# 10 Characteristics of Socially Responsible Organizations

## (And What Makes Them Important)

1. **MISSION:** *Communicates a clear message about its unique purpose for existing and how it benefits all youth, families, communities, and the world.*

   **Why It's Important to Social Responsibility:** Organizations can become overwhelmed with daily demands. Keeping a strong mission focus increases social impact because it gives clear direction, meaning, and power to everything organizations do. A socially responsible organization includes in its mission a commitment to increasing opportunity and equity for underserved populations.

2. **PARTNERSHIPS:** *Develops broad cross=sector initiatives with a wide range of organizations to create collective impact.*

   **Why It's Important to Social Responsibility:** The causes and solutions of social inequities today are typically beyond the scope of any single organization to address. Organizations that work in isolation limit their potential reach and impact. When organizations do coordinate and align their efforts with others, their social impact can grow exponentially.

3. **INCLUSION:** *Engages the people it seeks to serve in facilitating transformative change in a community.*

   **Why It's Important to Social Responsibility:** Organizations can intentionally or unintentionally include or exclude groups through the composition of their leadership and staff, the profiles of their typical members, their choice of services and products, how and where they communicate, the pictures on their walls, and the environment that they create. Becoming more inclusive can increase social impact by soliciting voice, participation, leadership, feedback, cultural inclusion, and innovations from all community groups.

**4. AUTHENTICITY:** *"Walks the talk" by ensuring that its words, actions, resources and relationships align with its vision, mission, and values.*

**Why It's Important to Social Responsibility:** Authenticity can increase social impact by giving organization the credibility and trust needed to work effectively with diverse communities.

**5. EMPATHY:** *Connects with and understands how other people see the world, experience it, and make meaning.*

**Why It's Important to Social Responsibility:** If you don't know what matters to your staff, community, beneficiaries, and supporters, it will be difficult to deliver effective services. Empathy can increase social impact by providing insights about how other people see the world, how they define their needs, and how they see your organization.

**6. EQUITY:** *Fosters social justice locally and globally by working to eliminate disparities and discrimination that limit peoples' opportunities.*

**Why It's Important to Social Responsibility:** When individuals and groups experience discrimination and social injustices, they are denied opportunities that may be essential to their development and ability to contribute to the larger society. A socially responsible organization develops creative ways to increase opportunity and access for those that might have previously been excluded from its products and services.

**7. SYSTEMS:** *Understands that long=term and sustainable change comes only from changing the systems that create and prolong social problems.*

**Why It's Important to Social Responsibility:** If we try to fix symptoms instead of systems, we will make little long-term progress. Systems thinking can increase social impact because it seeks to understand and change the deeper forces that create and perpetuate social problems.

**8. STRENGTHS:** *Honors and builds on the community's diverse talents, cultures, identities, worldviews, and histories.*

**Why It's Important to Social Responsibility**: Many intervention strategies address what needs to be "fixed." Focusing on strengths instead can increase social impact because it identifies and amplifies people's self confidence, motivation, and capacity to contribute. As Robert Greenleaf asks: "*Do those served grow as persons and become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become wise leaders?* "

**9. FAMILY:** *Strengthens the family's capacity to encourage the factors that are key to their children's positive development.*

**Why It's Important to Social Responsibility:** Programs that focus on youth can inadvertently undermine the role of families as the primary teacher of their children. Focusing on youth *and* families can increase social impact because it is families that are best positioned to produce a strong positive identity and outcomes for their own children.

**10. ACCOUNTABILITY:** *Uses common measures to evaluate the effectiveness of the work over time and are focused on both short= and long=term impact.*

**Why It's Important to Social Responsibility:** It is not enough for organizations to assess their success solely on people's perceptions. Focusing on more formal and ongoing qualitative and quantitative data can increase accountability, drive program improvement, and increase social impact.