

The Commitments of High-Impact Nonprofits

A blueprint for achieving meaningful, lasting results in human-serving organizations

Impact is not about what you do—how many people you serve, how long you’ve been in existence, or how far your service area reaches. It’s about the positive change you achieve and whether or not it lasts. Organizations that achieve impact are influencing either directly or indirectly:

- The number of people living in poverty
- The number of people living safe and healthy lives
- The number of people on pathways for educational and employment success

Because the Alliance for Strong Families and Communities believes that organizations do not achieve impact by accident but through dedication and rigorous attention to high standards, we’ve identified the following Commitments of High-Impact Nonprofit Organizations to serve as a blueprint for impact:

Leading with Vision
Governing for the Future
Executing on Mission
Investing in Capacity
Partnering with Purpose

Co-creating with Community
Measuring what Matters
Innovating with Enterprise
Engaging all Voices
Advancing Equity

It is the Alliance’s mission to acknowledge each member’s current capacity and help its network master all of the Commitments, so that, together, we can realize our vision of a healthy society and strong communities for all children, adults, and families.

The Alliance offers a robust Commitments Assessment Tool to help them assess and benchmark their current competency in each of the Commitments. The Alliance’s resources have been comprehensively organized to help organizations elevate their proficiency in each specific area.

The Commitments were identified through an extensive literature review, the Alliance Strategy Counts initiative, *Disruptive Forces: Driving a Human Services Revolution*, member engagement and feedback, and the Alliance’s more than 100 years of experience in working with the human services sector.



Navigator Commitments. WHO Guides the Organization to Achieve Impact

These foundational commitments assert that nonprofit organizations cannot afford to rely on leadership styles and governance models that worked in the past. If they are to succeed in the uncertain economic, political, and technological climates, leaders cannot focus on the mechanics of management and boards of directors cannot focus on operational issues.

LEADING WITH VISION

Leaders at all levels are courageous and disruptive. They embrace new ideas and are open to looking outside of traditional relationships and hierarchies. Those who lead with vision are not deterred by complexity or ambiguity; when confronted by challenges, they listen carefully and think critically. They are among their organizations' best ambassadors and champions of the cause.

GOVERNING FOR THE FUTURE

Governing boards of high-impact nonprofits analyze market, political, and practice trends to define the organization's preferred future and ensure mission alignment. They push and support their organizations in pursuing lofty goals, taking risks, and innovating. They are guardians of the horizon, and they do this by helping their organizations define and realize their future aspirations, rather than focusing on solving operational problems.

Strategic Organizational Commitments. WHAT the Organization Does to Achieve Impact

Because the challenges communities face are highly complex, adhering to these intermediary commitments helps organizations gain traction. To achieve the most impact, organizations will maintain focus by aligning all programs and services to their missions and build networks with diverse partners. High-impact nonprofits grow community capacity and quickly mobilize around emerging community needs. They also continually invest in and improve their operating systems and business functions.

EXECUTING ON MISSION

To execute on mission, organizations must articulate a clear purpose, target audience, and intended results of their efforts. High-impact organizations refuse to deplete resources across disjointed programs, services, and activities, even if it means rejecting funding. They continually examine their programs to assess relevancy to mission and divest those that are misaligned.

PARTNERING WITH PURPOSE

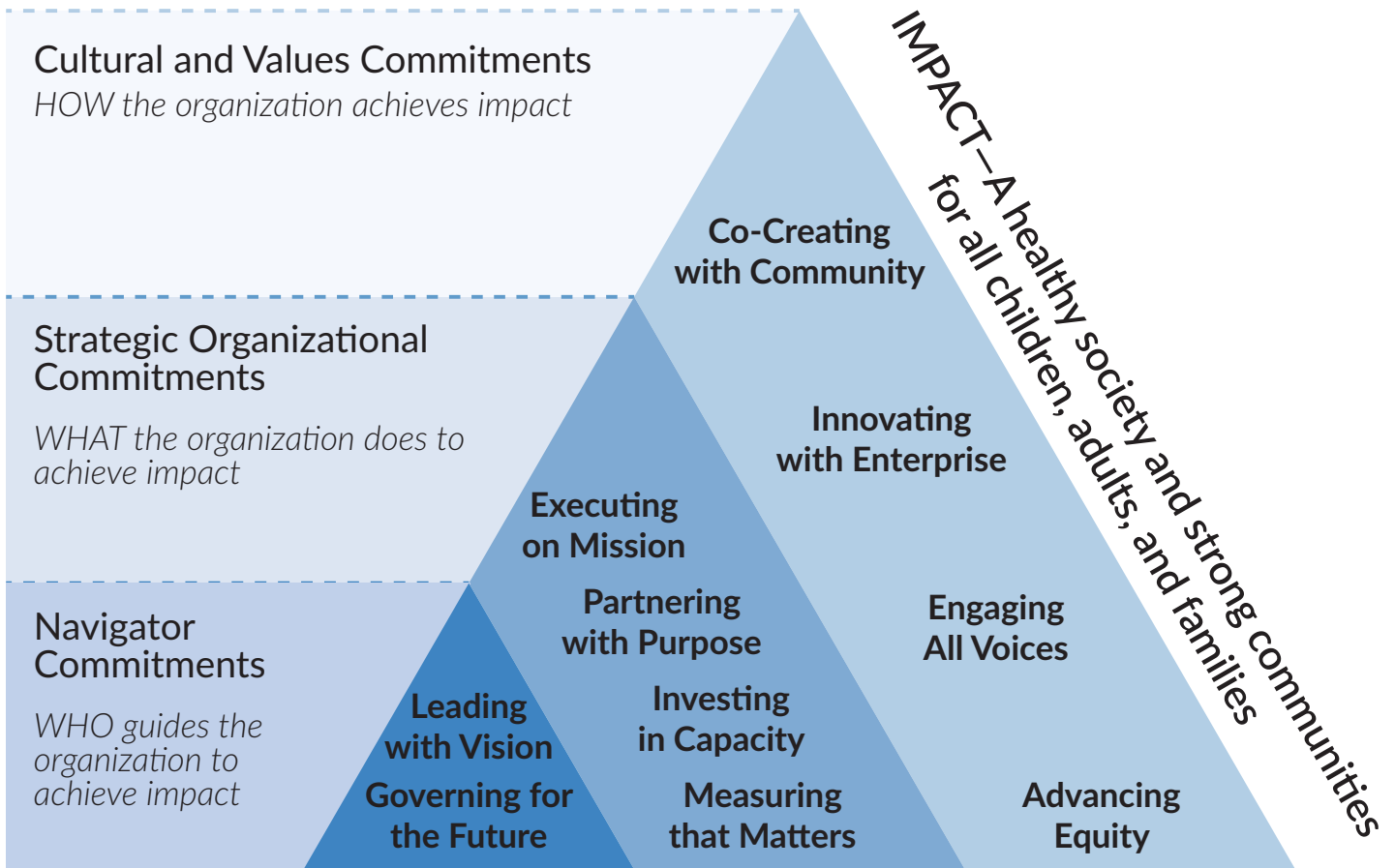
As opposed to diluting their potential for impact across a diverse spectrum of programs, organizations will address the complexity of social problems through diverse networks that revolve around shared visions and values. Those who partner with purpose share control around program implementation, funding, and recognition to further the cause.

MEASURING THAT MATTERS

High-impact organizations relentlessly focus on achieving outcomes tied to meaningful, measurable change in lives, systems, and communities. They infuse performance management in all levels of their organizations. Staff relish the ability to improve their approaches and inform their decisions with internal and external data, research, and practice evidence. Organizations also commit to using evidence to educate funders, government agencies, and the public on the impact of their work.

INVESTING IN CAPACITY

High-impact organizations' budgets position them for the future and are used, first and foremost, as policy and strategy guides, as opposed to binding documents. They continually improve the operating systems and business functions that support resource generation and high performance. Organizations raise unrestricted revenue to allow risk taking, finance good overhead, and scale what works. High-impact organizations seek and identify efficiencies to reinvest dollars in their missions.



Cultural and Values Commitments. HOW the Organization Achieves Impact

A set of leaders and services alone will not translate to high impact. These commitments enhance programs and operations by attuning staff to a culture of high impact. They thoughtfully push themselves to do their jobs more effectively and efficiently, whether it is through researching best practices, monitoring internal performance, or taking risks. Staff of high-impact organizations also are led by their values of inclusiveness and equity, ensuring that every voice is heard and has influence.

CO-CREATING WITH COMMUNITY

By being nimble and connected to community, high-impact organizations are uniquely positioned to identify and efficiently mobilize around emerging needs, even if the work goes outside of the scope of contracts and funding commitments. Organizations work with and through their communities to build solutions that maximize their assets. Residents view organizations as vital institutions and economic engines, and they have a sense of shared ownership in the missions.

INNOVATING WITH ENTERPRISE

Through cultures of innovation, staff are comfortable with ambiguity, and they recognize that uncertainty often inspires creativity. High-impact organizations encourage staff in all positions at all levels to challenge the status quo and take calculated risks. Instead of discouraging failure, they reward it along with success, only opposing inaction.

ENGAGING ALL VOICES

High-impact organizations know that placing families and communities at the center of decision making and goal setting achieves meaningful and durable outcomes for individuals, families, and communities. Their practices, policies, and relationships all reflect a person-centered, asset-based orientation. Through this orientation, organizations create multiple pathways through which individuals can provide feedback that shapes their own paths and that of the organization and broader community.

ADVANCING EQUITY

High-impact organizations understand that equity is central to human development. Instead of viewing advocacy efforts as separate from their program or service delivery, organizations view it as part of their social justice orientation to address issues of disparity and disproportionality. They tackle relationships that cause and sustain inequity and seek to reduce the social exclusion of underrepresented and marginalized communities in societal and civic processes.

Powerful Ideas—and the Means to Implement Them

Unique among other frameworks for organizational excellence, the Commitments present not only powerful ideas but the means to implement them.

The first step in engaging the Commitments, the **Commitments Assessment Survey Tool**, definitively evaluates an organization's maturity level in each area. Developed in collaboration with the distinguished American Institutes for Research, the Assessment's 150 questions and customized report provide a statistically valid analysis of an organization's strengths and challenges.

The report's key indicators, competency levels, and percentile rankings allow organizations to benchmark their performance against other nonprofits. Uniquely, the Assessment evaluates not only an organization's operational practices but how it implements the person-centered and strengths-based values that distinguish human-serving organizations. For this reason, the Assessment is administered to staff at all levels.

The results report helps the organization identify its most pressing strategic priorities with a new level of assurance and seamlessly tap associated Alliance resources that have been extensively organized according to their Commitments relevance.

Exemplary performance in the Assessment will be identified and studied to enable the Alliance to spread breakthrough strategies across its 450-plus member network. As more and more organizations complete the Assessment, accumulated data will pinpoint the most powerful drivers of impact, resulting in a set of empirically refined best practices for the human-serving sector.

Taken together, the Commitments, the Assessment, and the Alliance's resources provide a comprehensive continuum of support for organizations focused on high impact. The Assessment is open to all Alliance network organizations as a benefit of membership.

About the Alliance for Strong Families and Communities

With organizational roots stretching back more than 100 years, the **Alliance for Strong Families and Communities** is a national organization dedicated to achieving its vision of a healthy society and strong communities for all children, adults, and families through the excellence and influence of a network of more than 450 nonprofit human-serving organizations across America.

Served by a headquarters in Washington, D.C., and a national operations center in Milwaukee, the Alliance network is made up of organizations that strengthen families and build

communities through their program excellence, leadership, innovations, partnerships, influence, and advocacy. These organizations look to the Alliance for trend spotting, useful knowledge, vital networking, unique cohort experiences, and tested solutions. The Alliance advances policy recommendations at the national and state levels and strategically mobilizes its network to influence the systems and sectors that together can ensure that all people have the opportunity to live safe, healthy, and prosperous lives.

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