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mission or money – what's more important?

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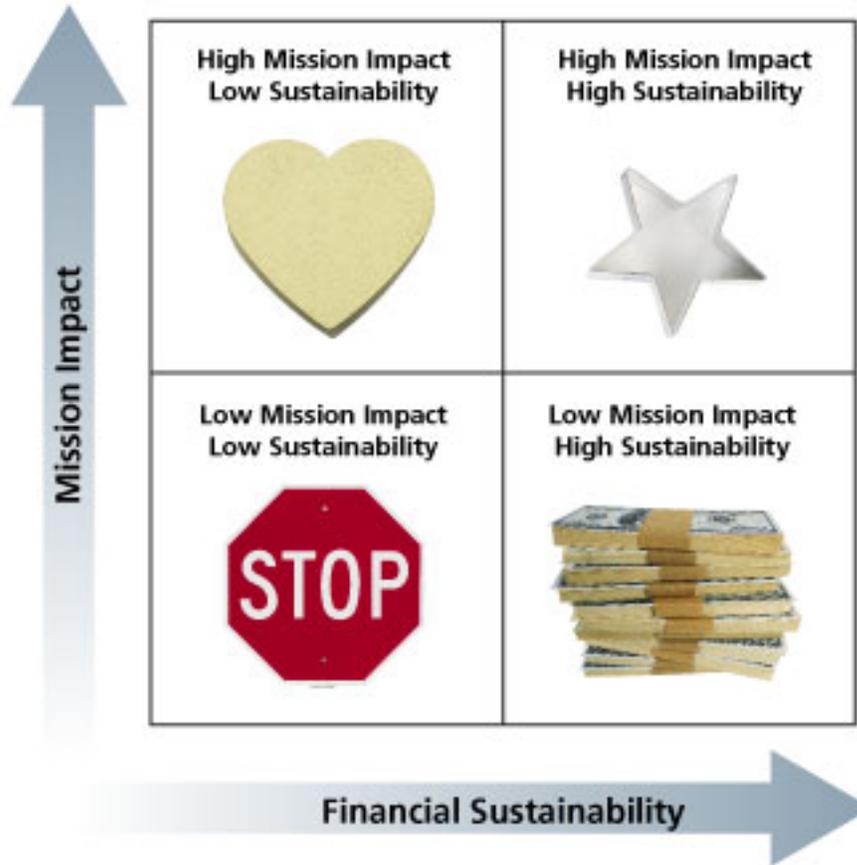
In this second post about strategic thinking inside the box, we want to focus on the issue of mission creep. That is, when nonprofits stray away from their original mission or objective. Although charities are set-up to try and achieve a particular mission, they often find that they have to tweak their core focus in order to get funding. The more tweaking and changing they do, the farther from their original mission they stray. Hence, mission creep.

For example, let's stay the (fictional) Stop the Defacing of Books charity was set up to, well, stop the defacing of books. But funder x only wants to pay for the charity's work if it will also stop the defacing of magazines. The charity has an existential dilemma: stick to the core mission and risk losing out on funding or accept mission creep in order to get funding?

Nonprofits and mission creep

There's no right answer. This is something that nonprofits must come to terms with on their own. But there is a helpful little strategic box (we wouldn't be consultants if we didn't use boxes!) that we wanted to share. It's called the Dual Bottom-Line Matrix. Sounds complex, but it's actually very simple:

Dual Bottom-Line Matrix



source: Blackbaud

Pretty much everyone would agree the star is good (high sustainability and high mission impact) and the stop sign is bad (low sustainability and low mission impact). So what is under debate is compromising mission for money or money for mission. If a nonprofit sticks unwaveringly to its mission then it risks going bust because there might be few or no funders willing to support what it does. On the other hand, chasing the money means that mission creep becomes a serious issue and a charity might find itself a long way from what it originally set out to do.

So, unless your charity is a star or a stop sign, the issue is about finding a happy medium between financial sustainability and mission impact. Applying this dual bottom-line matrix to your own organization is a helpful exercise in understanding your current and future strategic direction.