



**FREE RESOURCES
EXCERPTED FROM:**

IMPACT ROADMAP

by Alison T. McNeil

THE ART OF DESCRIBING YOUR IMPACT

Revised & Expanded Edition



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DEDICATION

For every artist, cultural worker, and creative leader who sustains community through imagination and care.

For those who balance vision with responsibility, and creativity with impact.

This toolkit is for you.

WITH GRATITUDE

To Mortensen Designs for the guide design, and to Dr. Tamara M. Walser, Professor of Evaluation & Inquiry Methods at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, for her thoughtful review and insights that helped strengthen this resource.

Dear Creative Leader,

For years, I've had the privilege of walking alongside arts and culture organizations as they worked to tell their stories — to their boards, to funders, to their communities, and sometimes even to themselves. And time after time, I've witnessed a truth: the work is powerful, but the language and tools to describe it often fail to capture its depth and breadth.

Too often, data feels cold. Reporting feels like a burden. The richness of community voices — the very heartbeat of your work — gets overshadowed by spreadsheets, deadlines, or funder requirements.

I created the *Impact Roadmap* because I believe you deserve a better way. One that doesn't just count people, but captures the fullness of their experiences. One that blends numbers with narratives. One that centers equity, culture, and voice — while still giving you the clarity and confidence to show the impact of your work.

This toolkit is not about proving your worth. You already bring immeasurable value every day through your creativity, resilience, and care. Instead, it's about describing your impact in ways that feel authentic to you, meaningful to your community, and credible to those who support your work.

Good data isn't about volume — it's about quality. This toolkit will help you focus on the kind of information that leads to useful insights, not just numbers for the sake of reporting.

My hope is that you return to this resource often — as a companion, a reminder, and a roadmap. May it give you clarity when you feel overwhelmed, encouragement when you feel under pressure, and courage to keep telling the full story of your impact.

This toolkit is part of The Creator's Well, a resource hub that supports artists, cultural leaders, and community-based organizations in building sustainable, wellness-centered practices.



With gratitude and in partnership,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alison T. Merif". The script is fluid and cursive.

Founder and Chief Creative Officer
McNeil Creative Enterprises & The Creator's Well

QUICK IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Discover Your Biggest Opportunity

Now let's go deeper. This assessment helps you evaluate how well your current practices are working and where your biggest opportunities for improvement lie. Rate your organization in each area below (1 = Never True, 3=Sometimes True, 5 = Always True). Only numbers 1-5 are permitted in the rating cell.

Assessment Area	Rating (1-5)
1. Setting Your Direction: We can clearly explain our program goals in ways that connect our mission to the outcomes we seek.	
2. From Stories to Systems: We have systems to gather both numbers and stories that reflect participant and community experiences.	
3. Turning Data Into Stories: We transform program data into stories that boards, funders, and community partners can easily grasp.	
4. Using What You Learn: We reflect on what the data shows, consider whose voices are present or missing, and use those insights to guide our next steps — from improving programs to enhancing our fundraising.	

Your Score: ____ / 20

How to Read Your Score

- **4–7: Building Your Foundation** - You're beginning an important journey. Focus on establishing a few core practices before trying to do everything at once.
- **8–11: Growing Your Practice** - You're building momentum. The next step is creating systems that make impact work more intentional and consistent.
- **12–15: Strengthening Your Systems** - You've developed strong habits. This toolkit will help you deepen your practice and communicate your impact more confidently.
- **16–20: Leading Through Learning** - You're using evaluation as a strategic asset. Continue refining your systems and sharing what you're learning.

Now that you know where you're starting, let's explore how the Impact Roadmap can help you take the next step.

Wherever You Start Is Exactly Where You Should Start

Your score isn't a grade.

It's a starting point.

The purpose of the Impact Roadmap isn't to tell you whether your organization is "good" or "bad" at evaluation.

It's to help you identify where your greatest opportunities for growth lie.

Every organization starts somewhere.

If your score is lower than you hoped, remember:

- Every strong evaluation practice began with someone asking better questions.
- Progress happens one step at a time.
- You don't need to implement everything at once.

Choose one practice.

Build confidence.

Then build the next.

What if we scored low because...

- ☐ We're still clarifying our mission or strategic direction.
- ☐ Our leadership team isn't fully aligned.
- ☐ We don't yet have the staff capacity.
- ☐ We're collecting information, but not using it consistently.
- ☐ We simply haven't had someone show us where to begin.

Whatever your number, it tells you the same two things: where your greatest opportunity lies, and which section of this roadmap to travel first.

CLARIFY YOUR IMPACT GOALS

Before you measure anything, get crystal clear on the change you're trying to create.

These goals should resonate with your team, board, community partners, and yes, funders too.



Impact-Ready Goals Worksheet

For each program or initiative, answer the four questions below:

1. What specific change are we creating?

Beyond general inspiration—what shifts in knowledge, behavior, skills, or circumstances will we help bring about?

Weak: “Build community.”

Strong: “Increase social connections among isolated seniors, reducing reported loneliness by 40%.”

In exactly whom do we create this change?

2. Be specific about demographics, circumstances, and current situation.

Weak: “Community members.”

Strong: “Spanish-speaking immigrants who have been in the U.S. less than five years.”

Need a conversation before completing this?

If your team isn't yet aligned around your mission, vision, values, or strategic priorities, use this worksheet as a discussion tool. You don't need perfect agreement before you begin, but you'll get the greatest value when the people leading the work share a common understanding of the change you're trying to create.

3. Over what realistic timeframe?

Match your timeline to the type of change you're creating.

Immediate (0–3 months): Skills, knowledge, attitudes

Short-term (3–12 months): Behavior change, initial outcomes

Long-term (1+ years): Sustained change, systemic impact

4. How will we show this change occurred?

Combine numbers with stories.

Numbers: percentages, increases, participation rates

Stories: testimonials, case studies, photos, or other visual documentation

Exercise – Goal Translation

Choose your most important program or initiative.

Answer the four essential questions above.

Write three versions of your goal:

- **Mission Version** – language for your team and community
- **Stakeholder Version** – for funders, board members, partners, or civic leaders
- **Elevator Pitch Version** – 30 seconds or less

Test your stakeholder version:

“If we achieved this goal, would our team, community partners, and funders clearly understand the difference we made?”

Quick Check

- ☐ Specifies who changes
- ☐ Describes what changes
- ☐ Includes how we'll measure change
- ☐ Connects authentically to our mission
- ☐ Inspires confidence in funders, partners, and our own team

TEMPLATE 2

Five-Question Post-Program Survey

Pairs with: From Stories to Systems. Give immediately after a positive program moment. Five questions, five minutes — resist adding a sixth

1. Compared to when you started, how confident do you feel about

_____ ?

Much less confident • Less • About the same • More • Much more confident

2. What's one thing you learned or experienced here that you'll use outside this program?

3. Describe a moment during the program when you felt proud of your progress.

4. Who did you connect with through this program that you'd like to stay in touch with, and what made that connection meaningful?

5. What's one thing we could do to make this program better for the next group?

Optional: May we contact you to hear more about your experience?

☐ Yes — name & email: _____

☐ No thanks

TEMPLATE 2 SUPPORT RESOURCE

Likert Scale Response Anchors

These scales can be used to adjust the Five-Question Program Response Survey questions to meet your specific needs.

Level of Acceptability

- 1 – Totally unacceptable
- 2 – Unacceptable
- 3 – Slightly unacceptable
- 4 – Neutral
- 5 – Slightly acceptable
- 6 – Acceptable
- 7 – Perfectly Acceptable

Level of Appropriateness

- 1 – Absolutely inappropriate
- 2 – Inappropriate
- 3 – Slightly inappropriate
- 4 – Neutral
- 5 – Slightly appropriate
- 6 – Appropriate
- 7 – Absolutely appropriate

Level of Importance

- 1 – Not at all important
- 2 – Low importance
- 3 – Slightly important
- 4 – Neutral
- 5 – Moderately important
- 6 – Very important
- 7 – Extremely important

Level of Agreement

- 1 – Strongly disagree
- 2 – Disagree
- 3 – Somewhat disagree
- 4 – Neither agree or disagree
- 5 – Somewhat agree
- 6 – Agree
- 7 – Strongly agree

Knowledge of Action

- 1 – Never true
- 2 – Rarely true
- 3 – Sometimes but infrequently true
- 4 – Neutral
- 5 – Sometimes true
- 6 – Usually true
- 7 – Always true

Level of Difficulty

- 1 – Very difficult
- 2 – Difficult
- 3 – Neutral
- 4 – Easy
- 5 – Very easy

Reflect Me

- 1 – Very untrue of me
- 2 – Untrue of me
- 3 – Somewhat untrue of me
- 4 – Neutral
- 5 – Somewhat true of me
- 6 – True of me
- 7 – Very true of me

My beliefs

- 1 – Very untrue of what I believe
- 2 – Untrue of what I believe
- 3 – Somewhat untrue of what I believe
- 4 – Neutral
- 5 – Somewhat true of what I believe
- 6 – True of what I believe
- 7 – Very true of what I believe

Priority

- 1 – Not a priority
- 2 – Low priority
- 3 – Somewhat priority
- 4 – Neutral
- 5 – Moderate Priority
- 6 – High priority
- 7 – Essential priority

Level of Concern

- 1 – not at all concerned
- 2 – Slightly concerned
- 3 – Somewhat concerned
- 4 – Moderately concerned
- 5 – Extremely concerned

Likelihood

- 1 – Extremely unlikely
- 2 – unlikely
- 3 – Neutral
- 4 – likely
- 5 – Extremely likely

Level of Satisfaction

- 1 – Not at all satisfied
- 2 – slightly satisfied
- 3 – moderately satisfied
- 4 – Very satisfied
- 5 – Extremely satisfied

Level of Consideration

- 1 – Would not consider
- 2 – Might or might not consider
- 3 – Definitely consider

Level of Support/Opposition

- 1 – Strongly oppose
- 2 – Somewhat oppose
- 3 – neutral
- 4 – Somewhat favor
- 5 – Strongly favor

Level of Likelihood

- 1 – Not probable
- 2 – Somewhat improbable
- 3 – Neutral
- 4 – Somewhat probable
- 5 – Very probable

Level of Agreement

- 1 – Strongly disagree
- 2 – Disagree
- 3 – Neither agree or disagree
- 4 – Agree
- 5 – Strongly agree

Level of Participation

- 1 – No, and not considered
- 2 – No, but considered
- 3 – Yes

Citation: Vagias, Wade M. (2006). "Likert-type scale response anchors. Clemson International Institute for Tourism & Research Development, Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management.Clemson University

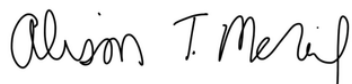
Carrying it Forward

As you've moved through this field guide, my hope is that you've seen new ways to describe your impact with clarity, confidence, and care. The Impact Roadmap is not about chasing numbers for their own sake — it's about aligning your data, stories, and strategies with the heart of your mission.

Remember: you don't have to do this all at once. Each step — collecting a single quote, tracking one new indicator, sharing one story at a board meeting — builds momentum. Over time, these small actions create a fuller picture of your work and its meaning. Your community already feels the difference you're making. This guide is here to help you capture that truth and carry it forward — so funders, partners, and future collaborators can see it too.

Thank you for letting this field guide be a companion in your journey. May it remind you that impact is not just measured — it's lived, shared, and celebrated.

With gratitude,



*Founder and Chief Creative Officer
McNeil Creative Enterprises & The Creator's Well*

GO DEEPER

This toolkit is designed to stand on its own. And some journeys go further, faster, with a guide.

If your team wants support putting the Impact Roadmap into practice, McNeil Creative Enterprises and The Creator's Well offer several ways to travel together:

- **Implementation Sessions** — facilitated working sessions that take your team through the toolkit's core exercises with your real programs and real data.
- **One-on-One Coaching** — focused coaching for leaders building their organization's first sustainable impact practice.
- **Strategic Accelerator** — a deeper cohort experience for organizations ready to move from good practices to lasting systems.
- **Funder & Cohort Partnerships** — foundations and intermediaries can license this toolkit for their grantees and pair it with facilitated implementation support.

Learn more or start a conversation: info@mcearts.com · mcearts.com

However you continue — with us or on your own — keep going. Your community already feels the difference you make. This work simply helps you show it.



“You already hold the power; this toolkit is just here to help you describe it with clarity.”

– Alison T. McNeil

Founder and Chief Creative Officer
McNeil Creative Enterprises & The Creator’s Well

About The Creator’s Well:

The Creator’s Well is a resource hub that supports artists, cultural leaders, and community-based organizations in building sustainable, wellness-centered practices. By translating lessons from consulting into practical tools like this toolkit, The Creator’s Well helps those shaping arts and culture align their work with both impact and wellbeing.