



## Vision is a Powerful Fundraising Tool

As a feminist and a gardener, I thoroughly enjoyed time spent with the members of the Woman's National Farm & Garden Association at our annual meeting each year. Farm & Garden turned 100 in 2014, so we took some time leading up to that milestone to think about our vision.

Staying relevant can be a challenge for an organization approaching its one-hundredth year. Like many organizations today, Farm & Garden membership has been declining. Vision can provide the connection to current issues we ought to address and the motivation for members to recruit their friends and for nonmembers to decide to join us.

In my experience, vision is one of the most powerful tools for nonprofit success. Not only does it give everyone involved direction as they act to achieve the vision, it also makes it much easier to raise money.

When I worked as Director of Development for Temple University's Ambler College, a strong vision of what we hoped to accomplish as the "green" campus of Temple enabled us to recruit an incredible board that was the envy of other Temple schools and colleges. The story we were telling about what we hoped to achieve at Temple Ambler motivated influential people to say yes to board service and gift solicitations that positioned the College to attract additional volunteers and donors.

Jim Collins identifies vision as one of the critical things that helps companies and nonprofits go from "Good to Great." If vision is so important and valuable, why don't more nonprofit organizations have a vision statement? Here are a few of my thoughts on this, along with a few suggestions for overcoming these barriers to developing a strong vision.

**Vision Confusion:** Nonprofit organizations often confuse mission with vision. According to Jim Collins, mission is the organization's timeless reason for being, such as "Promoting stewardship of the earth's resources." Vision is something else entirely. It is "a 10-to30-year audacious goal plus vivid descriptions of what it will be like to achieve the goal. A daunting challenge that is clear and compelling, serves as a unifying focal point of effort, and acts as a catalyst for team spirit. It has a clear finish line so everyone will know when it has been achieved." (Collins & Porras) For Farm & Garden, that vision might be "winning the MacArthur Foundation genius award for exceptional creativity in our efforts to engage school-age children in food production activities." Mission is eternal. Vision is achievable.

**Vision Reluctance:** When we set for ourselves, in the words of Jim Collins, "a big hairy audacious goal" or "B-HAG," we go out on a limb. Dreaming big can be scary. What if we don't succeed? It seems risky to tell the world we are going to achieve something so audacious. However, the advantages far outweigh the risks. Collect and share stories of effective vision statements and their successful impact on volunteer engagement, program development, and fundraising to overcome these fears.

**Vision Mechanics:** Many organizations don't know how to come up with a powerful vision. Here are a few ideas to get you started.

1. Reaffirm your mission and values. Be clear about this, or your organization may set a vision that is in conflict with your core ideology. The Collins & Porras article, "Building Your Company's Vision" is an excellent resource. (Harvard Business Review, September – October 1996)
2. Understand your context. Your ability to have relevance and make an impact depend upon it. Think about recent trends that are related to your mission. How do you want to affect change in that area? Great ideas for vision will come from this kind of thinking.
3. Use "is" language. At the 2013 Farm & Garden meeting, we practiced making up statements that began, "**In 2020, WNF&GA is** (or has) ...." What followed was a word-picture of an exceptional accomplishment.
4. Engage your stakeholders in dreaming up potential B-HAGs. Create a number of possible statements of tangible visions, vividly described. Ask people to imagine what each vision would command of the organization in terms of its strategies and allocation of resources. A strong vision gets stakeholders excited about the potential for impact and engagement of others.

Once you have approved a strong vision, start telling people about it. You'll be amazed at how much easier it is to convince people to get involved and support your organization with their time and money.

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