



## Strategic Framework

2021 – 2024

Adopted by Board of Directors

February 25, 2021

[www.propelnonprofits.org](http://www.propelnonprofits.org)

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# Overview

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This document presents a strategic framework for Propel Nonprofits, weaving together mission, vision, values, strategic priorities, and organizational culture work completed during 2020 by the Board of Directors and Propel staff.

As noted later in this document, the framework is designed to be adaptive and responsive. As a staff and board, we chose to develop a truly high-level Strategic Framework as a guiding document for the next several years. As a high-level strategic guide, you won't find a bulleted list of activities or goals in this Framework. Staff will make annual and periodic, rigorous work plans which will allow us to learn, refine, and adapt as we continue forward.

We wanted to share this document with you as a commitment to our transparency, and as an example of how an organization might choose to lay out a strategic document. We extend our gratitude to the 73 nonprofit leaders who spent time with us and offered their input and perspectives as part of the creation of this framework as well as the entire staff and board of Propel.



# Contents

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The following components, which can be found on subsequent pages, cascade from each other:



**GUIDING PRINCIPLES**  
MISSION | VISION | VALUES



**STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**  
HOW MIGHT WE BETTER DELIVER ON MISSION AND VISION?



**COMMUNITY**  
WHO DO WE SERVE?



**ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE**  
HOW DO WE OPERATE TO THRIVE?



**THEORY OF CHANGE**  
HOW DO WE ACCOMPLISH OUR MISSION?

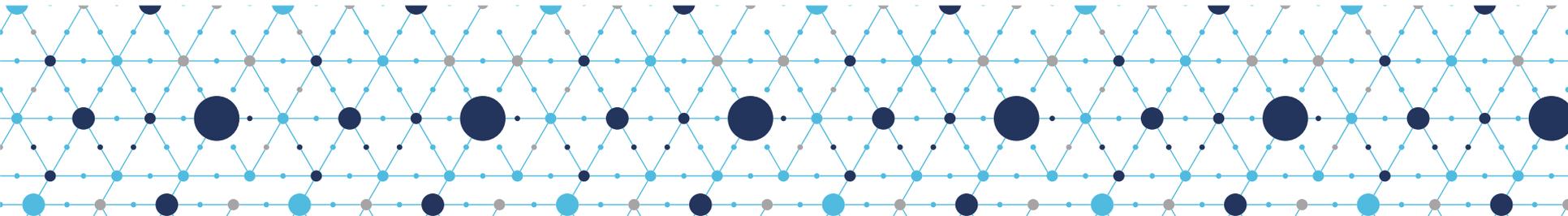
# Our Guiding Principles

## Mission and Vision

Propel Nonprofits' mission is to fuel the effectiveness of nonprofits with guidance, expertise, and capital. The mission is in service to our vision of a diverse network of mission-driven nonprofits building a healthy, vibrant, more just community.

## Core Values

- Champion nonprofits
- Be a mutual and trusted partner
- Advance justice
- Stay curious
- Have fun





# Framework

The framework in this document is designed to be adaptive and responsive to nonprofits and partners, the culture and people at Propel, and the external environment. These components fit together with foundational elements and the strategic priorities to guide the programs and activities.

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Equity through  
programs

Equity through  
influence

Community

Organizational Resilience



# Strategic Priorities

Under this strategic direction, Propel will more intentionally support a diverse network of mission-driven nonprofits building a healthy, vibrant and more just community. We'll accomplish this vision focusing on building powerful nonprofits and a more equitable sector through the following priorities:

Strengthen Equity Practices  
Throughout Programs

Influence & Change Systems  
and Structures to Build a More  
Equitable Sector

These two priority pillars are sometimes aligned and sometimes in conflict with each other. These priorities will call on Propel's capacity to operate from a both/and position of supporting nonprofits to work within and with the structure and rules as they exist while also using our resources and influence to change and shape the structures and systems.

# Strengthen Equity Practices Throughout Programs

The most visible and direct impact of Propel's work is through the programs and activities designed to serve nonprofit organizations with guidance, expertise, resources, and capital. The strategies for what we do, who we partner with as clients and allies, and how we deliver and evaluate our services are critical choices in how we advance our mission and strengthen equity practices. Equally important are choices of what activities we do not initiate, maintain, or promote. Propel's core values will be reflected in program development, design, delivery, and evaluation.

## Strategies

- Review and assess how the design and delivery of all program activities strengthen equity practices and make changes and adaptations to improve them. Program design considerations include geography, delivery modes, pricing and financial structure, opportunities for internal and external collaboration and partnerships.
- Elevate client and community input and perspective in program definition, design, and delivery approaches.
- Institute systems and set programmatic goals to evaluate programs and determine effectiveness in strengthening organizations and equity.
- Embrace innovation and experimentation in program development and implementation in order to learn, adapt, and respond to changes in the community and sector. Stay open to new approaches and emerging models for nonprofit structure and operations. Use the strategy screen and matrix map to make strategic decisions that further our mission and sustainability.

# Influence and Change Systems and Structures to Build a More Equitable Sector

The system in which nonprofits operate is inequitable. Organizations grounded in community, most notably nonprofits led by and serving Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), face barriers in accessing resources and constantly encounter inequitable rules and requirements, archaic practices, and systemic racism. Propel is committed to working with partners and allies to co-create a more equitable system, understanding that this will take time. Propel will utilize its knowledge and voice to champion practices that enable nonprofits to operate more efficiently and effectively, thereby increasing impact, within the current systems while simultaneously working with others to effect bigger systemic change.

## Strategies

- Define our spheres and channels for influence and invest time and resources in using that influence.
- Invest our reputation and influence in supporting and advocating for new practices that address financial health and management pain points for nonprofits including overhead, the need for general operating support, paying full costs, livable wages, and adequate and equitable capitalization.
- Invest our reputation and influence in supporting and advocating new models and practices to re-imagine nonprofit governance and organizational structures.
- Practice followership by bringing our support and capacity to community organizations and leaders spearheading systems change in the sector. Build community partnerships to understand and respond to diverse needs across state. This includes partnering and sharing our experience with peer capacity building organizations where able.



# Community

Propel approaches its work through intentional partnerships with the community it serves. While we focus on serving nonprofits in Minnesota, the impact of our efforts are felt nationally across the nonprofit sector. This impact flows from our most intensive work which has a specific focus on organizations with missions that advance equity and justice, with values that align with our own, and with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) leaders in the state of Minnesota and adjacent communities. Strengthening and deepening our community connections and partnerships and our accountability to the community we serve is fundamental to advancing our mission and vision. Community engagement and deep partnerships are ongoing commitments that require time, investment, and leadership commitment.

To determine Propel's community we look for the following traits and ask the following questions:

BIPOC	Shared Values	Readiness	Access	Geography
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is the organization BIPOC led?</li><li>• Does the organization hold itself accountable to and share power with the community it serves?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Does the organization approach its work with a social justice lens that centers equity and advances justice?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Are we able and ready to meet the organization in the current environment and context?</li><li>• Do we have partners or networks that will aid us in our readiness?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Does the organization have access to other relationships, networks, or capital that might be better suited to advancing its mission?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do we have the networks, partners, and relationships to be responsive and valuable to the organization?</li></ul>



# Organizational Resilience

The health and effectiveness of both the organization and the staff and volunteers is foundational to Propel’s capacity to advance its mission, vision, and strategic priorities. The organizational culture needed for this work will be developed and nurtured with trust, transparency, learning, intentional reflection and rest, and investment of resources and time. We are in a time that will continue to see change and adaptation in light of the external environment and these commitments to bold strategic priorities. Fostering resilience in every aspect of the organization will prepare the people and the organization to continually learn, adapt, and thrive.

To transform and strengthen Propel as an organization we will focus on these commitments:

Equity	Relationships	Well-being	Infrastructure	Durability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Invest in DEI learning and support.</li><li>• Create avenues for feedback, grievance, and repair.</li><li>• Operationalize equity and anti-racism in policies and practices.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Practice trust and transparency to support reciprocal accountability &amp; communications.</li><li>• Create feedback loops and avenues for grievances and repair.</li><li>• Stay curious and open to learn with each other.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support staff wellness and well-being with policies, practices, and resources, and by eliminating barriers.</li><li>• Be attentive to capacity, pace, and workload.</li><li>• Support professional and leadership development.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assess, build, and maintain smooth and efficient systems to support priorities and commitments.</li><li>• Invest in HR, development, communication, IT, and financial infrastructure.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plan and budget for adaptability and flexibility. Balance financial health and sustainability with innovation and risk.</li><li>• Build effective governance structure and practice.</li><li>• Model succession planning at multiple levels.</li></ul>



# Strategy Screen

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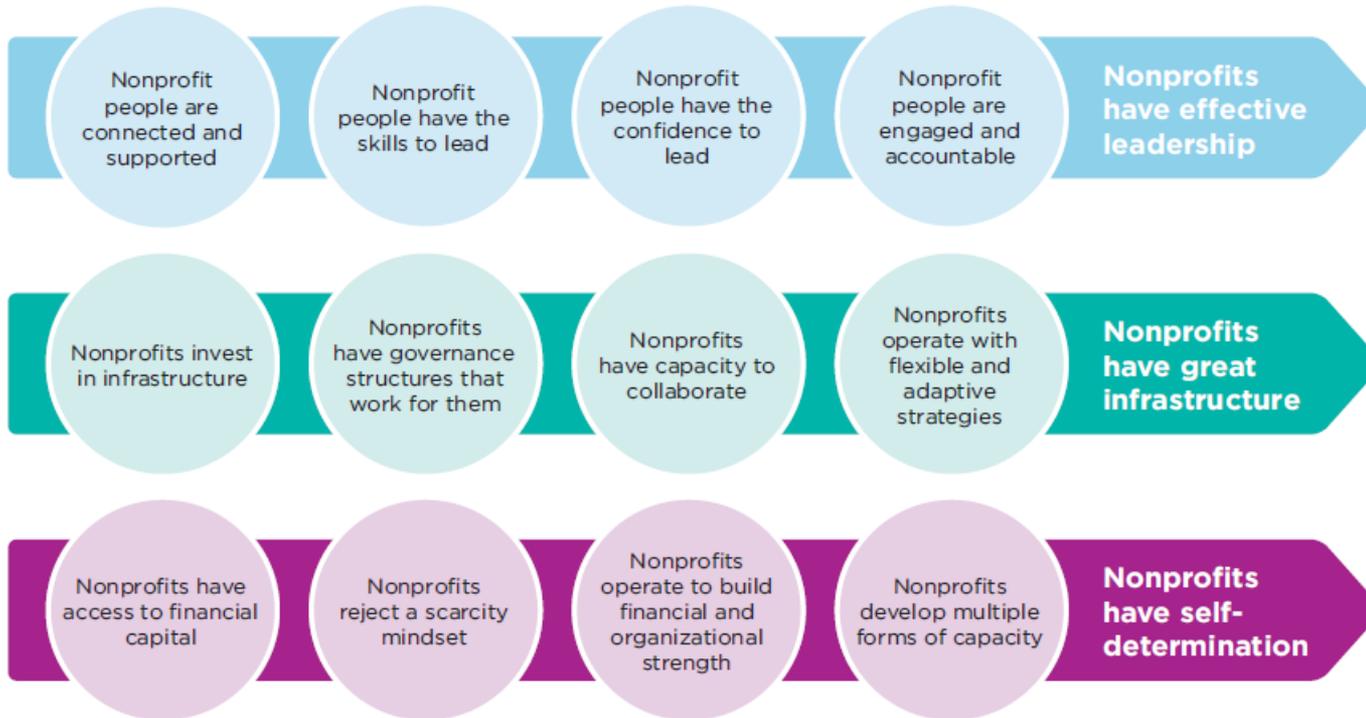
The purpose of this strategy screen is to provide a framework of criteria to use when considering and weighing choices and options to pursue or respond to new opportunities that arise during the period of the plan. Applying the strategy screen is an exploratory process.

## Criteria to consider:

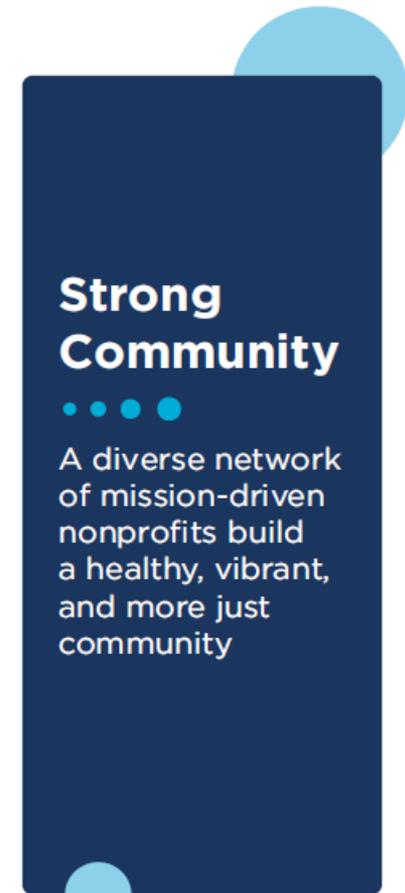
Mission & Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is it aligned and consistent with our values? If not perfectly aligned, is it opposed to our values?</li><li>• Does it contribute to our mission and theory of change?</li><li>• Is it aligned with our strategic priorities?</li></ul>
Capacity & Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is the audience for the opportunity aligned with our community? Specifically, does the program have an opportunity to emphasize organizations that are BIPOC-led? Will the program support organizations that hold themselves accountable to and share power with the community they serve?</li><li>• Do we have the capacity, knowledge and partners or networks that will aid us in our readiness?</li><li>• Are we the right organization for the project or is there another that might have greater capacity and relations with the community?</li><li>• Can we co-create the program in partnership with others in the community?</li></ul>
Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do we have or will be able to secure the finances to cover the total true cost of implementation?</li><li>• If not, is it of higher impact than another activity we're currently subsidizing?</li></ul>
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is there sufficient need or demand for this initiative?</li><li>• Does it provide opportunities to strengthen important relationships or our influence for systems change work?</li><li>• Does it present reputational risk or other unmentioned risk to the organization?</li></ul>

# THEORY OF CHANGE

## Powerful Nonprofits ●●●● Nonprofits achieve mission success



## Equitable Sector ●●●● The sector centers racial equity



### Strong Community

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A diverse network of mission-driven nonprofits build a healthy, vibrant, and more just community