

Support Center 2017-2021

Accelerating Positive Social Change

Background

In September 2015, the Support Center began a transition process that involved a new executive director, new responsibilities for each of our staff and changes to the composition of the board. This transition process has been aided in a number of ways: a third-party organizational assessment helped to clarify our strengths and challenges. A half-day retreat with our Leadership Council, board, staff and affiliate consultants helped to scan the environment and identify key trends that will impact our work. And lastly, a strategic planning committee and several subcommittees have convened over the last six months to look more closely at specific aspects of our work and to tap into the energy, enthusiasm, and vision of our funders, staff and board.



Through an integrated approach that spans from training to coaching and consulting, we aim to empower nonprofit leaders to drive social change.

Initial Organization Assessment

The initial assessment of the Support Center was informed by interviews with board members, staff, funders, affiliate consultants and client organizations. The core strengths of the Support Center encompassed three key areas: service delivery, relationships and our role as a convener, and our reputation. In terms of service delivery, the quality of our affiliate consultants and their diverse backgrounds were often identified as strengths. Our focus on clients' needs, rather than using a rigid or dogmatic framework about how organizations *should* further their mission, is seen as a plus.

Similarly, our understanding and responsiveness to clients' needs surfaced as another key strength. The Support Center is seen as a partner for the groups with which we work, and we have even greater ability to sustain connections with our clients and to foster network ties across consulting engagements and clients. The Support Center is seen as a strong convener with an



We believe in building communities of practice to connect nonprofit leaders and social entrepreneurs with the networks, ideas and funding to make a difference in the world.

ability to do more to sustain networks and connections. Finally, the reputation of the Support Center is a strength. We have a reputation for being flexible and adaptable with deep knowledge of the local sector and familiarity with the issues.

Any worthy assessment will identify areas for improvement as well. One high-priority area for development applies to the Support Center's use of data and metrics for monitoring its work. How well are strategic planning processes strengthening the organizations with which we work? How effective is our executive coaching? And how do we ensure dynamic feedback loops that help us and our nonprofit partners know that we are making progress?

Other areas of focus include investing in the Support Center's marketing, branding and communications. We can better explain the organization's core practice areas and simplify the theories and models that anchor our consulting work. The Support Center can also be a bolder voice in the sector with an ability to convert our experience into lessons learned and knowledge for others. We can disseminate more widely what we learn through our consulting and executive transition work as well as our convenings.

A Scan of Our Environment

On May 18, 2016, we held a half-day retreat with our board, staff, affiliate consultants and Leadership Council. The following questions anchored that discussion:

- *How has the nonprofit sector changed and evolved over the last few years?*
- *How has the landscape of capacity building organizations and supports to nonprofits changed?*
- *Where do we see the greatest opportunities for partnership and collaboration to meet the needs of the sector and leverage our strengths?*

In the pages that follow, we break out specific issues that were identified, such as an increased focus on evaluation and funder regulations and the increasing emphasis on data-driven programming and evaluation for which few organizations are prepared. Our strategic goals for the next five years will address these trends.

The Strategic Planning Process

Our organizational assessment and scanning work led to the creation of a strategic planning committee and four workgroups focused on: our mission, vision and values; the role of the Support Center in the impact economy; our consulting work; and our executive transition practice. We looked more closely at our strengths and opportunities for growth in each of these areas.

Several key themes emerged through these discussions that are reflected in our strategic goals, including:

- *How can we as the Support Center operate within a more effective ecosystem of capacity building organizations?*
- *How can our work be more transformational and less transactional? Be more integrated and less compartmentalized?*
- *How can we support organizational change over a longer period of time while still delivering the consulting support that organizations need?*
- *Are we up to date in our practices in addressing today's capacity needs?*
- *Do we have the requisite dimensions of diversity among our staff and consultants and is there a strategy to attract a next generation of consultants that reflects the communities we serve?*

The End Result: Our Plan

As we took stock of the organization during this transition process, we took note of the legacy of innovation and vision that is a hallmark of the Support Center. In the beginning, the Support Centers of America was a bold initiative to create a network of capacity building organizations across the country. This strategic plan honors that legacy with a network model rooted in the development of communities of practice and is predicated on closer collaboration with our staff and affiliate consultants, clients, funders and our peer organizations. The plan has also called for a revised and simplified mission statement:

To empower nonprofits and social enterprises to transform their leadership and management and accelerate positive social change.

The revised mission statement anticipates an ever-increasing number of corporate forms and strategies for bringing about positive social change. We want the ability to work with a range of corporate forms and different strategies as we pursue positive social change. And this shift will also give us the ability to respond to the rising interest in earned income strategies for nonprofits, B-corporations and social ventures.



With biannual investment gatherings, we look forward to convening nonprofits, social entrepreneurs, grantmakers and impact investors as equal partners in the impact economy.

Perhaps the single greatest strength of the Support Center is our ability to convene practitioners, funders, and capacity builders. The resulting strategic plan will work to leverage that strength through ongoing convenings and dialogue.

VISION, MISSION, VALUES

Our Vision

We envision a thriving community of nonprofit leaders and social innovators committed to organizational excellence and a shared vision for a better world.

Our Mission

To empower nonprofits and social enterprises to transform their leadership and management and accelerate positive social change.

Our Values

- **Proactive.** We anticipate and focus on internal and external changes that affect the capacity of our nonprofit and philanthropic organizations to fulfill their missions.
- **Collaborative.** We work as a team within the Support Center and in partnership with the organizations we serve and our communities at large.
- **Integrated.** We have a holistic view of organizations where various capacities (e.g., executive transition, governance and finance) are interconnected.
- **Efficient.** We assist in developing appropriate and sustainable solutions that achieve effective outcomes, minimize waste and maximize resources for nonprofits and grantmakers.
- **Accountable.** We uphold the highest ethical standards and model the processes we recommend.
- **Respectful.** We are sensitive to the diverse backgrounds, perspectives, strengths, and various stages of organizational development.
- **Continually Learning.** We value continuous feedback and evaluate data to adjust and adapt to changing circumstances. We listen to and learn from the nonprofit community, and we reflect this in our work.

Reaffirmed Tag Line

Constructive change, hands-on help / Accelerating Positive Social Change

A Proposed Name Change:

Simply put: Support Center

KEY ASSUMPTIONS

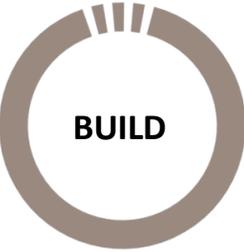
The following assumptions were identified during the planning process and factored into our thinking when charting the course for the next five years.

<u>Assumption</u>	<u>Implication for the Support Center</u>
Government policy changes have resulted in new regulations, increased oversight and compliance and a greater focus on overhead for organizations reliant upon public sector funding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping understand finances and the true cost of delivering services; • Policy role for the Support Center; • Assessment of staffing capacity and potentially redesign for some of our partner organizations.
The nonprofit sector lags behind the private sector in the use of technology; today there are new platforms to deliver training and an array of digital tools with implications for nonprofit operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology partnerships, modeling our own use of technology; • Update to professional development offerings and the delivery in partnership with Foundation Center; development of communities of practice.
There is increased funder interest in capacity building and a sense that management support organizations can play a key role beyond independent consults. However, there is a question about the effectiveness of capacity building and its return on investment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on outcomes and tracking the efficacy of capacity building; • Telling the story of capacity building through various forms.
Data-driven programming and evaluations; focus on evaluations and increased funder regulations; improvements in oversight (Guidestar, etc.) and access; increased skepticism and questions of nonprofit integrity and increased reporting (metrics); higher levels of donor sophistication.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping the Support Center to tell our own story through evaluation and outcomes data (e.g., professional development and consultancies – measure the impact on our clients); • Developing alternatives to the data that exist today; • Identifying and helping our clients measure and communicate their own outcomes (telling their own story); • Advocating for other forms of accountability beyond what is on the 990.
There are not enough new leaders who are willing, capable and prepared to take on the top position in a nonprofit despite the wave of transitions that are anticipated. There is more work to be done around developing our leadership “bench strength,” succession planning and addressing persistent mid-career leadership gaps and challenges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support Center will need to focus on leadership development within and across organizations leveraging communities of practice; • Work with organizations in advance of a leadership transition to explore internal career pathways; • Ensure the use of onboarding; • Leverage certificate programs to prepare the next generation of leadership, with a focus on candidates of color.
There is a persistent lack of diversity among the ranks of senior nonprofit leaders and among nonprofit consultants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with other organizations to look at the institutional barriers for candidates of color; • Make long-term commitment and recruit new consultants from new places that better reflect the communities we serve and invest in leadership pipelines for future talent.

KEY ASSUMPTIONS CONTINUED

<u>Assumption</u>	<u>Implication for the Support Center</u>
<p>Within the social sector, there has been an increase in revenue-generating activities and growth in different corporate models such as B-corporations – blurring of lines between for-profit and nonprofit activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support Center will need to expand its workshops and consulting offerings in this space to meet this need; • Partner with other organizations to create a system of supports and help groups to access the impact economy for capital; • Raise additional funding to make this a core offering.
<p>With the rise of social media, there is both an opportunity and a challenge to change the world using new communications, marketing and storytelling strategies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support Center will continue to expand its use of different media to tell the story of capacity building; • Tell the stories of our client organizations and the benefits of our work together.
<p>There has been an increase in collaboration, partnership and in some cases merger among organizations; however, the pace of partnership may lag behind the need. Organizational size and financial strength are linked to sustainability, with even mid-sized nonprofits proving fragile.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support Center will continue to pursue a “movement-based approach” leveraging our community of peer organizations; • Continue with workshops, trainings and consultancies around “redesign;” • Tell redesign stories to inspire others.
<p>Large numbers of nonprofits still struggle with economic constraints since the 2008 financial crash; many organizations seeking financial viability still pursue funding as a means of remaining solvent.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to find different ways to “subsidize” support to organizations across the spectrum of workshops and trainings to in-depth consulting and executive transition engagements; • Continue to leverage workshops; • Continue with workshops, trainings and consultancies around “redesign.”

OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



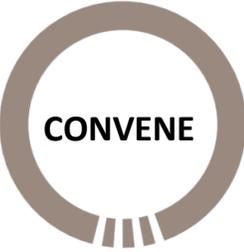
BUILD

communities of practice to drive long-term change for our nonprofit partners.



EMPOWER

nonprofits through an integrated capacity-building platform to promote long-term organizational transformation.



CONVENE

nonprofits, social entrepreneurs, grantmakers and impact investors as equal partners in the impact economy.



ADDRESS

the next wave of executive and board leadership and organizational transitions in the social sector.



HARNESS

the power of our community's people and resources to drive social change.

BUILD

communities of practice to drive long-term social change with our partners.

The focus on communities of practice is anchored in our own consulting practice as we continue to strengthen the quality, diversity and competencies within our affiliate consultant pool. We intend to create a responsive, enduring and partnership-driven consulting “community of practice” that drives long-term social change with our partners. In the years ahead, we will continue to improve our consulting and coaching processes, the technology and platforms that we utilize and how we communicate the impact of our work to others.

In our work with partner organizations or client organizations, we will look to employ many of the same principles, refining our approach to the selection of participating organizations and setting clear expectations. Among the measures of success will be engagement, quality and frequency of interaction and a more rigorous evaluation of the effectiveness of our approach.

OBJECTIVES

- Deepen our consulting community of practice to position us to meet the needs of our partners and deliver long-term social change.
- Organize and facilitate effective communities of practice among partner organizations and in concert with our funding partners.
- Support the “Ahead of the Curve” collaborative to create a healthier capacity building ecosystem.
- Identify other opportunities to build community such as our certificate programs and interim executive community.

EMPOWER

nonprofits and social enterprises through an integrated capacity-building platform to promote long-term organizational transformation.

While there are different perspectives on the dimensions of organizational performance, the underlying point is the same. Organizations need capacity in multiple areas and not just in terms of a strong board or successful fundraising. We subscribe to the theory that the following dimensions of performance are critical for organizational success and bringing about the positive social change that we collectively seek: governance and leadership; mission, vision and strategy; internal operations and management; finance; program delivery and impact and strategic relationships. Our goal is to integrate more fully these disciplines across our professional development, coaching and consulting work with organizations. We envision using data-management to better track and help our partner client organizations navigate these disciplines and build their capacity across these dimensions. We envision helping groups to periodically administer more holistic organizational assessments to “take stock” of their capacity across these functions. And we imagine creating a more integrated system that helps us to identify areas for capacity building for the organizations with which we work.

OBJECTIVES

- Ensure a holistic frame across our professional development, coaching and consulting practices.
- Implement an organizational “navigator” program as a clear offering for our clients.
- Develop a “case management” model that enables an integrated view of organizational health over the long-term and utilizes enhanced data management and measurement of nonprofit vital signs.

CONVENE

nonprofits, social enterprises, funders and impact investors as equal partners in the impact economy.

The Support Center is positioned to fill a void in the nonprofit/social enterprise/impact investment space. We imagine an “impact economy” that is inclusive and welcomes a full range of participants operating in the marketplace focused on creating social impact. This includes, but is not limited to, social enterprises (including earned income-generating nonprofits, for-profit social ventures, and hybrid social ventures), impact investors (both individual and corporate), socially conscious lenders, private grantmakers, traditional philanthropists, venture philanthropists, and corporate foundations.

The void to be filled is the role of convener. There are many social enterprises that need capital to sustain their business models and position them for growth. On the other side, there are many individuals with the resources to direct the flow of capital, whether in the form of equity, loans, or grants, who may not have broad awareness of high impact social enterprises in their area. The Support Center’s deep familiarity with nonprofits and the funding environment, coupled with its growing familiarity with the social enterprise landscape, offers the opportunity to act as convener, bring together those who need capital and those who can provide capital and ensure that nonprofits and social enterprises are “investment ready” in the process.

OBJECTIVES

- Consult and coach nonprofits and social enterprises to become investment ready.
- Educate capital providers on alternative investment opportunities in the social sector.
- Integrate other intermediaries, funders and capacity builders focused on social enterprise development as key partners in this system.

ADDRESS

the next wave of leadership and organizational transitions in the social sector

A hallmark of the Support center is our interim executive director and executive transition management programs. To address the next wave of leadership transitions in the social sector, we will need to understand the full scope of the challenge. This will involve updated research and participation in surveys to gauge the extent of leadership transitions over the next five years. To address the next wave of leadership transitions, we will also invest in our own capacity with a commitment to evaluation, long-term partnership, attracting top talent to our pool of interim executives and embracing emerging leadership strategies and practices to inform our executive transition work. Lastly, executive transitions are often an inflection point for organizations to consider new structures such as affiliations or even mergers. We will draw upon our own experience helping organizations to restructure as appropriate.

OBJECTIVES

- Utilize an integrated, three-phase approach to leadership transition that emphasizes the value of onboarding.
- Advance research and storytelling around executive transition trends and practices that work.
- Expand and continue to promote the interim executive program, communicating in particular the value of interim leadership to organizations in transition.
- Guide organizations that opt to restructure particularly at times of executive transition.

HARNESS

the power of our community's human and financial resources to drive social change.

The Support Center sits at the crossroads of philanthropy, corporate social responsibility and volunteerism. At this crossroads, there is a tremendous amount of human and financial capital that can drive positive social change. In the coming years, we plan to make harnessing our community's human and financial resources a key priority. We envision continuing to fully engage and leverage our board and Leadership Council. We intend to work closely with our corporate and private foundation partners to explore integrated approaches that harness direct funding, skilled volunteers and expertise on behalf of the communities we serve.

OBJECTIVES

- Continue to draw upon the Support Center board and Leadership Council on multiple levels to drive positive social change.
- Engage philanthropic, government and mission-driven business partners for the benefit of our client organizations and the communities we serve.
- Leverage the use of skilled volunteers and our community of technical assistance providers for the benefit of our client organizations and the communities we serve.