

Sustaining the Leap Ambassadors Community

INTRODUCTION

Why the Leap Ambassadors Community Was Founded

In 2011, entrepreneurial business leader and philanthropist Mario Morino wrote and published *Leap of Reason, Managing to Outcomes in an Era of Scarcity*. This monograph, with essays by “Experts and Practitioners Who Are ‘Walking the Talk,’” inspired Mario, with an array of social sector colleagues, to establish the Leap Ambassadors Community (Community) in 2013.

The Community was founded to address the critical problem of inadequate social sector impact. As Mario wrote in 2011: *“Here’s the problem in a nutshell: We don’t manage to outcomes, thus greatly diminishing our collective impact.”* To help address this challenge, Mario committed to financially supporting the Community through its first 10 years.

About the Present Leap Ambassadors Community

The Community is a diverse, vetted network of 350+ experienced social purpose leaders -- nonprofits, funders, consultants, policymakers, academics, business leaders, and government officials -- focused on spurring greater social sector impact through the development and spread of best practices in outcome management. Community members work together to encourage effective leadership and management practices so that nonprofits and other actors have the knowledge and tools to mobilize their organizations and act on the idea that organizational mission, management, and performance are inextricably linked.

Need for Future Support

The Community now seeks a new organizational home as well as financial and operational support to continue its unique and relevant mission. The urgent imperative of the Community remains: to leverage the Community's robust network of highly experienced and diverse leaders to further strengthen the effectiveness and equity of the social sector.

The remainder of this document discusses what makes the Community unique and relevant, a sampling of accomplishments to date, why the Community should continue, and the seeds of an evolving vision for the future.

This information is both for organizations who may be interested in providing a new operational home for the Community and for funders interested in providing financial support through its transition and beyond to help sustain and strengthen this influential network.

CASE FOR THE FUTURE

What makes the Leap Ambassadors Community unique and relevant?

Leap Ambassadors volunteer their time and talents to define, convey and continuously learn what it takes to lead and run well-managed organizations that achieve results, applying this knowledge in their own organizations, and encouraging broader dissemination to others in the field. Ambassadors believe that strengthening organizations to deliver equitable, meaningful,

measurable, and financially sustainable results over a sustained period of time will lead to greater positive impact for the people and communities they seek to serve.

In 2018, [The Chronicle of Philanthropy](#) wrote this about the Community: *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 [to educate the field]. The ambassadors, all of whom have full-time jobs elsewhere, say they give their time and energy to Leap because they believe it is working (Gunther, 2018).*

What are the accomplishments of the Leap Ambassadors Community?

The initial work of the Community was the publication of [The Performance Imperative in 2015](#). After feedback from hundreds of readers, the Community amended and released a second version of the Performance Imperative in 2018 that incorporated meaningful changes such as seeking and responding to constituent feedback; the importance of advocacy, empathy, succession planning, diversity, and transparency; and cultivating diversity, equity, and inclusion at every level of the organization. To complement *The Performance Imperative*, the Community developed a 7-Pillar assessment tool called *The Performance Practice*, along with numerous articles, monographs, videos, and online resources that contribute to the ever-evolving framework for social sector excellence. All resources and publications are offered free of charge at www.leapambassadors.org.

Conversations among Leap Ambassadors, via online forums and geographic convenings, are substantive and practical. On many occasions, in response to one Ambassador's question or comment, a discussion thread will be fleshed out on a specific topic. These Community conversations are curated by Leap Support staff into resources that can be shared within Ambassadors' organizations, as well as shared beyond the Ambassador Community via [Ambassador Insights](#).

The Community's centralized, dynamic [website](#) includes sections for nonprofits and for [funders](#), with its Funding Performance Monograph and funder profiles for investors in the social sector.

The Community currently reaches over 20,000 people through various platforms. Its publications are used by academic institutions as well as government agencies, nonprofit organizations of all sizes, and funders and investors. [The Pittsburgh Learning Circles Program](#) and [Dalio Education's Connecticut Opportunity Project](#) and are just two examples of initiatives that have drawn from the Community's publications, to inform and influence effective management practices.

Why should the Leap Ambassadors Community continue?

The Community seeks to build on its accomplishments over the last 10 years and remain a high-functioning network that can positively influence the social sector over the next decade. Specifically, it should continue to exist because it is making a difference—for the 350 and counting Ambassadors who find value in their engagement and learning within the Community; for nonprofits and funders who are discovering ways to apply Community resources to improve and better engage with the people and causes they seek to serve; and for the social sector as awareness about the importance of strong, well-supported nonprofits for greater social impact is taking hold and specific tools are needed.

The Community identifies emerging issues that threaten nonprofit success complemented by curated ideas to address those threats. It continually makes suggestions for better implementation approaches, such as more equitable and fair job postings, advancing equity through feedback, financial management, succession planning, contracting, and crisis management. There is no other place for these critical conversations.

In addition, the Community is expected to continue to grow and increase its diversity as new Ambassadors bring varied backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives—across sectors, knowledge domains, race, ethnicity, age, gender, and geography.

What is the Community's Vision?

While recognizing the long journey ahead, this group of smart, talented, engaged leaders is committed to expanding our current vision: a world where all nonprofits and other social impact organizations have the strength and support to achieve greater equitable impact. As our dynamic community continues to grow and diversify, so do the possibilities of achieving this vision and adapting it to new horizons for pursuing systemic and organizational change.

To date, the Community's accomplishments provide a solid foundation to make real progress on this vision: by enhancing engagement and learning by Ambassadors, increasing the use of Community assets, amplifying the Community's voice, and influencing the field to boost efforts to drive change.

The key change needed to achieve this vision is for leaders and supporters of organizations to become convinced that organizational mission, management, and performance are inextricably linked—and to act accordingly. The Community seeks to influence direct and indirect change to help improve the social sector ecosystem. This includes encouraging policymakers, business and government leaders, state and local government leaders, educators, consultants, and the media to prioritize strengthening social sector performance that leads to equitable improvements in the wellbeing of individuals, communities, and our planet.

The Community is a group of leaders singularly positioned to align the social sector around mission, management, and performance for greater societal impact.

This requires partnership and funding starting in 2023.

NEXT STEPS AND THE ASK

We are seeking a mission-aligned partner or partners for the following:

1. An operating home with infrastructure capabilities that can sustain and grow the Community within a transition timetable that works for both organizations, ideally by the end of 2023.
2. Explore future scenarios for growth, beginning with funding commitments to minimally support an initial two-year transition and strategic planning period.

The Community hopes that other organizations will see synergistic opportunities for mutual growth arising from a partnership. It also hopes that funders will value and support the Community's future.