Achieving the Performance Imperative
With Results-Based Accountability
In “The Performance Imperative: A Framework for Social Sector Excellence,” a group of more than 50 nonprofit and public sector leaders making up the Leap of Reason Ambassadors Community set out to define what it means to be a high-performance non-profit organization.

According to the document, “The purpose of the community is to inspire, motivate, and support nonprofit and public sector leaders (and their stakeholders) to build great organizations for greater societal impact and to increase the expectation and adoption of high performance as the path to this end.” High performance, as the group collaboratively defines it, is the “ability to deliver—over a prolonged period of time—meaningful, measurable, and financially sustainable results for the people or causes the organization is in existence to serve.”

Resulting from this collaborative effort is the “Performance Imperative”—a framework that establishes seven pillars of a high-performance organization:

I. Courageous, adaptive, executive and board leadership
II. Disciplined, people-focused management
III. Well-designed and well-implemented programs and strategies
IV. Financial health and sustainability
V. A culture that values learning
VI. Internal monitoring for continuous improvement
VII. External evaluation for mission effectiveness

FIGURE 2: THE SEVEN PILLARS OF A HIGH PERFORMING ORGANIZATION
The Leap of Reason Ambassadors come from different backgrounds with different perspectives on how best to achieve the Performance Imperative. As a member of this diverse group, I come to the table with a background in Results-Based Accountability (RBA)—a strategic planning, management, and budgeting framework described by Mark Friedman in the book *Trying Hard is not Good Enough*.

The Performance Imperative framework represents a significant step forward in defining the conditions necessary to becoming a high-performance organization. RBA inherently complements the Performance Imperative because it can help organizations attain and maintain these conditions.

By utilizing the RBA concepts laid out within this paper and completing the attached Organizational Assessment once annually, your organization will be able to measure, improve, and maintain your achievement of the 7 Performance Imperative Pillars, bringing you one step closer to being a high-performance organization.

**WHAT IS RESULTS-BASED ACCOUNTABILITY™?**

“[RBA] provides a method for thinking and taking action together that is simple and common sense...It is about making a difference. Not just trying hard and hoping for the best.”

*Trying Hard is Not Good Enough Page 1*

Results-Based Accountability (or RBA) is a disciplined way of thinking and taking action that is being used by governments and organizations around the world to improve the lives of children, families, individuals, and communities. It is also being used to measure and improve the performance of agencies, programs, and service systems. Because RBA is a comprehensive problem-solving framework, it can be used to guide planning, budgeting, and management decisions, making it the ideal complement to the Performance Imperative.

RBA is different from other management frameworks because it starts with ends and works backwards to means—ends being the conditions of well-being desired for communities, and means being the strategies to get there. It also distinguishes between population and performance accountability. In population accountability, a group of partners takes responsibility for the well-being of an entire population. In performance accountability, managers take responsibility for the performance of a program, agency, or service system.

In performance accountability, RBA uses the common sense performance measurement categories:

- How much did we do?
- How well did we do it? , and
- Is anyone better off?

Once organizations identify key program performance measures that need to improve, a simple ‘Turn the Curve’ thinking process is used to develop strategies to improve those measures. In Turn the Curve Thinking (see Fig. 5), baselines are established for key performance measures and a series of questions are asked to help literally ‘turn the curve’ on the baselines that are not satisfactory.

By making the collection, analysis, and sharing of data imperative, RBA provides a solid basis for management decisions and increases the accountability and transparency of the organization. This also provides funders and the public with evidence of organizational efficacy.
Using RBA to achieve the Performance Imperative will enable organizations and communities to put each of the seven pillars into operation in a disciplined way that fosters continuous improvement. Instead of just talking about how to achieve high-performance and the seven pillars, RBA actually provides a step-by-step process for getting from talk-to-action quickly and making a difference.

PILLAR 1:
COURAGEOUS, ADAPTIVE EXECUTIVE AND BOARD LEADERSHIP

"All managers must exhibit two kinds of leadership:

1) Management leadership to produce the best possible performance for their services, and
2) Community leadership to bring together the necessary partners to improve community quality of life."

- Trying Hard Is Not Good Enough Page 23

Leadership is the foundation of a high-performance organization. Without it, the remaining pillars cannot be achieved. RBA enables leaders to set clear expectations for the performance of programs and services. It helps managers and staff identify the most important customer outcomes and the measures that reveal whether those outcomes are being achieved.

When leaders set their sights unambiguously on improving the lives of their customers, they provide a clear path for their staff and others to follow.

Boards and executives need to invest in their leadership development programs while making sure those programs reinforce the remaining pillars in their approach. Leadership programs and behavior change should be focused on finding ways to achieve meaningful and measurable results in a financially disciplined way—these are three components that are emphasized by both the Performance Imperative and RBA.

RBA can help achieve the conditions of Pillar 1 because it shows how measurement can be applied to leadership itself. Using a board and staff survey to rate leaders on the seven aspects of the definition of “Courageous, Adaptive Executive and Board Leadership” will allow for your organization and board to focus on which elements need to be most urgently developed.

It should also be the role of leadership to measure, monitor and manage the seven pillars of the Performance Imperative. Using a Performance Imperative scorecard based on the principles of RBA can help leaders do just that.

The Clear Impact Scorecard is an accessible, online Scorecard platform that enables you to measure and manage your progress in real time towards achieving effective leadership and the remaining pillars. See below for an example (fig.2):
Using a scorecard can be an effective way to track your progress toward achieving the Performance Imperative because it lays out your data visually.

The sample scorecard in Figure 2 provides an overview of a hypothetical organization’s achievement of each of the seven pillars with performance measures for each. An example performance measure for each pillar could be the “Average Achievement Score across Pillar Elements.” This data could be collected through the use of staff surveys, with an example being attached to this document as Appendix A.

**FIGURE 2: SAMPLE RBA SCORECARD TO HELP MEASURE AND MANAGE PROGRESS**
PILLAR 2: Disciplined management and decision-making

"RBA thinking is the discipline that makes passionate people successful."

Disciplined, transparent management and decision-making are the hallmarks of the RBA framework. The RBA methodology and Turn the Curve Thinking should be used in all staff meetings and in one-on-one supervisory meetings. This will ensure that all meetings are focused on creating the best strategies to make a difference. These 14 elements of disciplined management and decision-making are needed for organizations to create measurable results. Rate your organization on how well you have implemented each element.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>We have adopted a common language that allows us to distinguish between population and performance accountability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We can translate our language usage into that of our funders and other partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We have identified one or more community/population results to which our work contributes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We and our partners have identified the 3 to 5 most important indicators for each of these results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working with partners, we track and review these indicators on a regular basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working with our partners, we apply Turn the Curve Thinking to each indicator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We understand the role our organization plays in the overall strategy to turn the curve of each indicator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We have established the 3 to 5 most important performance measures for what we do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We track and review these performance measures on a regular basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We apply Turn the Curve Thinking to each of the performance measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We have adapted our management, budget, strategic planning, grant application, and progress reporting forms to reflect Turn the Curve Thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The population and performance baseline curves we want to turn are displayed prominently as charts on a wall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We have identified an in-house expert to train and coach other staff in this work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We are successfully turning curves; creating measurable improvements for customers and communities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PILLAR 3:

WELL-TARGETED, WELL-DESIGNED, AND WELL-IMPLEMENTED PROGRAMS AND STRATEGIES

"Problems related to program design most often require changes in policy.....Problems with implementation most often require changes in practice.....RBA can help with both."

- Trying Hard Is Not Good Enough
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Asking whether strategies are well-targeted, well-designed, and well-implemented is good, but misses a critical element of success:

Is the program having any impact?

In addition to
1) whom they serve
   (who the customers are);,
2) what they do, and;
3) how well do they do it;

Organizations should be asking:
4) is anyone better off?

The question "is anyone better off" speaks to the combination of quality and impact of a program or organization on the specific community members it is meant to serve.

This impact can be experienced as changes in attitude, behavior, skills, knowledge, or circumstance of an organization’s customers.

The process for identifying performance measures using these questions can be found beginning on page 67 of Trying Hard is Not Good Enough.

RBA provides a disciplined 5-step process for identifying the 3 to 5 most important performance measures from the data you already have—and the priorities for new or improved data in the form of a Data Development Agenda. RBA’s three types of performance measures are summarized on the chart below:

FIGURE 4: THE 4 QUADRANTS OF RBA PERFORMANCE MEASURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effort</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># Customers Served</td>
<td>% Common measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Activities</td>
<td>% Activity-specific measures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Is anyone better off?

| # Skills / Knowledge | % Skills / Knowledge |
| # Attitude / Opinion | % Attitude / Opinion |
| # Behavior | % Behavior |
| # Circumstances | % Circumstances |
PILLAR 4: 
Financial health and sustainability

"With RBA, we can begin to think about management, budgeting and strategic planning as three parts of a single system."

- Trying Hard Is Not Good Enough
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RBA can help identify financial management performance measures and use those measures to improve the organization’s financial condition.

RBA also provides the tools to create a Results-Based Budget. Results-based budgeting asks two questions: "Do we need it?" and "Is it working?" The first question is about what role the program or agency plays in achieving community well-being. If it is decided that the program or agency plays a relevant role in the community, the second question, "Is it working?" is asked. This question is an examination of whether the program in its current form is making the best possible contribution to the community.

For this Pillar, we use the same metrics used in program management and make budgetary decisions based on the need for the program or agency and its performance.

Using the same Turn the Curve thinking process for management, budgeting and strategic planning, provides a way to unify these three, often separate, processes within the organization.

PILLAR 5: 
A Culture that Values Learning

"What if under-performing agencies got serious about performance, not just to make their funders happy, but with an earnest devotion to the lives of their customers?"

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A culture that values learning and improvement or what some consider a “learning organization” emanates from the first leadership pillar and reflects how crucial the foundation of good leadership really is. Great leaders create great cultures for those involved in the organization.

Team members need to feel like they can challenge the status quo, explore new options, grow personally and professionally, feel invested in and connected to the work, and challenged. This may make the difference between a program that gets results and a program that does not.

Organizations that use RBA and continuous improvement tools like Turn the Curve Thinking are inherently learning organizations because they engage leaders at all levels in transparent, data-driven decision-making.
PILLAR 6:
Internal monitoring and measurement for continuous improvement

"The RBA [Turn the Curve] Questions should be asked and answered on a regular basis in every supervisory relationship throughout the system."

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Whether it is establishing clear metrics, producing simple and frequent performance reports, making use of data part of the organization’s DNA, collecting only the most important information, or thinking about what works from others in the Turn the Curve thinking process…RBA is the ideal and comprehensive tool that supports all of these elements.

**RBA ‘Turn the Curve’ Report**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the “end”?</td>
<td>Choose either a result and indicator or a performance measure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are we doing?</td>
<td>Graph the historic baseline and forecast for the indicator or performance measure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the story behind the curve of the baseline?</td>
<td>Briefly explain the story behind the baseline: the factors (positive and negative, internal and external) that are most strongly influencing the curve of the baseline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who are partners who have a role to play in turning the curve?</td>
<td>Identify partners who might have a role to play in turning the curve of the baseline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What works to turn the curve?</td>
<td>• Determine what would work to turn the curve of the baseline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Include no-cost/low-cost strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do we propose to do to turn the curve?</td>
<td>Determine what you and your partners propose to do to turn the curve of the baseline.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5: The RBA ‘Turn the Curve’ Report** - This template provides an overview of the step-by-step RBA “turn-the-curve” decision-making process.
Continuous improvement is at the heart of ‘Turn the Curve’ thinking—the hallmark process of RBA. In Turn the Curve thinking, individuals look deeper into key performance measures, asking specific questions to help them actually turn the curve on performance baseline trends.

You don’t just do Turn the Curve thinking and then you are done. You want to be able to consistently monitor your baseline trends and make mid-course corrections as necessary. Data is obviously a key ingredient to be able to monitor trends, so you need to be able to pick a few, important measures to ensure staff do not become over-burdened by data collection.

PILLAR 7: EXTERNAL EVALUATION FOR MISSION EFFECTIVENESS

“Evaluation studies can provide information that is useful in both Population and Performance Accountability. Program evaluations provide data for baselines and information about the story behind the baselines. Managers and funders can use this information to help manage the program and make funding decisions. Evaluation reports that show a program is making a difference in the lives of its customers can be used to promote and defend the program in budget and political processes. Evaluation reports that reveal problems with a program’s performance can help improve that performance.”

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Evaluations are an important tool for managers and funders. They are often the only way to be certain of the effect of program services on customer outcomes. And they have direct bearing on the sustainability and growth of programs in the budget process. Evaluation studies also provide important information about best and promising practices that are useful to the government and nonprofit sectors in making choices about the use of limited resources.

As noted above, RBA makes use of evaluation findings in several key steps in the “Turn the Curve” talk-to-action thinking process. And RBA has been used in evaluation design to construct testable hypotheses about the relationship between quality service delivery (How well did we do it?) and customer outcomes (Is anyone better off?)

Harvard Family Research Project Evaluation Exchange (Volume XI, No. 2, Summer, 2005) provided an overview of eight outcome models. Of these outcome models, only four (Logic Model, Outcome Funding Framework, RBA and Targeting Outcomes of Programs) were appropriate for program planning and management. RBA was the only model found to be well suited for the variety of uses that are necessary for a comprehensive approach to: program/agency improvement plans and budgets; grant-making; project planning and start-up; development of community report cards and evaluation design.

This report found that RBA has the following strengths:

- It is a thorough system for planning community-change efforts and improvement in program, agency or system performance;
- It uses lay language and provides a direct link to budgeting;
- It is useful for integrating different outcome systems.

RBA also provides accessible methods for continuous improvement that complement formal evaluation methods and can be used between formal evaluation studies. If an organization is of the right size and maturity to take on an external evaluation, RBA concepts should be used as part of the evaluation design as well as for the ongoing performance management system used during the period of evaluation.
CONCLUSION:
I am proud to be a part of the Leap of Reason Ambassadors community and believe the Performance Imperative represents a great step forward in defining the conditions necessary to being a high-performance organization. I believe that, when coupled with RBA and the Clear Impact Scorecard, the Performance Imperative has the potential to be a powerful tool in maximizing your organization’s ability to deliver measurable improvement to the communities you serve. It will help you to start implementing the Performance Imperative instead of just talking about it.

If you are interested in learning more about RBA and getting serious about high-performance, I recommend that you take the following steps:

- Have your staff take the attached survey once a year and record your results in your Performance Imperative scorecard. You may even want to embed this scorecard on your public website. You can sign up for a free 30-day trial at clearimpact.com/scorecard.
- Read *Trying Hard is Not Good Enough* by Mark Friedman and *The Holy Grail of Public Leadership* by Adam Luecking
- Visit clearimpact.com for more resources and explanations.
