) While tautologies should be omitted, picture-painting adjectives should not. Essence statements should paint a picture in the minds of readers of the kind of organisation you are and the world you believe in.

Live it, breathe it, be it. In the end it doesn't matter what your vision or your mission or your values are if you don't live and breathe them. Too many essence statements are confined to the walls of a charity's reception or board room. The best essence statements in the world are worthless if they aren't guiding and giving focus to people every day.

About nfpSynergy

nfpSynergy is a research consultancy that aims to provide the ideas, the insights and the information to help non-profits thrive.

We have over a decade of experience working exclusively with charities, helping them develop evidence-based strategies and get the best for their beneficiaries. The organisations we work with represent all sizes and areas of the sector and we have worked with four in five of the top 50 fundraising charities in the UK.

We run cost effective, syndicated tracking surveys of stakeholder attitudes towards charities and non-profit organisations. The audiences we reach include the general public, young people, journalists, politicians and health professionals. We also work with charities on bespoke projects, providing quantitative, qualitative and desk research services.

In addition, we work to benefit the wider sector by creating and distributing regular free reports, presentations and research on the issues that charities face.

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