



Movements and Sectors

By Chris Ash, Sophie Otiende, and Aubrey Lloyd for The Meaningful Engagement Toolbox by Collective Threads Initiative

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. What is the core difference between a movement and a sector in addressing a social issue?..... | 1 |
| 2. How do movements and sectors approach the concept of power?..... | 1 |
| 3. What types of structures and organisations are typically found in movements versus sectors?..... | 2 |
| 4. How are movements and sectors typically funded?..... | 2 |
| 5. How does the direct lived experience of an issue influence the work of movements compared to sectors?..... | 2 |
| 6. What is the primary goal of organising within a movement?..... | 3 |
| 7. What are the main activities and functions of a sector in relation to a social issue?..... | 3 |
| 8. What potential challenges or risks might individuals within a sector face if they actively challenge the existing balance of power?..... | 3 |

1. What is the core difference between a movement and a sector in addressing a social issue?

A movement is fundamentally driven by the shared experience of injustice among the people leading and [organising](#) it. Its primary purpose is to build collective [power](#) through organising relationships with the explicit goal of strategically shifting the balance of power, informed by a broader social change agenda. In contrast, a sector develops and administers policies, programmes, research, and services related to an issue. While individuals within a sector may care deeply about the issue, they may or may not be directly impacted by it, and their ability to challenge power structures can be constrained by the systems they operate within, such as funding sources and institutional hierarchies.

2. How do movements and sectors approach the concept of power?

Movements aim to dismantle or significantly reduce the relevance of hierarchical power models by fostering shared [power](#) among communities. Their organising efforts focus on building collective power from the ground up to challenge existing power dynamics. Sectors, on the other hand, often operate within established hierarchical structures, comprising government agencies and registered

organisations. While individuals within sectors might seek to address power imbalances, their actions can be limited by the inherent hierarchies of these institutions and the potential for negative repercussions if they significantly challenge the status quo.

3. What types of structures and organisations are typically found in movements versus sectors?

Movements exhibit diverse and often informal structures, ranging from individual organisers and mutual aid networks to unregistered [grassroots](#) collectives and registered organisations. They may also include peripheral volunteers. Sectors are characterised by a collection of formal institutions, including government agencies at various levels, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and other registered entities. Individuals involved in sectors include leaders, employees, civil servants, volunteers within these organisations, and independent consultants or speakers focused on sector engagement.

4. How are movements and sectors typically funded?

The unfunded, grassroots elements of movements often rely on community-based and crowdsourced [resources](#). Labour may be provided by community members or organisers with specific skills, reducing the need for monetary funding. Financial support may come directly from the affected community, as well as from friends and allies. Sectors are funded primarily by governments (for government agencies and a significant portion of NGO work) and through individual, corporate, or foundation philanthropy. This funding is often administered in ways that align with the funders' objectives.

5. How does the direct lived experience of an issue influence the work of movements compared to sectors?

In movements, the direct lived experience of injustice is a central driving force. Those leading and organising are typically directly affected by the issue, shaping their understanding, strategies, and commitment. In sectors, while individuals may be deeply concerned about an issue, the leadership and strategy development may be carried out by people who are not directly impacted. This difference can influence the priorities, approaches, and the sense of urgency in addressing the issue.

6. What is the primary goal of organising within a movement?

The primary goal of [organising](#) within a movement is to build relationships strategically to shift the balance of power. This is done with a clear understanding of a larger social change agenda. The focus is on [empowering communities](#) and ensuring that power is more broadly shared, rather than simply increasing the number of individuals with power within existing hierarchical models.

7. What are the main activities and functions of a sector in relation to a social issue?

The main activities and functions of a sector include developing and administering policies, implementing programmes, conducting research, and providing services aimed at addressing a specific social issue. These activities are typically carried out by government agencies, NGOs, and other registered organisations that constitute the sector.

8. What potential challenges or risks might individuals within a sector face if they actively challenge the existing balance of power?

Individuals working within a sector who attempt to challenge the established balance of power may encounter significant pushback or risk losing funding. This is because the systems that govern, oversee, and support sector participants are often deeply intertwined with the very systems that create and perpetuate hierarchy. Funders, being part of this interconnected system, may be resistant to initiatives that fundamentally question or threaten the existing power structures.



Questions or ideas? Reach out to us at meaningfuleengagement@collectivethreads.org or review the other documents in our Meaningful Engagement Toolbox at collectivethreads.org/meaningfuleengagement.