

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 you accomplished so far and what’s next?

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.*

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