

Creating a Vision for Success

Most people wouldn't start off on a journey without a destination in mind and a map to help them find the way. As a student activity adviser, you are embarking on an educational journey that is unlike any you'll find in the classroom.

Do you have a vision of what the organization should be like? Have you explicitly identified what you want to accomplish with your student leaders? What values are serving as your compass as you make decisions for the group?

As an activity adviser, you probably already have some kind of vision for your group, whether you have consciously defined it or not. Advisers come to their positions in many ways—some are interested in the subject matter of the group, some like to work with students in informal settings, some were “volunteered.” Many people view student activities as “extra-curricular—an extra element that is nice but not absolutely necessary—but veteran advisers understand that activities are an integral part of the education process, teaching students skills that will benefit them for life. These views of student activities as either extra-curricular or co-curricular color the ways advisers approach their work with student leaders, form-

ing a vision for what they want to accomplish with their groups.

What Is a Vision?

A vision is your big picture idea of the way things ought to be, what you are working towards.

It encompasses your core values and helps unite the group. A successful vision accomplishes several things:

A vision creates a shared purpose.

A common vision lets people know that they are part of something bigger than just themselves.

For a group, the vision helps members see that they are working together toward the same goals.

A vision guides decision making and strategy. With the vision in mind, group members will determine goals and objectives that will move the group toward making the vision a reality.

A vision provides guidelines that determine behavior. People who believe in a vision will choose behavior that is consistent with the vision. Most members want to do a good job and advance the work of the group.

A vision creates energy. By inspiring emotions and connecting to values, visions energize people. They strike a spark that generates excitement to accomplish things.

A vision enhances leadership.

Developing a vision and working to build support for it are essential elements of leadership. A leader needs to know where he or she is going before anyone will be willing to follow.

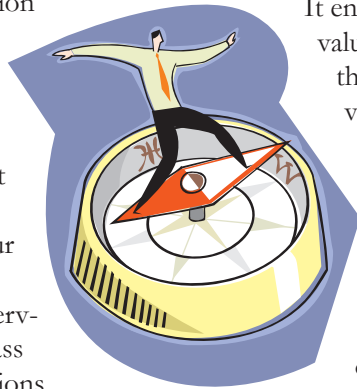
A vision gives a sense of the future. Articulating the “big picture” idea of what the group ought to be gives an idea of what you are striving for and where you are headed.

Your Personal Vision

The way you imagine things is what matters in the first stage of developing a vision. Even though the group members and officers will have their own ideas for the organization, it's important for the adviser to develop his or her own vision for the group. The group's vision is important too, but if the adviser doesn't have a clear vision of what he or she wants to accomplish as an educator, the group's success will be limited.

Perhaps you have taken over advising a student group that is in disarray—there's no constitution or bylaws, few members, lackluster officers, and an unclear agenda for the year. Or, maybe your group has been functioning quite well for a number of years. Whatever its current state is, asking yourself a few questions can help crystallize your vision for the group:

- What would you like the group to be like at the end of the year?



- What do you envision them accomplishing?
- How would you like members and officers to act?
- How should the group be structured?
- How should decisions be made?
- What type of activities should the group sponsor?
- What is its purpose?
- What role does the group play in the overall mission of the school?

As an educator, consider approaching your work with student groups not as the sponsor of events and programs, but as the adviser who helps student leaders use activities and programs to learn and practice leadership skills. This vision of student activities can make all the difference in your approach, and will help make your advising experience—if it isn't already—an important element in your mission as an educator.

The Group Vision

Once the adviser has a clear idea of his or her vision for the group, it's a good idea to have group members create their own vision. There are many different exercises for developing a shared vision. Most begin with a brainstorming session in which a facilitator asks members to envision the ideal organization. What would it look like? What would it feel like? What functions would it serve? What would result from it? Answers are recorded on chart paper. Alternately, to give each person an equal voice in the process, ask participants to write down their thoughts in answer to the vision questions on five or six index cards and post them on the wall. After brainstorming, group mem-

bers organize the notes by ideas and key words, identifying categories or themes among the items listed and grouping related items together.

The next step is to create the vision statement connecting the main categories identified in the brainstorming step. If there are a large number of categories, the group might consider narrowing them down or re-grouping until there are three or four. To facilitate drafting the vision, the group could appoint a small team to write a proposed statement, or divide the large group into small groups of 4–7 members and let each group create a draft.

The vision statement should begin with the name of the group and a verb followed by descriptive words. For example:

- LHS Student Council empowers student leaders to serve as the voice of the student body with the administration, faculty, and the community and provides leadership development opportunities for all students.
- WHS National Honor Society works to recognize outstanding student leaders, create enthusiasm for scholarship, and stimulate a desire to render service.
- RHS FCCLA helps young men and women become leaders and address important personal, family, work, and societal issues through family and consumer sciences education.

Your group will probably go through several revisions before settling on a final vision statement. As the group works toward agreement on a vision statement, the following questions, excerpted

from “Creating a Vision for Afterschool Partnerships” at <http://nccic.org/afterschool/visioning-tool.htm> can help guide discussions:

- Is the vision statement bold enough to inspire yet credible enough that stakeholders believe it can come true?
- Is the vision focused on the future?
- Does the vision clarify your direction and instill a sense of common commitment?
- Does the vision mobilize and coordinate efforts into a single cohesive enterprise?
- Does the vision act as a living reminder of what is important and what can be achieved?

Sharing the Vision

It won't do much good to create a vision if it's written down and then forgotten about. Create a colorful display in a prominent place to remind members of the vision and what they are working toward. Review the vision at the start of meetings or planning sessions. Be sure to plan activities that will move the group toward achieving the vision. Ask yourselves often, “will this help us achieve our vision?” Decisions should be made based on the mission and values of the group.

Finally, help your faculty, administration, and parents see the organization's value by sharing the group's vision with them. Be sure they understand that there's a purpose behind all the fun and games. Stressing that your group supports the greater mission of the school just may lead to greater support in return for your organization.