

TOOLKIT #5

Why & Where We Win

A positioning canvas for mission-driven organizations: why you exist, who you are best for, and why they should choose you.

A Lever & Core toolkit

Drawing on Simon Sinek (Start with Why) and April Dunford (Obviously Awesome)

Every complex organization is inherently simple.

01 · WHAT IT IS

Know why you exist, and where you are the obvious choice

Most NGOs can describe what they do. Far fewer can say, in one breath, why they exist and why a specific donor or partner should choose them over every other option. This canvas closes that gap.

What it is

The canvas joins two ideas. The first is **purpose**: leading with why you do the work, before what you do and how. The second is **positioning**: a disciplined way to define the context in which your strengths are obvious.

That means comparing yourself with the real alternatives a donor or partner has, focusing on the people who care most about what makes you different, and backing every claim with proof.

The result is not a slogan. It is a shared, written answer the whole team uses in proposals, donor meetings, the website and board conversations.

When to use it

- Your proposals and website sound like every other organization in your field.
- Donors say “great work” but do not commit or renew.
- Your team describes the organization five different ways.
- You are launching a program, entering a new market or rebranding.
- You chase every funder instead of the ones who fit.

You walk away with

- A one-sentence purpose: your why
- The alternatives you are really compared with
- Your unique value, in terms others care about
- A profile of best-fit donors and partners
- The proof behind each claim
- One positioning statement the team shares

The session at a glance

90–120 minutes, one working session.

3–8 people: leadership, development and program leads.

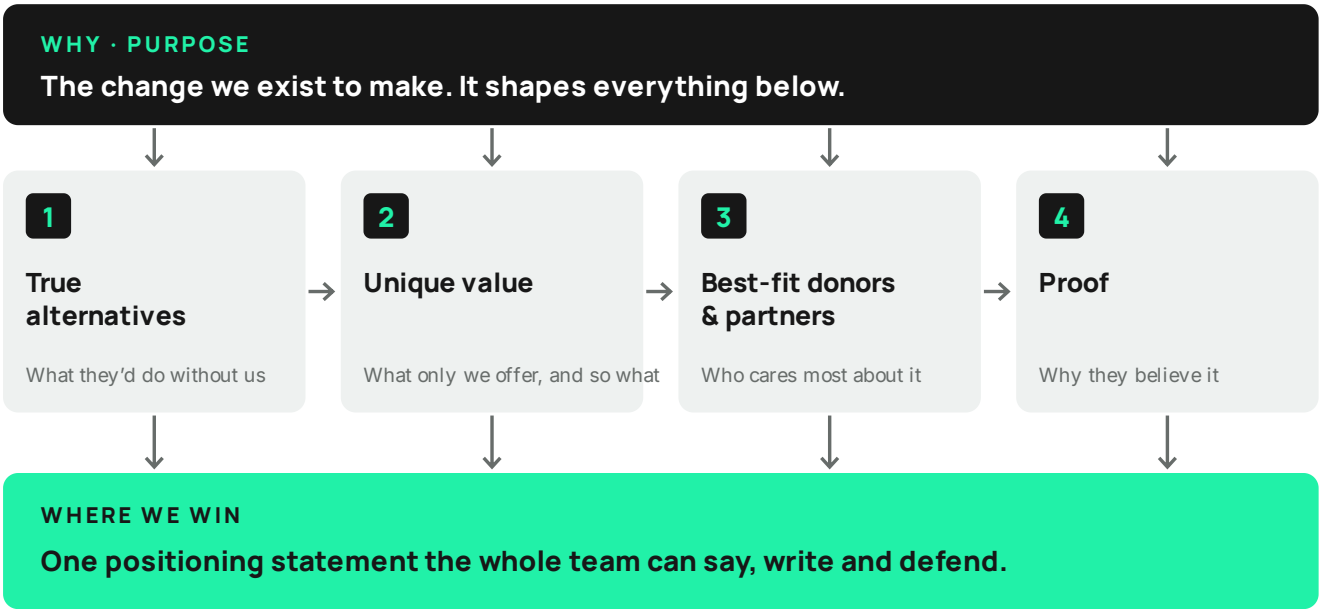
Bring notes from three to five recent donor or partner conversations, including ones that did not go your way.

Sources. The purpose layer draws on Simon Sinek’s idea of starting with why, from his book *Start with Why*. The four positioning components draw on April Dunford’s positioning method, from her book *Obviously Awesome*. This toolkit is an original adaptation for mission-driven organizations by Lever & Core.

02 · THE FRAMEWORK

One purpose, four positioning components

Purpose sits on top: it explains why the work matters. The four components underneath explain why you, specifically, are the best choice, and for whom. Work them in order, left to right.



Why: purpose

The reason the organization exists beyond its activities: the change you believe in. One sentence, no jargon, still true if your programs change.

1 · True alternatives

What a donor or partner would actually do if you did not exist: fund another cause, give to a bigger name, do it in-house, or do nothing. Their real options, not your list of "competitors".

2 · Unique value

What you have that the alternatives do not (an approach, access, expertise, a way of working), and what that delivers for the people you serve and the people who fund you.

3 · Best-fit donors & partners

The donors, foundations and partners who care most about that value, and why. Defined by what they care about, not only by size or sector.

4 · Proof

Evidence that makes each claim believable: outcomes you can document, a method you can show, stories you have permission to tell, endorsements you actually have.

Where we win

One sentence that joins it all. The template is on the worksheet; every part of it comes from a box above.

Why start with the alternatives? Strengths only mean something in comparison. "We are experienced" says little; "unlike one-off visits, we stay with the same group all year" tells a funder exactly why to choose you.