

MODULE 1: DEFINING AND PURSUING PURPOSE

At Landy NPO Services, LLC, we believe everything that happens in life should flow from a purpose. This is true of not-for-profit organizations (“NPOs”), including charities. We consult with many NPOs and find that many NPOs with problems do not have a definite understanding of their purpose. Not surprisingly, many NPOs with a defined purpose also have problems because they do not strictly test everything they do against their purpose.

“Purpose,” for Landy and these materials, answers the big “Why” question. The “why” is the reason for doing a particular thing. Purpose defines why we do what we do. Purpose is not the same as “goal”—a goal is a means to measure whether we are achieving our purpose.

For example, take Rescue Dog, Inc. (fictional). Suppose Rescue Dog, Inc. represents it is an adoption agency with a goal to adopt out 100 dogs a year. From those two facts can we identify what Rescue Dog, Inc.’s purpose is? No, because we do not know WHY Rescue Dogs, Inc. believes, or at least says, it is an adoption agency, and we do not know what the 100 adoptions a year goal has to do with its purpose. To complicate this, consider one additional fact: Rescue Dogs, Inc. prides itself on being a “no-kill” organization, and as a result 68% of its kennel space is taken up by dogs who are too sick, or too mean, or too whatever, to be adopted out. Does warehousing un-adoptable dogs have anything to do with the organization’s purpose? Well, it is impossible to say unless the organization knows what its purpose is.

We have created a fictional case study, “All About Students, Inc.” We encourage you to read that case study before tackling any of the Module materials because there are, and will be, constant references to the case study. It, and other examples (like Rescue Dogs, Inc.) are designed to help you understand what we are saying.

Do you think Betty has considered the purpose of All About Students, Inc.? Has anyone? Why, or why not? Do you spot issues that All About Students, Inc. has that may be the result of having considered, or not, the purpose of the organization by its founder, staff, board, volunteers, donors, and beneficiaries?

Where there is no stated purpose, and no testing of aspects of the organization (take, for example, programs) against purpose, the organization will drift. At Landy, “drift” is the cardinal sin. Drift kills organizations.

Do you want your organization to live? And not only to live, but to thrive, to flourish? Then join us to explore how to make your organization flourish. We invite you to hire us to come in live to help your organization define its purpose, or to become a subscriber on this Website and participate in an exercise designed to help your organization define its purpose.