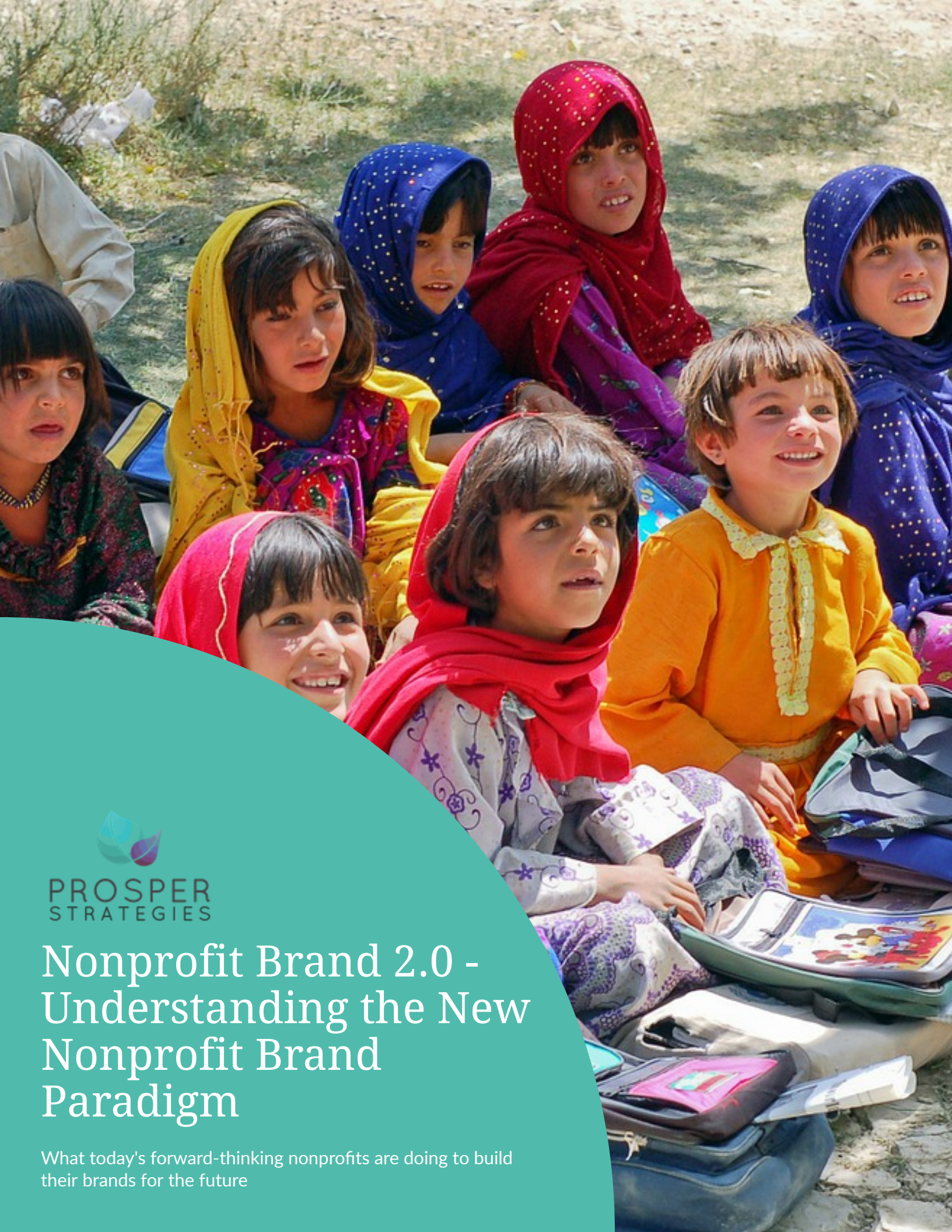




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Nonprofit Brand 2.0 - Understanding the New Nonprofit Brand Paradigm

What today's forward-thinking nonprofits are doing to build
their brands for the future

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The nonprofit sector is in the midst of a major transformation in its approach to brand.

Organizations of all shapes and sizes are beginning to think more broadly than they ever have before about the strategic purpose their brands can serve.

The **old nonprofit branding paradigm** treated brand as a tool for fundraising. Brands were about building visibility and awareness among target audiences in order to drive financial support. Plain and simple.

But today's most innovative nonprofits are recognizing that this thinking is far too narrow.

They're moving to a **new nonprofit branding paradigm** that recognizes brand as a tool for driving internal cohesion and capacity, mission advancement and social impact. The organizations that are embracing this new mindset are already realizing extraordinary results, from improved staff performance to increased revenue.

Let's take a look at three diverse examples—an international aid organization, a federated membership organization, and a local aging services nonprofit—to see how they're embracing the new brand paradigm and explore the outcomes they're realizing as a result. Then, let's take a look at *your* brand and assess its alignment with the new nonprofit brand paradigm.

Opportunity International: Brand as a Tool for Mission Advancement



When Vicki Escarra stepped into the role of CEO at [Opportunity International](#) in 2012, she had just concluded a rebrand for Feeding America.

The effort spurred the organization's greatest period of growth in its 30+ year history and led to a 50 percent expansion in the number of hungry people Feeding America serves weekly.

But could Escarra achieve similar results for Opportunity International? The

organization, which provides microloans and other financial services to women in developing countries, was starting from a far weaker brand position than Feeding America.

“We’re a 42-year-old organization that’s distributed more than 21 million loans at a value of about \$6 billion. We’ve created 10 million jobs in the last 15 years. But we’re relatively unknown as far as key stakeholders are concerned,”

Escarra **explained to Devex** shortly after joining Opportunity International.

“Although we’re known very well to the finance community, we knew it was essential to rebrand. The internal audience really didn’t know what we stood for and the external audience didn’t understand the life-changing, transformative work Opportunity was doing.”

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This problem was due to a lack of cohesion among Opportunity International’s five global offices (Australia, Canada, the United States, Germany and the U.K.), each of which operated as its own independent entity, and a common belief among them that the Opportunity International brand existed primarily for fundraising purposes.

Escarra knew this approach was misguided, and aimed to refocus Opportunity International’s brand on mission advancement.

“Any brand clearly needs to represent a promise to clients, donors and partners — as well as align around what the organization’s goal and missions are,” she explained.

She immediately began to drive Opportunity International’s brand toward that standard. She led the organization through a reassessment of its mission, vision

and values with the goal of aligning each of those items with Opportunity's strategic goals and with the needs and perspectives of the diverse communities and cultures the organization serves.

“Any brand needs to represent a **promise** to clients, donors and partners -- as well as align around what the organization's **goals and mission** are.

She then rolled Opportunity International's five distinct entities into one global organization united around the same strategy, mission, messaging and branding. This unification made it possible for Opportunity International to improve its approach to social performance measurement, and allowed the organization to introduce 16 metrics around which they measure and report on their impact in key areas such as wages, education and health, all of which contribute to their mission.

These changes transformed Opportunity International's brand into far more than a tool for fundraising and revenue generation. It became a powerful force for alignment around a shared mission and made it possible to measure mission impact.

The organization increased the number of clients served by 21 percent between 2014 and 2015, and also made the strategic decision to transition the operation of its banks to a FinTech partner so that they could better deliver on their core focus of helping women find a path out of poverty. This transition would not have been possible without the strong strategic foundation laid by the new Opportunity International brand.

The Y: Brand as a Tool for Social Impact



We hear a similar concern time and again from nonprofits that are struggling with their brands and messaging. They know they're doing good work, but feel their wide range of services and offerings are not well-understood.

This is exactly the position the Y found itself in when the organization made the decision to rebrand. But unlike many nonprofits before them, they were operating with the new nonprofit brand paradigm in mind, and they knew that brand confusion was limiting far more than their fundraising abilities. It was also limiting their social impact.

The Y embarked on a two year research process to determine how its brand could evolve in order to maximize the organization's impact. As part of the process, they surveyed a cross section of Americans about the greatest challenges they felt their communities were currently facing, and found that the Y could address many of their most pressing needs. However, most people surveyed had a very limited understanding of the organization's ability to help them improve their community and quality of life. This led to an underutilization of the Y's programs and services, and kept Y locations across the country from achieving their true potential to serve as a force for good in their communities.

"We are changing how we talk about ourselves so that people better understand the benefits of engaging with the Y," said Kate Coleman, senior vice president and chief marketing officer of YMCA of the USA explained at the time of the rebrand.

“ Unlike many nonprofits before them, they were operating with the new brand paradigm in mind, and they knew that brand confusion was limiting far more than their fundraising abilities. It was also limiting their social impact.

"We are simplifying how we describe the programs we offer so that it is immediately apparent that everything we do is designed to nurture the potential of children and teens, improve health and well-being and support our neighbors and the larger community."

After simplifying their name (from YMCA to simply the Y) and unveiling a new logo and refreshed visuals, the Y launched a series of national communications campaigns to bring their new brand to life.

You might remember their "Places" and "Idle Hands" campaigns, or the **Zoe for President** ads that launched during the last election season. These campaigns are a great illustration of the Y's newly simplified brand and are highly effective

at communicating the organization's broad range of services *and* its deep social impact.

So far, **the approach is paying off**. Since launching their new brand, the Y has expanded evidence-based programs designed to close the Achievement Gap, launched its first nationwide fundraising and positioning campaign and advanced strategies designed to help Y Staff and volunteers develop the competencies needed to deliver on the Y's cause of strengthening rapidly changing communities.

A young girl with dark skin and braided hair, wearing a blue t-shirt, stands behind a young boy with dark skin and short hair, wearing a green and white plaid shirt. They are both smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with green foliage.

The Y is there for those who need us. And for those who don't know they do. From career readiness to safe spaces, the Y is there for all of us.

**We can't do it alone.
» DONATE FOR A BETTER US.**

DONATE TODAY

A child is lying on a blue rug, partially covered by a large American flag. The child is wearing a blue dress with white stars and red polka dots. In the background, there are wooden bookshelves filled with books and a red storage bin. A sign with the word 'the' and a red arrow is visible on the wall.

ZOE

FOR PRESIDENT

CMSS: Brand as a Tool for Internal Alignment



Large, national nonprofits aren't the only ones embracing the new nonprofit brand paradigm. Innovative local organizations like our client [Chicago Methodist Senior Services](#) (CMSS) are also beginning to see the broader strategic utility of a strong brand.

Recently, the desire to establish differentiation in the ultra-competitive senior care market led the 118-year-old nonprofit to embark on a rebranding process in partnership with Simple Truth and Prosper Strategies. But once the process began, CMSS recognized that their internal brand challenges were in some ways

greater than their external ones. The organization operates four different communities, each of which was functioning as its own mini-organization with its own messaging, internal communications practices and focus. Employees felt a strong affinity to the building they worked in, but the affinity to the organization as a whole was often weaker. Even more problematic, many employees did not have a solid understanding of the wide range of programs and services the organization offered, which made it difficult for CMSS to help individuals move through its continuum of care.

“Large, national nonprofits aren’t the only ones embracing the new nonprofit brand paradigm.”

The new CMSS brand was therefore developed with a strong emphasis on improving internal cohesion, while at the same time improving external perceptions of the organization.

The new CMSS brand focuses on the brand platform “caring for life” and leans heavily on the following “ways of being” statements:

- Be there
- Share the love
- Deliver our best
- Celebrate

These statements are intended to give staff across all communities, programs and services a framework through which to live out the new CMSS brand and exhibit the organization’s values and mission in their day-to-day work.

This brand platform, coupled with a completely refreshed voice and visual expression, have given the organization’s diverse range of staff and volunteers something to rally around and align themselves to. They also put the organization in the position to develop and distribute its first ever system-wide internal communications plan, a process that we supported

earlier this year.

Though CMSS is still in the early phases of rolling out its new brand, its impact is already becoming apparent. Many employees are showing a greater enthusiasm for their work *and* an improved understanding of CMSS' range of programs and services.



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#MemoryCare services are all about helping people feel their best with #memoryloss. If you're just beginning to look into memory care options, consider these three guidelines to help you find the best care possible. [bit.ly/2nMVHtXV](#)

Making Days Brighter, One CMSS Resident at a Time

At CMSS, we believe there's always a way to bring some joy into the lives of people around us. That's why we started the **Good Days program** last year. The Good Days program is all about enhancing the lives of CMSS residents day by day and empowering staff members to add a personal touch to their caregiving.



It's a good day
when we can make
yours better.

How can your organization move toward the new nonprofit brand paradigm?

The new nonprofit brand paradigm requires a new vocabulary, framework and set of guiding principles. Simply applying for-profit brand methodologies that focus on revenue generation and visibility is not adequate.

After 18 months of research, Harvard University's Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations introduced just such a framework: The Nonprofit Brand IDEA (in which "IDEA" stands for brand integrity, brand democracy, brand ethics, and brand affinity).

We believe the nonprofit brands that succeed in the future will be strong in each of those four areas. The IDEA Framework is a highly useful tool for building nonprofit brands that play a strategic role in internal alignment, mission advancement and social impact.

But before you can begin taking action with the Nonprofit Brand IDEA framework, you must understand how your nonprofit brand stacks up against it.

Enter: The IDEA Nonprofit Brand Scorecard

We've created a scorecard to help you evaluate your nonprofit on the four criteria of the Nonprofit Brand IDEA framework: integrity, democracy, ethics and affinity. On the pages that follow, you'll answer a series of yes or no questions about your nonprofit's brand. Each response is associated with a score, and when you're done, you'll total up your points to determine how far your nonprofit brand needs to come in order to evolve into the IDEA Framework.

Ready? Let's dive in.

1.0 Brand Integrity | Brand Integrity means that the organization's internal identity is aligned with its external image and that both are aligned with the mission. Evaluate your Brand Integrity based on the criteria below.

We connect our mission to the identity of our organization, and our brand is highly visible and well-understood by our target stakeholders.	YES ☐ + 5 points	NO ☐ +0 points
Our mission is strongly represented in every tactic we use to communicate about our organization.	YES ☐ + 5 points	NO ☐ +0 points
We give members, staff, volunteers, and trustees a common sense of why our organization does what it does and why it matters in the world.	YES ☐ + 5 points	NO ☐ +0 points
We view our brand primarily as a tool for fundraising and prioritize external perception over internal brand alignment.	YES ☐ - 5 points	NO ☐ +0 points

2.0 Brand Democracy | Brand Democracy means that the organization trusts its members, staff, participants and volunteers to communicate their own understanding of the organization's core identity. Evaluate your Brand Democracy based on the criteria below.

We police how our brand is presented and portrayed extremely tightly.	YES ☐ +5 points	NO ☐ +0 points
We give our employees the opportunity to discuss and champion our brand on social media.	YES ☐ +5 points	NO ☐ +0 points
We've implemented a participatory form of brand management in which we provide resources, such as sample text and online templates, that all staff can access and adapt to communicate the mission, strategy, work, and values of our organization.	YES ☐ +5 points	NO ☐ +0 points
Our staff feels they can personalize the way they talk about our brand and have authentic, non-scripted conversations about our purpose and work as an organization.	YES ☐ +5 points	NO ☐ +0 points

3.0 Brand Ethics | Brand Ethics means that the brand itself and the way it is deployed reflect the core values of the organization. Evaluate your Brand Ethics based on the criteria below.

We can clearly articulate our organization's values and culture.	YES ☐ +5 points	NO ☐ +0 points
Our organization's internal identity and its external image are aligned with its values and culture.	YES ☐ + 5 points	NO ☐ + 0 points
The use of our brand conveys our most closely held values. For example, if one of our organization values is hope, we avoid using images of our beneficiaries that show them in a state of despair and hopelessness as a ploy to motivate donors.	YES ☐ +5 points	NO ☐ +0 points
Our brand empowers our staff to be vocal about their values, which align with the values of our organization.	YES ☐ +5 points	NO ☐ +0 points
Our brand empowers our staff to be vocal about their values, which align with the values of our organization.	YES ☐ +5 points	NO ☐ +0 points

4.0 Brand Affinity | Brand Affinity means that the brand is a good team player, working well alongside other brands, sharing space and credit generously, and promoting collective over individual interests. Evaluate your Brand Affinity based on the criteria below.

We attract partners and collaborators because we lend value to the partnerships without exploiting them.	YES ☐ +5 points	NO ☐ +0 points
We promote the brands of our partners as much as or more than we promote our own brands, redressing rather than exploiting the power imbalances that inevitably exist in any collaboration.	YES ☐ +5 points	NO ☐ +0 points
For brands that operate as part of a coalition: we maintain our own independent brand and champion the coalition's brand, with neither overshadowing the other.	YES ☐ +5 points	NO ☐ +0 points
We see other organizations in our space not as competitors, but as potential partners. However, we still see the need to differentiate our organization with clear positioning and branding.	YES ☐ +5 points	NO ☐ +0 points

Total Your Score Below:

Brand Integrity Total	Brand Democracy Total
Brand Ethics Total	Brand Affinity Total

GRAND TOTAL:

What Your Score Means

If you scored in the **60-80** point range, congratulations, your nonprofit brand is ready for the future.

If you scored in the **40-59** point range, your nonprofit brand is above average, but you have work to do to position your brand as a true strategic player.

If you scored in the **0-39** point range, your nonprofit brand needs significant attention. It's time to get serious about prioritizing your brand and aligning it with your mission and goals.

Want More?

Follow along with our series on Nonprofit Branding and Messaging on www.prosper-strategies.com/blog, and when you're ready to get serious about strengthening your nonprofit brand, [contact us](#).

Thank you to Nathalie Kylander & Christopher Stone for their research on the role of brand in the nonprofit sector, which originally appeared in the Stanford Social Innovation review in 2012. They are responsible for the creation of the Nonprofit Brand IDEA Framework, which we've adapted into scorecard format. See their original article [here](#).

About Prosper Strategies

You're focused on more than maximizing shareholder profits and earning prestige. You've recognized a problem you're unwilling to watch persist.

Families struggling to figure out where they'll sleep each night. Ecosystems so ravaged by pollution they may not exist for the next generation to enjoy. Young people unable to break a cycle of gang violence and drug addiction. You've set out to find a solution, and your organization is working every day to create a different future.

We exist to help you make that vision a reality.

Prosper Strategies isn't like all the other agencies, either. We're a Chicago-based marketing and PR firm that works exclusively with enterprising nonprofits and companies with a cause. We're not interested in working in a world where success is defined by a single bottom line, but we do believe financial sustainability is a critical component of any mission, so we're focused on helping our clients leverage marketing and PR to grow their income *and* their impact. Find us online at www.prosper-strategies.com.



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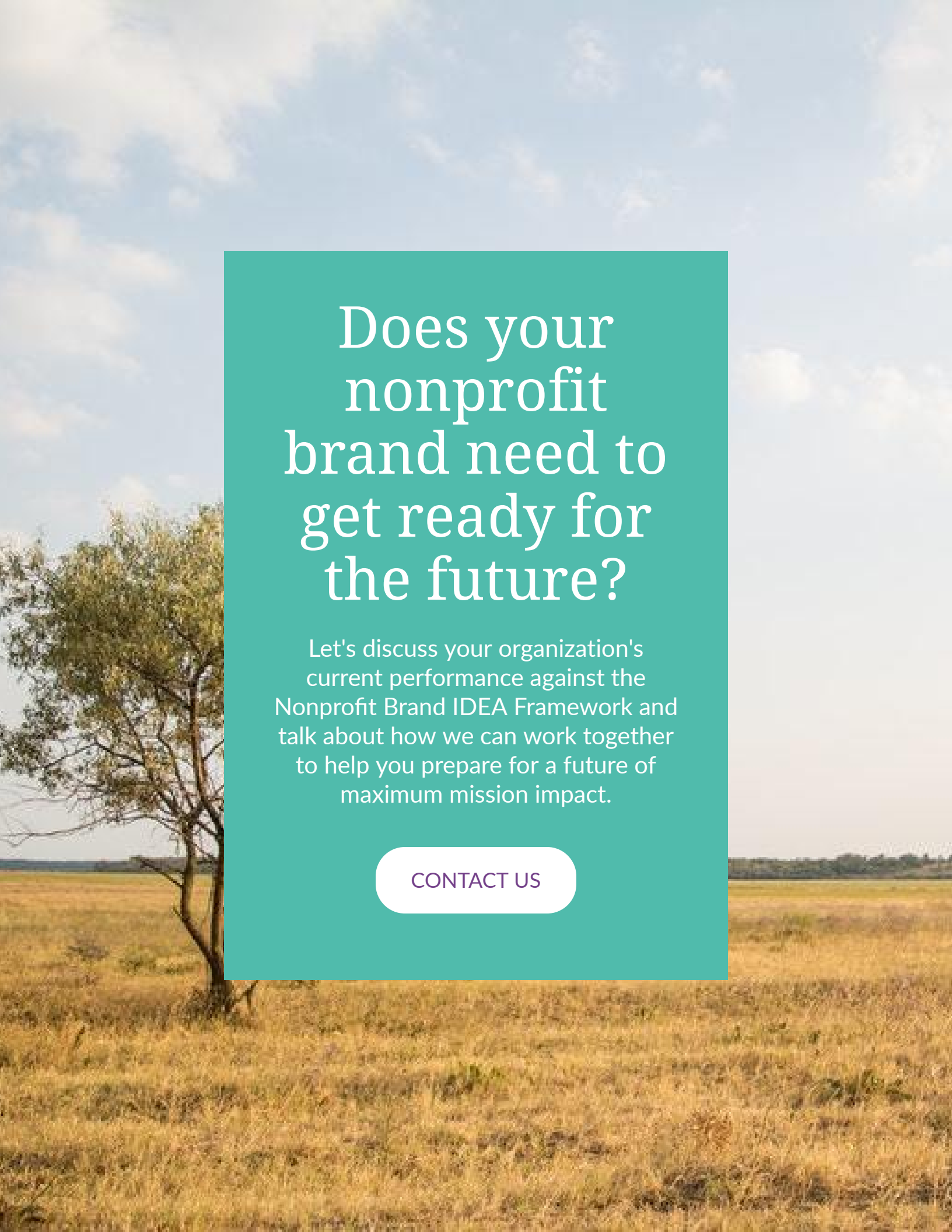
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Does your nonprofit brand need to get ready for the future?

Let's discuss your organization's current performance against the Nonprofit Brand IDEA Framework and talk about how we can work together to help you prepare for a future of maximum mission impact.

[CONTACT US](#)