



Chapter 1

Connection to Cause

CHAPTER OUTLINE

1. Why is the connection to cause important?
2. Understanding the elements of connection to cause
 - A. Connecting mission to cause
 - B. Communication
 - C. Advocacy as a tool

Chapter 1 Summary: Connection to Cause

INTRODUCTION

A nonprofit's work exists within a larger cause and context of policies and regulations, circumstances, individuals, organizations, and agencies that affect the work. Board members are community leaders sharing their knowledge, experiences, and connections with the organization. Supported by the public, nonprofits operate for the public's benefit and board members are key organizational stewards. Board members serve as ambassadors and advocates for their organization's cause.

1. WHY IS THE CONNECTION TO CAUSE IMPORTANT?

Connecting your nonprofit's mission to the larger cause and advocacy efforts within a greater landscape of individuals, other nonprofits, and agencies strengthens the organization's ability to achieve its mission. Examples of causes might include hunger relief, environmental conservation, community development, etc. There is a connection to root causes and circumstances that created the need in the first place for the services provided by your nonprofit.

Organizations become part of a network ensuring the rules governing nonprofits provide the right level of oversight, and help, not hinder the work. Your nonprofit can expand their strategic vision to include a larger community of individuals and organizations working in the same area, such as government agencies or universities. When board members are aware of others working in the same space, there are chances to give a collective voice to the stories, challenges, and opportunities that exist for community members served by their organization.



ACTIVITY

Your turn: Think about your organization’s mission as you reflect on the following questions. Use the space provided to write down your answers and action steps.

Ask yourself...

WHY:

- As a board member, why is it important to connect your nonprofit’s mission to the bigger cause?

WHO:

- Who are the key decision-makers and community leaders connected to your cause?

HOW:

- How might engagement of key decision-makers and community leaders connected to your cause help your nonprofit achieve its mission?
- How might your organization help guide decisions that would affect potentially burdensome oversight requirements or create access to critical data needed to better understand your cause?

WHAT:

- What can your board do to connect the dots between your nonprofit’s work and larger issues effecting your cause?

Notes & Next Steps

2. UNDERSTANDING THE ELEMENTS OF CONNECTION TO CAUSE

There are several elements of connection to cause board members should understand. Developing a deeper knowledge of your nonprofit's work, including the causal relationships that create the need for your organization, makes the space to connect your mission to the larger cause, builds intentional communications, and embraces advocacy as a powerful tool.

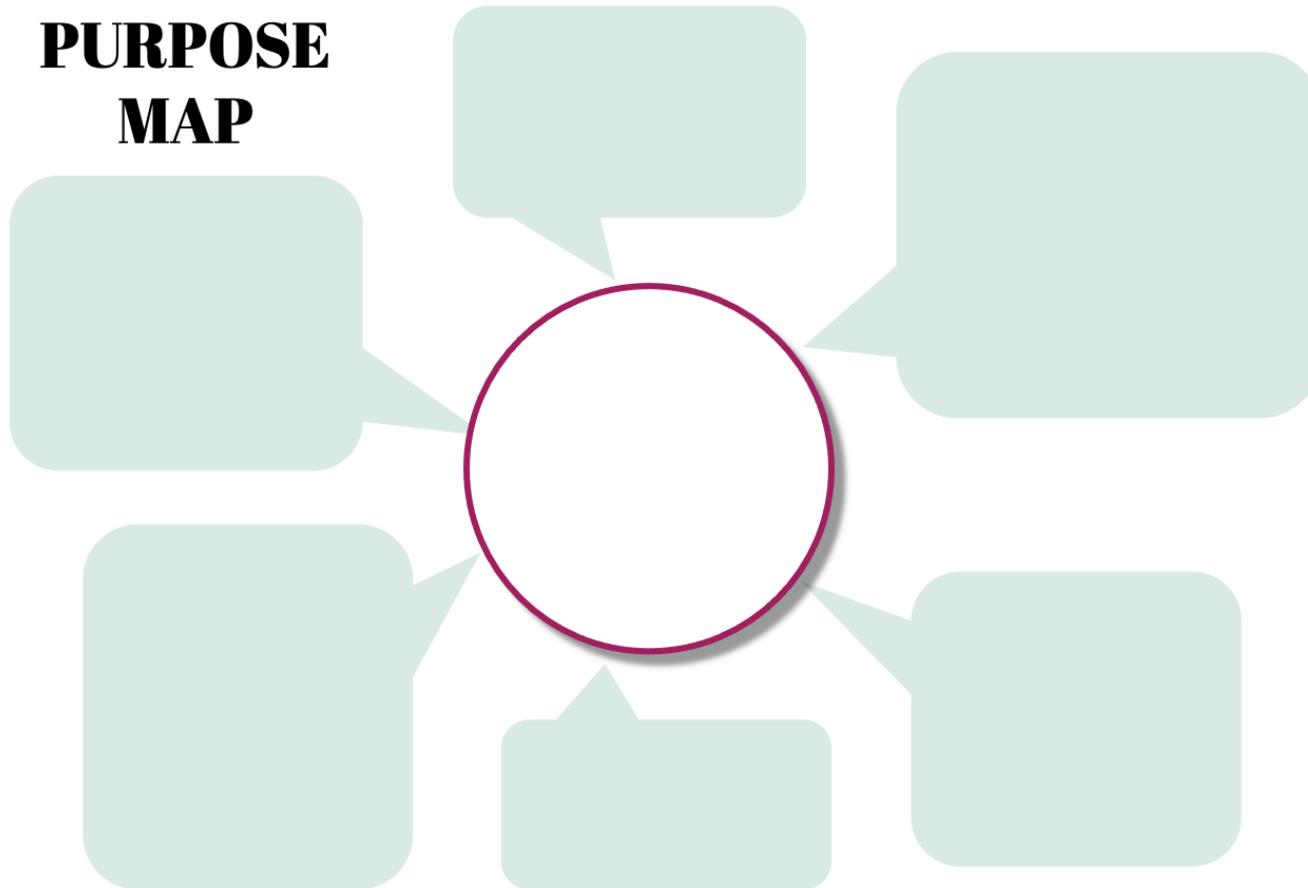
A. Connecting mission to cause

Connecting mission to cause is important since the work of nonprofits is affected by and exists within a larger context of circumstances, individuals, organizations, and agencies. Board members should be able to convey the connection between the organization's mission and the cause the organization is working to advance. There are actions you can take to explore the connection between your organization's mission and cause.

- **Think specifically about why your organization exists, the changes you hope to make, and the items you believe to be true and related to your mission.** Take your nonprofit's mission and ask yourself, "Why?" or "So what?" three times to help express a clear organizational purpose.
- **Develop a shared vision for the future** that includes what the world would look like if your nonprofit fully achieved its mission.
- **Thinking across sectors, map the people who have a role in shaping this envisioned world.** These individuals may include community leaders, elected officials, nonprofit leaders, private sector leaders, etc.
- **Identify other organizations working within the same cause as your nonprofit.** Consider if the organizations do similar or different work than your nonprofit. Determine if there are gaps not met or addressed by the organizations identified.

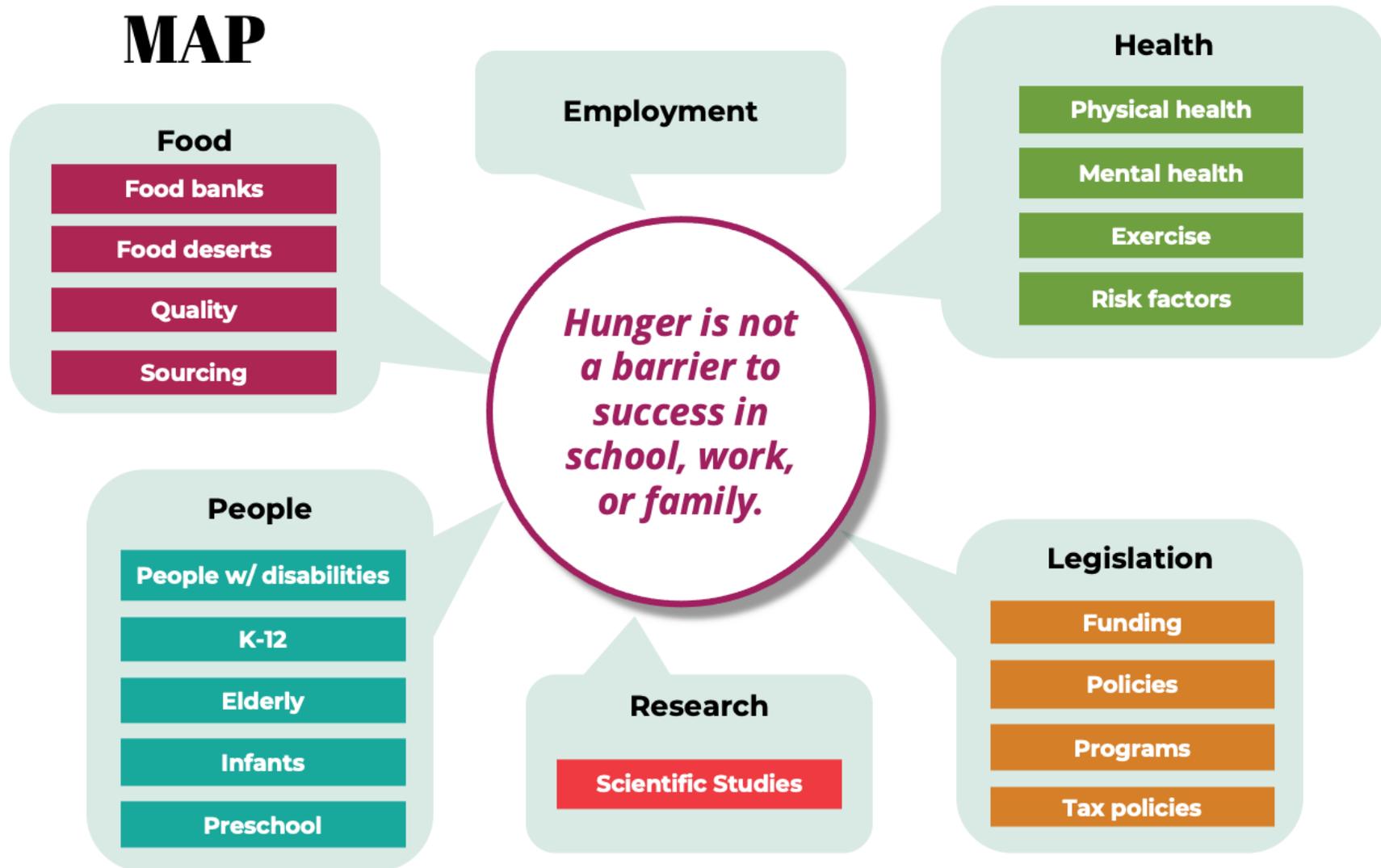
**ACTIVITY: PURPOSE MAP**

Purpose is where the cause your organization is working to advance meets your mission. Start this activity by taking your organization's mission and asking three times – “Why?” or “So what?” – to help express a clear organizational purpose. Capture that purpose statement in the center circle. Next, map the key elements needed to move your purpose forward. Key elements are individuals, organizations, and agencies that care about your purpose and larger cause. Enter the key elements in the thought bubbles branching off the center. (A sample purpose map is available on the next page.)

**PURPOSE
MAP**

SAMPLE PURPOSE MAP FOR A FOOD BANK

PURPOSE MAP



B. Communication

Intentional communications elevate the compelling voice of board members, connecting the organization to larger causes of focus for key decision-makers and community leaders. Board members serve as ambassadors for your organization, building connections with the community, decision-makers, and potential supporters.

As board members deepen their understanding of the organization's work, weave new perspectives of the issues and opportunities into stories that show the impact your nonprofit is making. Board members should be able to describe the organization's mission, purpose, and values, as well as talk about specific program and service examples. Having materials like handouts and digital content (for sharing by email and social media) helps board members and others with intentional communication and community engagement work.

C. Advocacy as a tool

By partnering with policymakers, advocacy can be a powerful tool to advance your organization's cause. Knowing how to engage with advocacy and lobbying will help your organization be effective and compliant with applicable laws. Lobbying is allowed in an "insubstantial amount" of the organization's overall activity and must be reported on the IRS Form 990. There is no clear definition of "insubstantial amount," and Bolder Advocacy a program of Alliance for Justice notes a general best practice is that 3 – 5% of a nonprofit's overall activities may go towards lobbying.

Embed discussions in board meetings around bigger issues related to the cause your organization is working to advance. Include time to talk about public policy, and how policies affect your organization and the community members you serve. Also, provide space to discuss the opportunities and risks that exist outside your organization like funding shifts, policy climate, and trends, which could affect your work.



1. Connecting an organization’s mission to cause is important since the work of nonprofits is affected by and exists within a larger context of circumstances, individuals, organizations, and agencies.
2. Intentional communications support board members in serving as organizational ambassadors that build connections with the community, decision-makers, and potential supporters.
3. Advocacy can be a powerful tool to advance your cause. Knowing how to engage with advocacy and lobbying will help your nonprofit be effective and compliant with applicable laws.



Here are some questions to think about:

- What is a story you can tell that shows the impact your nonprofit is making?
- How could developing an advocacy plan in coalition with others help your organization navigate opportunities and challenges that arise?
- How would you describe the world we would live in if your nonprofit fully achieved its mission?

Reflections



Next steps:

- ❑ Take one of the activities or reflection questions in this chapter and discuss the concepts of connection to cause with others.
- ❑ For nonprofits considering expanding their advocacy work, review these resources and key documents.
 - Nonprofit Association of Washington – [Build a Movement!](#)
 - Bolder Advocacy – [Lobbying Under the Insubstantial Part Test](#)
 - Key organizational documents: Articles of Incorporation, advocacy plan, one-page handout for decision-makers, 501(h) election and lobbying tracking document (for organizations lobbying)