

Discussion Guide: Developing Linkages Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles

Below are some discussion questions and process suggestions to facilitate a dialogue to develop the vision, mission and guiding principles for Linkages.

Mission – Our reason for being

A mission is intended to tell the outside world why Linkages exists. Instead of describing what Linkages does (because that can change over time), it describes Linkages' reason for being. The role of a mission is to **guide** and **inspire**. In addition, a mission must communicate the essence of Linkages to others. An effective mission reflects the importance people attach to the agency's work—it taps their idealistic motivations—rather than just describing the organization's output or target customers. A mission statement typically describes Linkages in terms of:

- Purpose - why Linkages exists, and what it seeks to accomplish.
- Key Beneficiary - the primary population that benefits from Linkages realizing its purpose.

Process:

1. Consider the link between poverty, abuse and potential Child Welfare Services involvement for the families in your county. (Present statistics for your county that may illustrate this point and stimulate discussion.)
2. Ask participants to name what other connections they see between poverty and abuse in their practice with families.
3. Discuss why families may see coordination between welfare and child welfare as a beneficial response to their needs.
 - For example, many families have multiple needs that no one program alone can fully address.
4. Discuss why the agency may see coordination between welfare and child welfare as beneficial.
5. Define a mission statement that answers the following questions:
 - Who do we serve for what purpose? (clients)
 - What measurable difference do we make in the community? (outcomes)
 - What major problems do we want to solve and what important needs do we want to meet? (issues)
 - Who holds us accountable for results? (stakeholders)

Mission Statement

“To strengthen families, ensure safety, promote self-sufficiency, eliminate poverty and improve the quality of life in our community.”

*Department of Human Services
El Paso County, Colorado*

Vision – Our envisioned future

While the mission summarizes the “what” and “why” of Linkages, an envisioned future is both a vivid description of what success will look like and assumes that a major, long-term impact is being achieved. Visions are written in the present tense and are descriptive statements of what will be happening when Linkages is realizing a successful future.

Process:

1. Think about what “big impact” you want to make through Linkages over the next 10 - 15 years. Consider the following questions to stimulate your thinking. . .
 - Imagine we’re at a national Linkages conference 15 years from now, what would we love to be saying is happening in our county as a result of Linkages?
 - Who is benefiting, in what ways?
 - What does it feel like to families, children and employees?
 - What is being achieved? What are we celebrating?
 - What impact or difference is being made by our efforts?
 - If someone at the local newspaper writes an article about Linkages in our county in 15 years, what will it say?
2. Come up with ideas as a group and write them down.
3. Determine what common themes emerge among the ideas.
4. Prioritize these ideas, by selecting those that are best aligned with the mission and basic core values for Linkages defined by the Partnership Project.
5. Write up a concise, clear statement that describes what success looks like for Linkages 10 years from today. Be sure to include descriptive statements (in the present tense) of what is occurring that demonstrates Linkages is achieving its desired future.
6. If the statement of your envisioned future gives you goose bumps, you’re probably at the right level.

Guiding Principles – Bringing values into practice

A set of guiding principles helps ensure new or revised practice protocols reflect the values and philosophy of Linkages. These principles establish a common foundation for developing practices that carry out the mission and vision of Linkages in your county.

Process:

1. Put yourselves in the shoes of a family who is challenged by navigating two programs in order to get their needs met.
 - What would you want the system to be like?
 - What expectations would you have about the kind of service experience you’d like to have?
 - How would you want to be treated in all encounters with the service system?
2. Brainstorm ideas and identify common themes.
3. Narrow down the list and refine these concepts into a handful of guiding principles.