



# Completing Your Charting Impact Report

## Discussion Materials

Your organization is committed to maximizing your impact and to telling the story of your progress in an accessible, concise way. People want to help you make a difference – through donations, volunteering, and more – but often struggle to find a succinct, consistent resource that clarifies what nonprofits want to achieve and what they have already accomplished.

Charting Impact responds to these needs. Developed with input from nearly 200 organizations, this thoroughly tested framework focuses on enabling your organization to be more effective. It encourages strategic thinking about how your nonprofit or foundation will achieve its intended impact, and helps you share concise information about your plans and progress with key stakeholders and the public.

This document explains the five questions at the heart of Charting Impact and offers guidance for developing your organization's responses to them. This material should help your discussions with key members of your organization as you consider how to communicate your goals, strategies, capabilities, progress indicators, and accomplishments through this framework. Once you've drafted your responses, we invite you to visit [www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org) to publish your Charting Impact Report.



## About Charting Impact

At the heart of Charting Impact are five deceptively simple questions that require reflection, encourage learning, and promote communication about what really matters – results.

BBB Wise Giving Alliance, GuideStar, and Independent Sector developed Charting Impact as a common presentation that allows staff, boards, stakeholders, donors, volunteers, and others to work with and learn from each other.

For each nonprofit or foundation, Charting Impact encourages strategic thinking about how it will achieve its goals, complementing the planning, evaluation, and assessment that organizations already undertake. Responding to the five questions creates a unique report that shares concise, detailed information about plans and progress with key stakeholders, including the public.

For the sector, Charting Impact provides a vehicle that organizations of all types, sizes, and missions can use. Answering the five questions will make it easier for organizations to collaborate and for potential supporters to direct their time and funds to those groups that are making a difference.

Answering the Charting Impact questions offers multiple benefits to organizations like yours. Using this common format to convey your organization's contributions to advancing the common good will:

- Encourage people to invest their money, time, and attention in effective organizations;
- Highlight the difference your organization makes;
- Sharpen your approaches; and
- Position your organization to work with and learn from others.

Share your answers to the five questions – your unique Charting Impact Report – on your organization's free GuideStar Nonprofit Profile. To claim and update your profile go to [www.guidestar.org/update](http://www.guidestar.org/update). Publishing your responses on your Nonprofit Profile creates a formatted report with a unique URL that you can share with your network. This can also be shared through your own website and media channels. Adding your report to this central database of information about nonprofit impact will also make it easier for potential funders and partners to find you.

***“The Arc is thrilled to participate in Charting Impact. Clearly the public wants to know how charities are making a difference with their dollars. The Charting Impact platform allows charities to explain the impact of their work in a thoughtful, concise format that is easy to understand. It represents the future of public disclosure by nonprofit organizations.”***

– Peter Berns, chief executive officer, The Arc

# Charting Impact's Five Questions

The Charting Impact framework can help your organization consider and communicate your progress toward impact. As more and more nonprofits and foundations create their own Charting Impact Report, it will be easier for organizations to collaborate and for potential supporters to direct their time and funds to those groups that are making a difference.

Central to Charting Impact are the five simple yet powerful questions that generate an organization's report.

## 1. What is your organization aiming to accomplish?

Clearly and concisely, state your organization's ultimate goal for intended impact. Identify the groups or communities you aim to assist, the needs your work is addressing, and your expected outcomes. Examine how your goals for the next three to five years (or an alternate timeframe specified in your answer) fit within your overall plan to contribute to lasting, meaningful change. When finished, ask yourself, "If someone unfamiliar with our work were to read this, would they have a clear definition of what long-term success means for my organization?"

***Why is this answer important?** Articulating your organization's long-term goals helps others understand your mission and intended outcomes. It also gives context and purpose to your day-to-day activities. Your response to this question is the foundation for your responses to the other four.*

## 2. What are your strategies for making this happen?

Describe your organization's strategies for accomplishing the long-term goals you cited in your previous answer. Specify the broad approaches you employ and why your organization believes these methods will benefit your target audience or advance your issue. Lay out near-term activities that serve as important building blocks for future success, explaining how these elements strengthen your organization's strategic approach.

***Why is this answer important?** Clearly articulated strategies help those outside your organization understand how you aim to accomplish your long-term goals. Your long-term strategic approach also helps your organization determine appropriate near-term activities.*

## 3. What are your organization's capabilities for doing this?

Detail the resources, capacities, and connections that support your progress towards long-term goals. While describing your organization's core assets, identify both internal resources (including, but not limited to, staff, budget, and expertise) and external strengths (including partnerships, networks, and influence) that have contributed to, or will contribute in the future to, the accomplishment of these goals. Also include any future resources and tools that will further strengthen your work.

***Why is this answer important?** Identifying your organization's specific capabilities and how they are aligned with your long-term goals can help you deploy your resources effectively, giving stakeholders confidence that these resources are being utilized constructively. The purpose is not to list every resource, but to identify how your organization's capabilities, both internal and external, will contribute to your intended impact.*

## 4. How will your organization know if you are making progress?

Explain key qualitative and quantitative indicators against which your organization assesses your progress toward your intended impact. In addition to describing what you measure, identify key milestones – what your interim targets are, and when you want to reach them – that signal progress and success. Include a description of your assessment and improvement process: the qualitative and quantitative methods you use as you monitor key indicators, and how your organization uses and will use that information to refine your efforts.

***Why is this answer important?*** *By definition, a long-term goal is not accomplished overnight. Monitoring key indicators and marking important accomplishments along the way help an organization stay on track, instill confidence in its methods, and let both internal and external stakeholders track movement toward achieving long-term goals.*

## 5. What have and haven't you accomplished so far?

Demonstrate recent progress toward your long-term goals by describing how your near-term objectives are propelling your organization toward your ultimate intended impact. Go beyond the outputs of your work to make clear how these outcomes are contributing to fulfilling long-term goals. In describing both outcomes achieved and those not yet realized, include what your organization has learned about what does and doesn't work, what risks and obstacles exist, and what adjustments to goals, strategies, or objectives have been made along the way.

***Why is this answer important?*** *Sharing the outcomes of recent work offers an opportunity to reflect on your organization's purpose, while affirming that progress that has been made toward long-term goals. Focusing on outcomes—and not just outputs—also improves your organization's ability to identify important strategies and variables affecting pursuit of your ultimate impact.*

# Complete Your Charting Impact Report

The five questions at the heart of Charting Impact are deceptively simple. Though each is short and direct, answering them can provide insights that strengthen your organization. The report that publishes your responses allows a variety of audiences – donors, program recipients, volunteers, allied organizations, and the general public – to understand more clearly the difference you make in your community.

This framework was designed to be applicable to organizations of all types, sizes, and missions. Because every organization is different, the five questions will invite unique responses. There is no right answer or single method for completing your organization's Charting Impact Report.

Nevertheless, our extensive testing process has revealed several practices that can help your report reflect your organization's attributes, accomplishments, and challenges. We invite you to consider the following tips as you undertake your unique Charting Impact Report.

This guidance has been developed to assist you as you complete a Charting Impact Report for your organization. While the five questions may also be helpful in planning and assessing specific initiatives or program areas, please keep in mind that your published Charting Impact Report should represent your organization as a whole.

## 1. Prepare

Organizations that have completed Charting Impact have found, as one tester put it, that these questions are simple but not always easy. They require deep thinking about your organization's purpose and progress. The most effective Charting Impact Reports reflect a careful internal process and produce concise language accessible to the average reader.

Some organizations have found that having a strategic plan in place prior to approaching Charting Impact greatly facilitated their ability to answer the five questions. You may also find that Charting Impact is a helpful starting point for a strategic planning process.

To prepare for this process, we suggest the following:

- Read Ahead. Consider the five questions and other supporting materials carefully.
- Assemble Key Data. Our participants have found that a Charting Impact Report pulls together information that is typically found in many separate documents, including mission and vision statements, strategic plans, your logic model or theory of change, program descriptions and evaluations, and other materials with internal and external explanations of your work. Assemble anything in print or in digital format that will help provide specific answers to the Charting Impact questions.
- Draw on Key People. Organizations in which 5-6 people handled most of the work generally found the experience more productive than those that assigned it to only one or two people or those that involved all staff. Invite contributors from across your organization, including those

***“Charting Impact is a simple and accessible way for nonprofits to think about and explain what they do, why they do it, how they do it, and the difference it makes. As a tool for boards to help build their knowledge and help them become more effective fundraisers, or for donors to use when they consider making a gift, Charting Impact’s potential is tremendous.”***

– Sonya Campion, trustee, Campion Foundation

responsible for programs, evaluation, communication, development, and strategic planning. You may also want to involve board members, volunteers, or other external partners as appropriate. Multiple perspectives will strengthen your process and the resulting document.

## 2. Write and Review

Your organization's approach to writing your Charting Impact Report will be as individual as your make-up and mission, but our pilot testing has revealed methods that can make the process go more smoothly.

Though you may select one person to champion the process and manage the writing, we encourage you to involve multiple people from across the organization as you respond to the five questions and review drafts of your report. Our pilot suggested that the most successful reports were developed with input from five to six individuals over a period of two weeks, resulting in 7 to 14 cumulative staff hours of effort.

Developing a Charting Impact report is an opportunity to refine your organization's approach to impact.

As you write and review, we encourage you to:

- Think about how your answers to the five questions are connected to one another. Your complete report should tell a cohesive story about how your near-term activities are advancing your long-term goals.
- As you connect the dots between where you are now and where you want to be, consider your assumptions. What do you need to explain as you respond to these questions? Which of your assumptions should you articulate?
- Include specific examples and measures where appropriate. Though you won't be able to detail everything you have done or are doing, readers appreciate having your statements grounded in specific examples.

## 3. Keep It Simple

Charting Impact seeks to translate a thoughtful and strategic internal process into an effective document for external communication. As you write, keep your external audience in mind. Some of them will already be familiar with your work. For others, this will be an introduction to your purpose and progress.

Our pilot testing revealed that readers by far preferred reports that were concise, direct, and specific. In a world of many competing messages, short is better than long, and the format for Charting Impact encourages brevity and clarity. The response to each question is limited to 3,000 characters (including spaces), but we encourage you to aim for 2,000.

***“Charting Impact is an important and timely contribution to the field of nonprofit leadership and management. It brings clarity of thought and action to help an organization reflect, plan, act, and share its learning internally, and with others striving to solve complex problems in today’s dynamic and changing environments. It is an excellent tool for integrating strategy and evaluation in pursuit of social impact.”***

– Hallie Preskill, Executive Director, FSG Strategic Learning and Evaluation Center

It will be important to state your key points clearly and succinctly, followed by the most critical information to support them. We strongly suggest a few additional effective writing techniques.

- Use simple declarative sentences.
- Be clear. Don't ask the reader to guess what you mean.
- Be concise. Include only necessary supporting information.
- Be specific. Use numbers and examples where possible.
- Use commonly understood language. Avoid jargon.

***Once you've drafted your Charting Impact Report, visit [www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org) to publish your responses. Sharing this report of your organization's plans and progress with key stakeholders, including the public, will increase the number of people who understand your work, make it easier for organizations to collaborate, and help potential supporters to direct their time and funds to those groups that are making a difference.***

## GLOSSARY

The following definitions support the explanations of the five Charting Impact questions. They are adapted from definitions used by Innovation Network, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, the Nonprofit Good Practice Guide, and the federal Bureau of Justice Assistance Center for Program Evaluation and Performance Management.

### Indicator

What the organization measures as a basis for assessing the extent to which it is achieving its goals.

### Intended Impact

The fundamental lasting, meaningful change occurring in organizations, communities, or systems that your organization wants to create. The focus of the long-term goals and long-term strategies described in your Charting Impact Report should be the lasting positive impacts toward which your organization is oriented.

When describing your ultimate goals for intended impact, include as many specifics as possible. It may be helpful to consider the following questions:

- What groups, communities, or organizations do you aim to assist, or what policies or processes do you aim to influence?
- What need have you identified in your community that you intend to address, and what do you intend to accomplish?
- Where are your efforts focused? Do you work locally or regionally, or do you intend to effect national or international concerns?
- When do you hope to accomplish these intended outcomes?
- Why are these outcomes important?

### Long-term Goals

Clear statements of your organization's intended contributions to your long-term intended impact. For the purposes of your Charting Impact Report, long-term goals should refer to the specific outcomes your organization seeks to achieve over the next 3 to 5 years. If your organization has long-term goals of a different time horizon, please specify that time period in your document.

### Long-term Strategies

Broad approaches your organization will deploy to accomplish your long-term goals. These methods are implemented through concrete near-term activities. For the purposes of your Charting Impact Report, long-term strategies should refer to the methods for achieving your organization's long-term goals over the next 3 to 5 years. If your organization has long-term strategies of a different time horizon, please specify that time period in your document.

### Milestone

A specific point that is critical for your organization to reach to ensure that you are on course to achieve your desired outcomes. Once your organization has decided what indicators to track, a milestone provides an interim target based on that indicator. Milestones may range from near-term to long-term as an organization charts its progress between now and accomplishment of long-term goals.

### Near-term Activities

What an organization does to implement long-term strategies and to move toward accomplishment of long-term goals. For the purposes of your Charting Impact Report, near-term activities identify events or actions that will happen within the next 1 to 2 years.

### Near-term Objectives

A concrete and measurable step toward long-term goals. These objectives can be related either to developing the capacity of the organization (in terms of performing your near-term activities or harnessing your resources), or to enhancing the outcomes of program activities. For the purposes of your Charting Impact Report, near-term objectives identify steps the organization will take within the next 1 to 2 years.

### Outcome

The effect of an organization's action, activity, or program. A description of an organization's results should reach beyond the outputs of its activities to encompass changes in conditions, behaviors, or attitudes designed to contribute to the lasting impact the organization seeks. These results are both accomplishment of milestones and changes that indicate progress toward the organization's long-term goals.

### Output

The direct, concrete product of program activities, in terms of volume of work completed or services delivered.

### Qualitative Information

Descriptive information about activities, events, and/or behavior that the organization tracks as measures of progress toward near-term objectives and long-term goals. Qualitative information focuses on observations, through such techniques as interviews, document analysis, focus groups, or reviews by stakeholders, including clients, donors, or volunteers.

### Quantitative Information

Measurable, quantifiable information about activities, events, and/or behavior that the organization tracks as measures of progress toward near-term objectives and long-term goals. Quantitative information strives for precision by focusing on things that can be counted, through such techniques as questionnaires, tests, standardized observation instruments, or program records.

#### For More Information

Visit [www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org) to complete your Charting Impact report and earn your Gold Seal of Transparency. To learn more about your GuideStar Nonprofit Profile and the Seals of Transparency visit [www.guidestar.org/update](http://www.guidestar.org/update).