



Common Framework: This is just the beginning

The Common Framework will evolve into a robust set of aggregation guidelines. Over time, we will develop **guidelines around thematic areas**—such as employment, wellbeing and food security—until it is truly a Common Framework for aggregation.

As we evolve the Common Framework, Common Approach will be guided by three rules of thumb, surmised from scholarly research on effective standard setting and the evolution of financial accounting standards.

1. A strong governance system is more important than a harmonized framework.
2. When harmonizing practice, maintain flexibility by gradually narrowing the range of allowable options; avoid a rush to a single, uniform, method.
3. Evolve and prioritize the work based on users' input; stay grounded in the realistic practices of typical organizations.

A strong governance system

It is more important to build a governance system for evolving the Common Framework, than it is to build an ideal Framework. Our governance system is led by a technical committee and governed by a board which has open calls for membership. The technical committee is mandated to ensure that their work is collaborative, informed by strong research practices, and thoroughly tested.

- Guidance will be based on what impact measurement practitioners' experience.
- Prioritization of topics will be led by a technical committee.
- Research will be done extensively, including consultations with relevant organizations and with scholarly literature.
- The Framework will be tested with small groups before any public release.
- All updates to the Framework and associated tooling will be released as exposure drafts to solicit feedback and comment before they are released as a revision to the Common Framework.

At Common Approach, we are certain that the impact measurement community has the brain power and insight to write a fabulous, complete, rigorous standard for measuring impact in a very consistent way. We are equally certain that whatever they could write would have an expiry date. Priorities change. Technology changes. Had early impact measurement experts succeeded in defining a universal measurement standard, their work would be the current against which today's innovators would have to fight. Had they succeeded in the 1940s, employment methods might well have excluded women. Had they succeeded in the 1980s, methods would celebrate replacing paper products with single use plastics to save the trees.

Standards are a great example of “the journey is the destination.” Building a robust governance system for evolving the Common Framework is a better long-term investment for the sector than a harmonized set of rules of aggregation. It will allow the Common Framework to stay current with evolving social norms and changing scientific understanding.

When harmonizing practice, maintain flexibility

As aggregation guidance becomes more detailed, we will retain the flexibility we believe is essential to ensuring impact measurement does not burden the charities, nonprofits and enterprises who are busy doing impactful work. We will do this using **bounded flexibility**, which is **choices within limits**. Bounded flexibility acknowledges that there are many acceptable ways to measure and aggregate *and* that there are some unacceptable measures and aggregations. Bounded flexibility is the middle ground between “one right way” and “anything goes.”

The Common Framework will build toward **harmonized impact aggregations based on practice**. We will do this by defining options, and specifying the conditions under which the various options are preferable. In practice this means a multistep process.

1. Observe the different methods being used by those aggregating impacts.
2. Give the approaches names that allow them to be identified and distinguished from each other.
3. Evaluate the conditions under which the methods are reasonable.
4. Issue an update to the standard that names all the methods, and limits to their use.



An illustrative example* of the multi-step process: Measuring job creation

1. **Observe the different methods being used by those aggregating impacts.** For example, by studying published frameworks, we might observe that some organizations count part-time work, unpaid internships, and volunteer work, while others do not.
2. **Give the approaches names that allow them to be identified and distinguished from each other.** For example, based on our study we might define the following:
 - a. Job characteristics method: qualifies something as a job based on criteria including the number of hours of work in a week, minimum pay and minimum safety conditions. The International Labour Organization uses this method.
 - b. Job-seeker characteristic method: qualifies something as a job based on the needs of the human. For example, some people with chronic health conditions seek flexible, part-time work; an immigrant health care professional might be better served by a part-time position in a hospital than a full-time position at a fulfillment warehouse if it leads to recertification in their new country. Many nonprofits use this method.
 - c. Entrepreneurship method: qualifies something as a job based on characteristics of the new business. For example, if it has sales and is cashflow positive.
3. **Limit options.** For example, the technical committee, upon extensive conversation with impact measurement professionals within the relevant nonprofits, grant making foundations, impact investors, and purpose-driven businesses, might specify that the job-seeker characteristic cannot be applied on the basis of age. A young graduate and a senior should be paid for work (unpaid work is not a job).
4. **Issue an update to the standard that names all four methods, noting the method that is not permitted.** This would begin as a public exposure draft with an ample public consultation period. Public comments would be reviewed, and the exposure draft revised before being issued as a new version of the Common Framework. The revision would define the three methods of counting “jobs” and limit the application of the job-seeker characteristics method in certain contexts.

** The consultations and research findings in this example are entirely fictional.*

Evolve and prioritize based on user input; stay grounded in real-life practices

The detailed aggregation guidance will arise collectively among the community of organizations—funders and impact inventors—who use the Common Framework. Guidance around specific aggregations will be harvested from their examples, rather than dictated by Common Approach. This will be achieved through the analyses of reports, feedback surveys, and consultations. Final decisions will be made by a technical committee composed of professionals who have themselves produced impact aggregations using the Common Framework within organizations.

Our technical committee and consultations will pay careful attention to those working in organizations. When an impact measurement guidance is shaped only by impact measurement enthusiasts (consultants, academics, specialists), it tends to become a gold-standard: an articulation of excellence that most organizations will never achieve on their own. Common Framework aspires to be more widely applicable than a gold standard. We want it to be something that most organizations can manage to use. This means raising the bar collectively, slowly, and in careful dialogue with all types of users, not just the impact measurement enthusiasts.