

## **Making Mission-Based Decisions**

Most decisions you have to make for yourself, getting advice from colleagues and friends you trust on anything major. You make many decisions every day, often quickly, and need to internalize what to consider when you spot ethical considerations.

Because you are operating within nonprofit organizations, your first consideration should be the mission. Identify at least three alternative courses of action, and ask how each alternative promotes or detracts from the organization's mission. If you can, do this with colleagues rather than alone. They may improve the list of alternatives as well as the analysis.

While many ethical questions may appear unrelated to the mission, some choices would waste resources that could be better used for mission achievement. And some may take too long to implement when you have a mission relating to direct service to those in urgent need. Are you going to turn homeless people away on cold nights because you chose to focus on building housing for next year? If so, an ethical decision would include helping such clients get access to alternative shelter.

On the other hand, some choices may be quick fixes that offer little towards long term results. Organizations devoted to biodiversity or reduction in global warming or an end to war need to make sure that even small decisions support incremental improvements towards a desired future.

As well, your mission is grounded in organizational values of how it will be achieved. These may provide guidance for selecting among alternatives. However, a list of words tends to provide very little guidance. Good statements of ethical values or principles include organization-specific definitions along with frequent dialogue about how to apply the values.

Remember also that missions can be reviewed to reflect a changing world. If consideration of the mission keeps leading to alternatives that seem wrong to you, encourage the Board to review the mission. However, until the Board develops and approves a change, the current mission must guide you. No individual in a nonprofit has the power to amend the mission or the right to work against it.