

How To Unite Your Route Behind A Shared Purpose or Vision (53)

Can you describe in one sentence why your route should exist?

Your route consists of a diversity of members with diverse interests, so to ask the question why the route should exist is really a question about the shared intention of all the members together, and not the benefits individual members may get from the route. This is a question touching on the bigger idea that the route represents.

In addition, the route operates in a world where there are many organisations and associations setting out to achieve their own objectives – also in the tourism field. The question why the route should exist can help clarify what the difference is between your route and all the other organisations around.

The question why your route should exist is best described in what is commonly referred to as a purpose statement. Sometimes it is also referred to as your mission and vision, but since these terms have in many (if not most) instances become meaningless slogans, we could rather focus on the apt use of the term purpose – the reason for your route to exist.

This Guide offers help with formulating a purpose statement and shows you how you can use this statement to unify your members behind the activities of the route.

Why a shared route purpose is

important

As part of the Open Africa network of destination routes, your route subscribes to the core Open Africa objectives of stimulating job creation, encouraging conservation of natural and cultural resources, and motivating community participation in tourism. These are broad objectives, which all members of the various Open Africa routes support, and it is likely that these are also important for your route and its members.

However, the local situation of each route is different, and the reasons for the route to be formed and developed may therefore also be different. Being explicit in describing the reasons for your route to exist will help you to offer the local community and members from the local tourism industry a clear motive to commit to the route. But this would not be possible if you did not clarify your route purpose and if you have not summarised it into a short paragraph or sentence that everyone can easily understand and remember.

Your route consists of members with diverse interests in the local tourism industry. Some may be product owners with a keen interest in positioning themselves as an element of the overall route attraction, while others may be policy-makers involved in management of public assets on the route. It may even be that different route members are in direct competition with each other.

You can honour the diversity of your members in the route by focusing on the bigger intention of the route and how it joins with other Open Africa routes. This bigger intention is often referred to as the purpose or vision of an organisation – in other words, the reason for it to exist. When you have clarified a shared purpose for your route, it becomes much easier to keep the attention of members, to motivate them to stay actively involved, and to prevent individual or short-term interests from diverting the route activities away from

its main objectives.

A well-defined and shared route purpose will bring your members together to make a real difference in your area. It will keep the focus on what really matters!

What is involved in formulating a route purpose

Your route's purpose is a short description of the bigger reasons for it to exist. Generally, a purpose statement would be no longer than a few lines, in which the desired outcomes shared by all route members are explained. It is the short summary of the bigger contribution the route makes or will make to benefit the wider community. Ideally, it should just be one sentence, but a short paragraph consisting of two or three sentences may also work well.

Many routes will describe their purpose in a sentence similar to this:

"We enhance appreciation of cultural diversity and we improve the quality of life of our local communities by promoting increased support of our route as a tourist destination with unique cultural attractions and excellent tourism products."

Your purpose statement is both the 'glue' that keeps your members together and the 'compass' that provides you with direction so that you will reach your intended 'destination'. It helps you decide what to do or which of your projects to prioritise. For instance, if we take the example purpose statement above, we can get clarity on whether or not a project should be taken on by asking some straightforward questions. Will the project enhance appreciation of cultural diversity? Will it lead to the improvement in the quality of life of our local communities? Will it result in more tourists visiting our route as a destination? Will the project lead to

the development of our local tourism products and cultural attractions?

The more convincing your answers to these questions are, the more likely the planned project is to contribute to the route's objectives. In this way, the purpose statement helps clarify what should be done and which activities should be prioritised.

You may be wondering what the best way is to formulate a purpose statement so that you can use it in your route. It is through an inclusive process where members have the opportunity to shape the final outcome and to combine broad participation with the wordsmith skills of a few or even one of your members.

Here is a suggested process to decide on a purpose statement while building unity in the route:

1. At the next General Meeting, ask all members to contribute a sentence on each of the following:
 - (a) The biggest possible idea or change that the route should represent right now.
 - (b) The most significant impact or achievement the route would have brought about in five years from now.
 - (c) The single biggest thing the local community would miss out on in 10 years from now if the route did not get off the ground.
2. Summarise all the contributions into a few (perhaps three to six) themes, and include these in the next circular sent to all route members. Ask them to underline the most important words that represent what the route should stand for.
3. Organise a workshop where members bring their underlined words for the workshop to use in formulating a purpose statement. Or if you did not follow steps 1 and 2 before the workshop, also make time during the workshop for those two steps. Ask that they write the words on cards

and organise the words on a wall so that similar words are grouped together.

4. Let the members form small groups of about five and ask that they select the 10 most important words from the wall that distinguishes the route. Ask that they then use these words to formulate a sentence that describes what the route's bigger purpose is. The sentence they compile should describe the reason(s) for the route to exist and the difference it will make to the world.
5. Let each group present their sentences and put it up on the wall.
6. Now ask that the same groups identify the commonalities between the sentences, and ask that they write a new sentence that reflects the shared insights of all the groups together.
7. Let each group present their new sentence and replace the previous sentence with the new one.
8. Ask that the workshop participants nominate about three people to take the various sentences on the wall and combine them into a powerful purpose statement that will serve as the draft purpose statement used for discussion.
9. After the draft purpose statement is completed, send it out to all members, asking for comments. Let the same three people refine the statement after they have received the feedback. This then becomes the proposed route's purpose statement.
10. Follow the prescribed steps to propose at a General Meeting of the route that the route formally adopts this purpose statement.

Who is involved in formulating the route purpose statement

Your route purpose statement is a powerful tool in describing exactly why the route should exist and what difference it will

make to the lives of the members and local communities. But it will not come into being without some efforts from the route leaders.

The Executive Committee may choose to appoint two or so of its members to take the lead in the formulation of the route purpose statement – or just one person may be sufficient, since the process of compiling the statement will be inclusive. Those co-ordinating the creation of the purpose statement will be organising the process, while the members will be expected to participate in the formulation of the sentence.

A workshop of members is a very important element in the process of compiling the purpose statement, since the statement should reflect what the members believe to be the main intention with the route. They should also be prompted to provide inputs at the various stages of developing the sentence so that it is as inclusive as practically possible.

At the members' workshop, a small team of one to three members will be tasked with merging the various contributions into one sentence. Ideally, you want to appoint members with good language skills to take on this task. It is a task that requires playing and working with words, and is best suited to people with some experience in writing or editing.

When the proposed purpose statement is finalised, it should be brought to a properly constituted members' meeting for adoption. Doing it this way will ensure that the members will 'own' the purpose statement. It will then serve as the 'glue' that keeps the route members together as well as the 'compass' giving them direction on where the route is heading.

Using the route purpose to unite

the route

The purpose statement is a concise summary of what the route is about and could be used with great effect in communicating this to the outside world, while also reminding existing members of the bigger intention of their involvement.

As a tool to help the route achieve good results, the purpose statement can be used in the following contexts:

- During annual planning when priority projects have to be identified.
- When assessing progress and measuring impact to compare actual performance with the key intended outcomes.
- In partnership or funding proposals where the public benefit of the route intentions should be emphasised.
- In marketing material where the route is promoted to prospective members.
- On route banners, the route website and social media pages, or any publications produced by the route to reaffirm what the route stands for and why it should be supported.

Use of this Guide

This Guide offers concise suggestions on how you could create a purpose statement for your route. You may wish to adjust this process in accordance with your specific local requirements, but you should be cautious not to exclude wide member participation in the process. The route purpose is not something one person can produce – it must be a collective effort!

Other Guides and Resources

These other Guides and Resources in the Open Africa Route Toolkit will be of use:

- Guide: [How To Compile Your Annual Route Plan](#)
- Guide: [How To Develop A Marketing Plan](#)
- Video: [The Big Difference Clarity Of Purpose Made To Disney](#)