

Community Achievements

Making a difference

The Leap Ambassadors Community is gradually making a difference—for ambassadors who are increasingly finding value in their engagement and learning within the community; for nonprofits and funders who are discovering ways to apply community resources and positions to improve and be better; and for the social sector as awareness about the importance of strong, well-supported nonprofits for greater social impact is slowly taking hold. While recognizing the challenges on this long and difficult journey, numerous anecdotal signs indicate the community’s progress and achievement. Here are a few:

- Ambassadors are getting to know each other, learning from each other, and finding value in the community. As one ambassador said, “I’m pleased to be a member of this high-quality universe of peers who engage in thoughtful conversation. I get a lot out of the exchanges on the online forum.”
- Ambassadors are leading the way to shift mindsets and drive change. Representative examples include **Terri Sorensen**’s use of the Performance Practice at Friends of the Children with her national leadership team to frame leadership development conversations with executive directors from Friends chapters, **Jennifer Hoos Rothberg**’s use of community resources to better understand and support their grantees, **Julie Russell**’s use of the Performance Practice as a source in her work with United Way of St. Louis to introduce a new grantmaking approach, and a host of consultants (e.g., **Ellen Bass, David Grant, Debra Natenshon, Amy Morgenstern**, and others) who have incorporated community messaging and resources in their work to help their clients improve their organization’s performance.
- Nonprofit executives and boards have used the community theme and messaging to question their effectiveness and then take steps toward organizational improvement.
- Regions, like Pittsburgh, are finding ways to collectively improve the capacity and effectiveness of nonprofits.
- Many others in the community are “walking the talk” and serving as true ambassadors. Though progress is still small in absolute terms, we’re reaching and influencing tens of thousands of leaders and thousands of nonprofits with what we’ve done.

Ultimately, these gains lead to improved lives and stronger communities. For the community to achieve its vision and mission, we must continue to strengthen the community, develop content to build the field, and influence the field. Here’s a recap of progress and achievements:

Strengthen the community

- **The community is growing.** It numbered 51 in 2013, currently stands at 226, and is on the way to 250 by the end of 2019 and 400-450 by the end of 2023, while the focus on quality over quantity was maintained. More importantly, the community’s intentional efforts are helping increase community diversity as new ambassadors bring varied backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives—across sectors, knowledge domains, race, ethnicity, age, gender, and geography.
- **The community online forum has come into its own.** Exchanges are occurring more frequently, and ambassadors are increasingly open to ask questions, share their work, request support, and more. Since November 2018, there were five rich threads sparking robust dialogue and valuable insights. Of the 309 forum messages from January to August 2019, 78% were either ambassador-initiated or



ambassador responses, and 85.7% of the community has contributed in some way to the online forum since 2017. Ambassadors turning to the community for help at critical moments often lead to relevant curated products that benefit the field (e.g., [“Graceful Exit: Succession Planning for High-Performing CEOs”](#)). Two more insights are in production as a result of recent exchanges.

- **Ambassador engagement** among and between community members continues to increase. The Leap team prioritized relationship building and engagement and substantially increased staffing to support it. We’re now reaching out to ambassadors annually to learn of their work, gauge how they’re doing, and provide mutual updates (200+ calls since inception in Q2 2018). A pilot micro-community of practitioners with 30 participants across two groups, a Speakers Bureau with about 20 ambassadors, online Community Conversations featuring ambassadors speaking on topics of interest (e.g., continuous improvement, financial sustainability, constituent feedback) are examples of recent engagement opportunities.
- **Gatherings and convenings provide opportunity to meet face to face.** From 2016 to present, 22 regional gatherings, including the first international gathering (London, January 2019) have brought 119 ambassadors together. In November 2016, the first [Ambassadors Convening](#) had a remarkable turnout of over 65% of the community at that time.

Develop content to build the field

- [The Funding Performance Campaign](#) shows funders the value of supporting and helping their grantees get better and stronger. Since 2016, eight profiles have been published with more than 25,000 downloads/views, and the ninth is slated for December 2019. While it’s taken time to gain traction, we’re seeing greater use and sharing, most importantly, with funders.
- [The Performance Imperative](#) and [Performance Practice](#) demonstrate the power of the community’s collective knowledge and collaborative development. These works have been well received and feedback from the field strongly talks of them as thoughtful, quality resources. The Performance Imperative has had 56,000 downloads/21,000 views and Performance Practice more than 6,800 downloads/19,500 views. Both have been updated to version 2.0, using the same rigorous process from their initial development.
- [The Continuous Improvement Pathway](#) integrates the Performance Imperative and Performance Practice into a structured process for organizational learning and improvement. And this process is augmented by a series of examples to learn from via the [Performance in Action stories](#) (e.g., Friends of the Children: A Year of Leadership Development) and the [Knowledge Center](#).
- **Other community resources** include [Small, But Mighty: The Performance Imperative for Small Nonprofits](#) (September 2017). It’s been the third most popular resource on the website with 8,900 views/downloads. The [Pittsburgh Learning Circles story](#) and [Better Together: A Guide to Starting a Regional Approach to Nonprofit Learning and Improvement](#), both published this year, have combined views/downloads of approximately 2,500.
- [Leap of Reason](#), the basis of the community, has reached 113,000+ readers in 90 countries and its companion piece, [Working Hard—And Working Well](#) has 33,000+ copies in circulation.

Influence the field

- **Advancing a common language** has helped get people on the same page. Anchored in the community’s messaging and the Performance Imperative, phrases like “mission and performance are inextricably linked;” “meaningful, measurable, and financially sustainable results;” “habits of highly effective funders;” and “continuous improvement is the pathway to high performance for



greater impact” are used more broadly in the field to rally resources, advance efforts, and provide for shared understanding.

- **Ambassadors have, far and away, become the best emissaries** of the community’s mission to increase awareness, shift mindsets, and drive change. While still relatively small in numbers, our community of smart, talented, engaged leaders is making a real difference, one ambassador at a time.
- **Collaboration with other key players** is helping get the community’s message and resources to a broader and larger audience. To date, the community has published the [Leap of Ambassadors Community magazine](#) in givingCOMPASS, conducted webinars with GuideStar (now Candid) and the Center for Effective Philanthropy; worked with the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, The Drucker Institute, and the Partnership for Public Service in the new [Knowledge Center](#); and is in active discussions with numerous others (e.g. Salesforce.org).
- **Improved distribution and reach helps spread the word.** In December 2016, 16,000 individuals received the monthly *Leap Update* newsletter. In January 2017, the Leap team prioritized external communications and added staff to support additional outreach and communications. The community began sending weekly emails three weeks of each month featuring community resources and external pieces aligned to the community’s mission and message. The *Leap Update* continues as a monthly publication under the byline of Mario Morino and Lowell Weiss. In August 2019, 67,000+ recipients are on one of our mailing lists. Social media platforms also support external engagement. The cumulative effect of these outreach efforts and the work of ambassadors sharing with their networks, has helped get the community’s messages, resources, and positions disseminated much more broadly.

We hope this view from an ambassador is shared by most in the community: “I’m quite blown away by the generosity and thoughtfulness of the community—the shared sense that we’re fighting a good fight—and the way that transcends geographies and domains.”

The [article in *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*](#) summed up our collective promise: “This is the first time that a community of nonprofit leaders has come together who are pushing the idea of high performance to their peers, colleagues, and grantees and developing best practices. The ambassadors, all of whom have full-time jobs elsewhere, say they give their time and energy to the Leap community because they believe it is working.”

The community’s collective and individual achievements over the past six years are certainly impressive. And one of its most important outcomes may well be the group of smart, talented, engaged leaders who have come together from around the world who care about high performance for greater impact. While recognizing the long journey ahead, what you’ve done provides a strong base to build on as we join together to do more to help each other; influence the field; boost our efforts to drive change; amplify the community’s voice; and see increased use of community assets, notable changes in practices in the field, and more examples of organizations continuing to improve for greater social impact with more funders helping them do so.