

Why Islamic Schools?

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Every business or organization that provides a product or service must first establish a need. Without the need to stay healthy, there would be no doctors. Without teachers there would be no learning. Before setting out to govern or manage an Islamic school, one must first understand the purpose for establishing an Islamic School. This pertinent question can make all the difference in how an Islamic School is designed. It will dictate what happens as well as what does not happen in a school. This question must be addressed first, however many others must also be asked in order to ensure the success Islamic Schools.

With the quintessential question in mind (Why Islamic Schools?), the following are some other pertinent questions the founders and leaders of an Islamic school must ask before establishing an Islamic School. The fact is that most ideas that fail do so because they are poorly designed or poorly managed. The answers to these questions will enable any organization to develop their mission statement, their vision and their goals. First I will address the definitions of a mission, a vision and goals.

I will then cover some valuable questions for brainstorming the purpose of any organization, in particular an Islamic School.

Mission Statement:

The simplest explanation of a mission statement is that it answers the simple question of “What is your organization?” A mission statement must be clear, succinct and exclusive so that it does not appear to be everything for everyone. Sometimes it helps to also answer the question of “What is NOT our organization?”

Vision Statement:

The simple question that can be answered to formulate a vision is “What is your final product?” For Islamic Schools, this requires leadership to project into the future and clearly describe their ideal graduate. This description must also be able to identify specific characteristics and once again use language that does not suggest a broad spectrum of ideas.

Goals:

Goals are the specific behaviors or qualities that make up the final product, the vision. In the case of Islamic Schools, goals are the major

things students will be able to do or will have accomplished such that they can be living realizations of the vision statement.

Understanding first exactly what a mission, a vision and goals are helps in forming ones that are effective. The following are some additional brainstorming questions that will help identify the purpose of your organization. It important to note that these questions do not have a right or a wrong answer, but rather an answer that is right for your community. For some of these questions it may become necessary to survey families of potential students.

What is the Problem?

All solutions must begin with a problem and that problem must be clearly stated and identifiable by all. If Islamic Schools are seen as the solution to a problem, the problem must first be identified and understood. It will also help narrow the focus if your organization takes time to identify what the problem is not. This question will lay a valuable foundation for the rest of the discussion.

Who is the Customer?

Leadership must be specific in identifying who this problem affects and more importantly what piece of the problem they are going to address. In other words, the problem may affect every child ages 2–20, but is it realistic that your organization with its limited human and financial resources can fix it? What does that customer really need most? What kind of a student are you prepared to simply say that you cannot serve? It is critical that these groups be identified or at least placed on a list of “future projects.”

What is Currently Being Done?

Once you have determined what the problem is and who you will try to help, you must then assess what has already been done to fix this problem for this specific customer and analyze failures and successes. Discussing this question will automatically bring about suggestions that have not been tried before or the things that will make your Islamic School unique?

In summary, these questions all point to the essential question of why we need Islamic Schools in the first place. In reality, there may be many different answers to this question and some schools may place emphasis more on one aspect than another. It must be driven by the needs of the

community and ultimately, as in the tradition of Islam, an Islamic School must serve society, and that service must be clearly defined.