

# STRATEGY FOR CHANGE

Leap Ambassadors Community

FINAL DRAFT OCT 2019



This document, developed collaboratively by the Leap of Reason Ambassadors Community (LAC), is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/). We encourage and grant permission for the distribution and reproduction of copies of this material in its entirety (with original attribution). Please refer to the Creative Commons link for license terms for unmodified use of LAC documents.

Because we recognize, however that certain situations call for modified uses (adaptations or derivatives), we offer permissions beyond the scope of this license (the “CC Plus Permissions”). The CC Plus Permissions are defined as follows:

You may adapt or make derivatives (e.g., remixes, excerpts, or translations) of this document, so long as they do not, in the reasonable discretion of the Leap of Reason Ambassadors Community, **alter or misconstrue the document’s meaning or intent. The adapted or derivative work is to be licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/)**, conveyed at no cost (or the cost of reproduction,) and used in a manner consistent with the purpose of the Leap of Reason Ambassadors Community, with the integrity and quality of the original material to be maintained, and its use to not adversely reflect on the reputation of the Leap of Reason Ambassadors Community.

Attribution is to be in the following formats:

- For unmodified use of this document, the attribution information already contained in the document is to be maintained intact.
- For adaptations or derivatives of this document, attribution should be prominently displayed and should substantially follow this format:

“From ‘Leap Ambassadors Community Strategy for Change,’ developed collaboratively by the Leap of Reason Ambassadors Community, licensed under CC BY ND <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/>” For more information or to view the original product, visit TK, TK

The above is consistent with Creative Commons License restrictions that require “appropriate credit” be required and the “name of the creator and attribution parties, a copyright notice, a license notice, a disclaimer notice and a link to the original material” be included.

The Leap of Reason Ambassadors Community may revoke the additional permissions described above at any time. For questions about copyright issues or special requests for use beyond the scope of this license, please email us at [info@leapambassadors.org](mailto:info@leapambassadors.org).

**leapambassadors.org**

## The Problem

In 2011, *Leap of Reason: Managing to Outcomes in an Era of Scarcity*, the book on which this community is based, scoped the problem we need to solve:

*Despite all the right intentions, the vast majority of nonprofits do not have the benefit of good management practices, information, and tools to determine where they're headed, chart a logical course, and course-correct when they're off. Only a fortunate few have a reliable way to know whether they're doing meaningful, measurable good for those they serve.*

Since the book came out, the sector has seen efforts to strengthen nonprofits, but the overall state of the field hasn't materially changed. The need for strong, well-supported nonprofits continues and will only increase in the decade ahead. As growing federal and state budget pressures force difficult—even impossible—choices, nonprofits will increasingly have to show results. We believe public and private funders will migrate away from organizations with stirring stories alone toward well-managed organizations that can demonstrate meaningful, lasting impact.

## The Community

After the publication of *Leap of Reason*, a core of leaders—doers and believers—surfaced. They cared deeply about how effective their organizations were in achieving their missions, were ready for a leap of reason that allowed their organization to become even better at doing what they do, and wanted to ensure that their organizations were on a path to greater rigor and impact. These leaders wanted a place where they could join with others who wanted to learn and help one another be better.

Today, the community is 200+ strong. It's on the way to being a place where great leaders not only “find their tribe” but also find value, give value, advance collective efforts, and work to influence positive change in the field. The community has aligned around the following vision, mission, and aspiration:

**Vision:** We imagine a social sector in which all nonprofits with the will to achieve greater impact have the strength and support to do so.

**Mission:** Convince social-sector leaders to invest in continuous improvement so nonprofits can achieve more meaningful, measurable, and financially sustainable results.

**Aspiration:** By 2024, grow a larger, more engaged, and more inclusive community of ambassadors who are individually and collectively contributing to a more-effective social sector.



...a concerted effort by a community of caring, committed, and accomplished leaders has the potential to shift mindsets and influence meaningful change in how we support nonprofits.



## Historical Context

Over the past 30+ years, new organizations, programs, and practices have emerged to help improve the performance of nonprofits and public agencies. While this progress has been significant, the necessary ecosystem—a diverse, equitable and inclusive network of interconnecting resources, entities, and relationships to support improvement—is far from mature.

So while we're encouraged by the gains we've seen, we must respect the history of social-sector change efforts and recognize that the change we seek may take decades. Driving real, lasting change for nonprofits and their stakeholders requires:

- Helping leaders and their supporters to see that their mission and performance are inextricably linked.
- Sparking widespread understanding that most nonprofit organizations need—and deserve—much greater support for building their management muscles.
- Increasing the flow and effective allocation of *financial capital*. This will require fundamental change in the way public and private funders provide support for individual grantees and to the sector.
- Increasing the flow and effective allocation of *human capital*. This will take greater public understanding of the social sector; a greater emphasis on talent recruitment, development, and retention; investment in compensation and non-financial rewards (e.g., greater recognition of leaders' and staff members' achievements and contributions); and a fuller embrace of and demonstrated commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Encouraging and supporting courageous leadership; operational discipline; people-focused management; effective programs; strong financial stewardship; diverse, equitable, and inclusive organizational cultures; and rigorous listening, learning, and improvement.

These are formidable hurdles. There's no silver bullet, no one thing, no “tipping point” that will change the sector's behavior. We believe the systemic barriers (e.g., lack of funding), misconceptions (e.g., the notion that nonprofits should be judged based on their “overhead”), and inefficiencies (e.g., overlapping organizations and ineffective resource sharing) that have built up over decades will continue to limit the sector's potential to do and be better—unless there is a profound sea change in thinking and behavior.

It's a major understatement to say that producing this sea change is daunting. Yet we believe that a concerted effort by a community of caring, committed, and accomplished leaders has the potential to do so. The following pages describe our current thinking about how we can best fulfill this potential.

# Rationale for the Leap Ambassadors Community

With the belief that a broad range of knowledgeable, diverse, experienced voices can drive meaningful change, the Leap Ambassadors Community was created in 2013.

An [article](#) in *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* summed up our collective promise as follows:

*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.*

In our first phase of work, the Leap Ambassadors Community has focused on building bonds of trust and facilitating the interchange of knowledge, ideas, and perspectives among ambassadors for our mutual benefit. Eventually we hope the ambassadors will help spark a broader movement, bringing changes in public policy, public understanding, funder behavior, and organizational-performance norms. The ultimate goal of this movement is to help lift our sector's ability to improve lives and communities.

The community has sought to bring together the “doers and believers”—those leading the charge that mission and performance are inextricably linked. Today, the community is built around committed nonprofit leaders and funders, and augmented by advisors, consultants, policymakers, academics, business leaders, government leaders, intermediaries, and instigators. Their diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives—across sectors, knowledge domains, race, ethnicity, age, gender, and geography—help them serve as individual change agents and contribute to a stronger community.

While we're big believers in the power of effective networks, the community's focus is on strengthening individual organizations. That is because strong organizations are:

- Vital for building effective networks.
- Built by strong leaders who continue to develop exceptionally capable leaders on their teams and boards. These leaders also inspire others within their organizations and in their networks to develop as leaders too.
- Key to attracting talent (young and older) to the social sector.
- Strong and resilient enough to weather major economic shocks and other crises.

## Core Functions and Outreach

For the community to achieve our vision and mission, we must strengthen the community, develop resources, and influence the field.

- **Strengthen the community.** This requires bringing together and retaining diverse, mission-aligned, accomplished leaders who are passionate about our community's vision and purpose; are driven to learn and improve; want to strengthen the field; and offer diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. It also requires ambassadors to engage in an inclusive, trust-based learning community, build closer relationships, share pertinent experiences, and benefit from one another.

 **We must strengthen the community, develop resources, and influence the field** 

- **Develop content to build the field.** This requires collaboratively developing intellectually rich resources (e.g., the Performance Practice) and positions (e.g., how funders can support grantees to improve) to a) engage and equip ambassadors and b) inspire and convince others in the field to continuously invest in improving organizations to achieve greater impact.
- **Influence the field.** This requires rallying and supporting ambassadors to be effective advocates for high performance for greater impact and using broad-based communication and outreach to persuade and motivate key leaders and influencers, especially funders, that performance is a clear path to greater social impact.

In turn, the community’s external outreach efforts are through:

- Individual ambassadors “walking the talk;” demonstrating the value of the community’s mission, message, and resources; convincing others in one-on-one or small-group discussions; giving talks; connecting with colleagues; and influencing others where and when they can.
- The community (as a collective) seeking to influence larger audiences via broad dissemination of its mission, message, and resources with campaigns, social media, and other mass-communication platforms.
- “Believers in the field” who buy into the community’s mission and message and take it upon themselves to influence and convince others in the field.

## To What End?

What ends are we trying to advance? Greater social impact in the form of more high-performing nonprofits and funders; improved lives; and stronger communities.

The community believes greater social impact is realized when nonprofits and funders act on their potential to continuously improve and develop into high-performance organizations. When they do, they have the best chance to create meaningful, measurable, and financially sustainable results for the people and causes they serve.

**Change happens** when leaders and supporters of organizations become convinced that organizational mission and performance are inextricably linked—and act accordingly.

To **trigger this mindshift**, the community (as explained above) seeks to inspire and convince:

- **Leaders of nonprofits** that continuous improvement is the path to high performance and greater impact for those they serve
- **Funders** that their efforts will create greater value if they encourage and support their grantees to pursue continuous improvement as the path to achieve greater impact for those they serve.

“...greater social impact is realized when nonprofits and funders act on their potential to continuously improve and develop into high-performance organizations.”

The community also seeks to influence indirect change and help to develop **the ecosystem** to support these leaders and funders, by encouraging:

- **Policymakers** to support policies and programs that incentivize leaders to strive for greater impact via improved organization (and network) performance
- **Business leaders** to invest their time, money, insights, and influence to help nonprofit leaders succeed
- **State and local government leaders** to be performance and evidence based in their service delivery and nonprofit support, fund evidence building, and apply public data to help nonprofits be more data informed
- **Talent developers** to help nonprofits better attract, develop, and retain the talent essential to a culture of continuous improvement and high performance
- **Consultants/advisors** to develop products and services to help organizations and their funders create a culture of continuous improvement and high performance
- **Educators** to influence students to consider careers in the social sector and instill in them the importance of continuous improvement and high performance
- **Media** to highlight important social challenges, effective solutions, and great social-sector leadership
- **Intermediaries**, such as associations, to help their members adopt continuous improvement to build high-performance organizations.

The chart on the following page illustrates how all these pieces can combine to produce the change we seek.

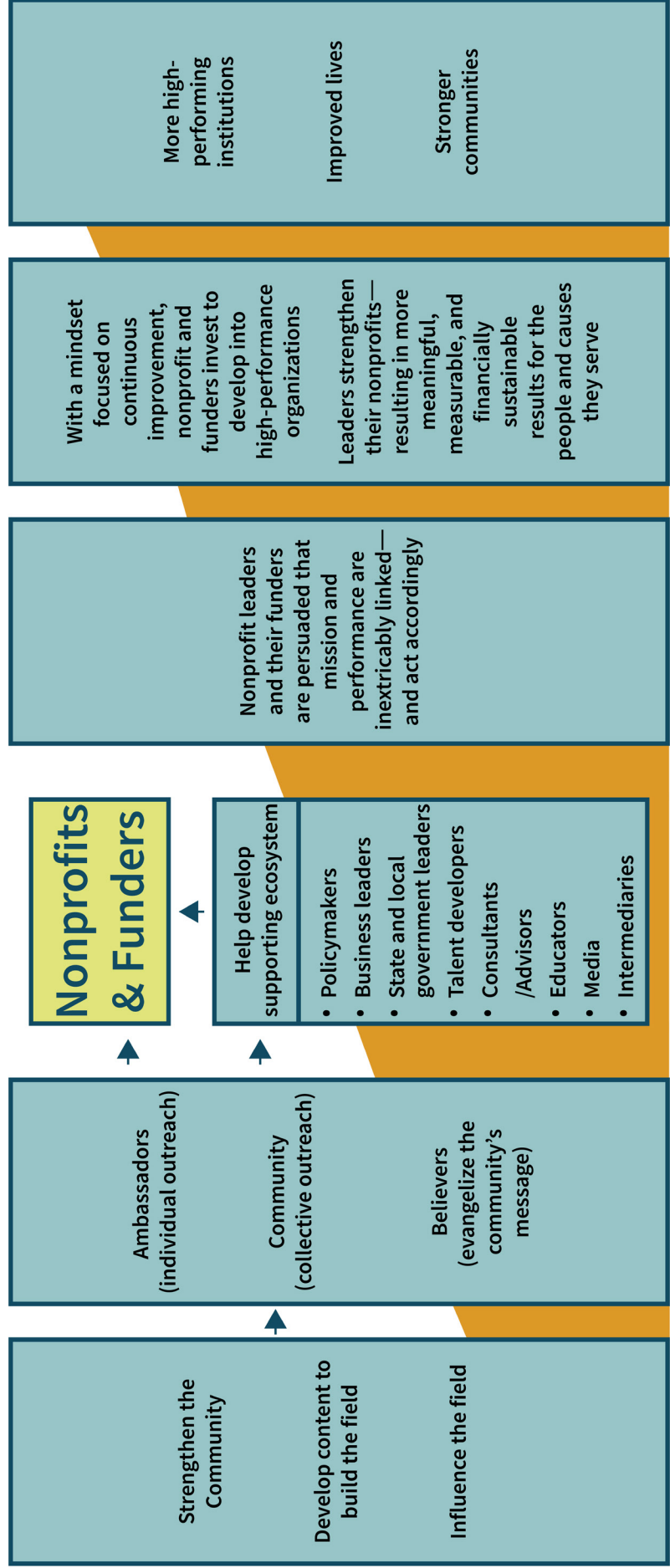
## Community Evolution and Transition

The community will continue to evolve, generate beneficial results, and gradually earn respect and its place in the field. We envision the community will hit a turning point somewhere in 2023-2025, 10 to 12 years after its formation, when it:

- Grows to a meaningful size in number of engaged members with diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences
- Creates greater value for its members so they stay, benefit, and, in turn, contribute to the community
- Materially influences and benefits the field through its collective capacity to co-develop and share major resources and positions and see its messaging and these assets be broadly applied
- Receives increased mentions or references by thought leaders, media, reports, studies, and/or affinity groups
- Becomes a sought-after source and/or partner to other important players in the field that will leverage the community's efforts.

Reaching this point will allow the community to do more to influence the field; boost its efforts to drive change; amplify the community 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. When the community reaches this plateau, we believe entirely new opportunities for creating greater impact and changing the field will develop.

# How the Community Envisions its Evolution



(Reaches Turning Point in 2023-2025 Timeframe)

2013 — 2016 — 2019 — 2023 — 2025 — 2028 — 2031 — 2034 — 2037 — 2040 — 2043



# Aspirational Goals for 2024

Reaching this turning point in the community's evolution will require accomplishing these goals:

- **Achieve critical mass in terms of numbers and engagement** – Community grows to 400-450 members by 1) adding ambassadors who bring increased diversity of backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences; 2) retaining those in the community; and 3) repopulating those who retire as alums. This growth contributes to more-robust engagement, improves the community's collaborative-development capacity, enriches peer learning, makes a stronger community voice, and sees more ambassadors convincing others to adopt our mission.
- **Deliver contributions to build and influence the field** – Community collaboratively develops a growing series of major works that are considered valuable contributions to the field. These major works are broadly distributed and effective in shifting mindsets and driving greater change. About every 18 months, the community contributes a major work, such as a resource to build the field (e.g., an enhanced Performance Practice with a robust Knowledge Center) or a position statement to influence the field (e.g., what leaders of nonprofits want from funders and what they will do to strengthen their part of the relationship).
- **Leverage relationships** – Community initiates two strategic relationships (e.g., leading universities, information providers, prominent consultant/vendors, distribution platforms, and influential funders) that 1) allow its works to be more broadly distributed and accessible, 2) apply significant support to increase the adoption, use, and improvement of community works in the field, and 3) take over specific community support functions from the Leap team.
- **Earn respect of the field** – Community earns the respect of the field through 1) a disciplined and thoughtful growth strategy to attract and retain top leaders, 2) collaboratively developed works, 3) demonstrated value as a peer-to-peer learning community, 4) messaging and outreach by individual ambassadors to naturally engage peers and colleagues, and 5) collective knowledge and pragmatic understanding of the field.
- **Provide for operation post-2023** – Morino Ventures/Institute and the Leap Ambassadors support team will continue to provide the financial and logistical backing for the community from now through 2023. Well before then, the ambassadors will have to understand and assess the interest, willingness, and availability of those in the community to determine what happens after 2023. Possible scenarios include continuing the current community as a new entity with its own governance, assets, support team, and funding; consolidating it with an established institution; sunsetting the operation by memorializing the community, recognizing the ambassadors, and ensuring its rich base of content is available to benefit the field.

However the community evolves, ambassadors must find value and provide value to their fellow ambassadors—either in their own work/careers and/or their interest in building and changing the field.

Regardless of what the future holds beyond 2023, **we have a tremendous opportunity to build on what we've already achieved; help many nonprofits and funders be better; and have a lasting positive impact on the field.**