

## The Foraker Nonprofit Sustainability Model



To steward an organization means to not just know the right answer at the right time to move mission forward but to ask helpful questions that keep the team on the path toward success. The Foraker Nonprofit Sustainability Model is a tool for asking questions, and only you and your team know the answers. Unlike other definitions that offer a destination approach, we suggest that sustainability is about your organization's journey, not its destination.

The diagram above depicts a set of inter-related lenses that when used to view any topic will help determine the right next step.

We start with **focus**, which reflects your founding purpose and values. In a resilient nonprofit, these attributes don't change – they are absolute, almost sacred. **Focus** honors the passion of the founders and defines both the core purpose and the core values that drive and motivate the whole organization. Focus takes two forms. It anchors what the organization does and answers the fundamental question, "who are we?" At the same time, **focus** remains flexible – it helps us stay relevant and answers the question, "where are we going?" That direction is under continual review. As the external environment changes, **focus** adjusts so the organization moves in the right direction and has the greatest impact.

Together, the founding purpose and values, along with a clear direction, provide a **focus** that is both true to the founders' intent and relevant to today's community.

Moving from **focus**, the next lenses also are constant in their underlying principles while remaining flexible as each adapts to current conditions. Organizations that use the lenses as a way to view their actions become more resilient and are able to:

- **Focus** on founding principles, making strategic decisions, and looking ahead.
- Recruit and retain the **right board and CEO at the right time** to work together effectively as partners to move the mission forward.
- Seek and nurture strategic **partnerships** to maximize impact because no nonprofit can achieve mission alone.
- Assure sufficient **unrestricted funds** to take advantage of opportunities and handle emergencies. Every organization has a strength in how it generates unrestricted cash. Either it will be stronger in charitable fund development and dabble in earned income or vice versa. Importantly, the organization should know what drives its economic engine.

Using the lenses, you can begin to understand the dynamics of the sustainability journey. Then, and only then, is it time to develop **programs and services**. That's why they are presented at the far end of the diagram. Programs and services are flexible – they are not sacred activities. One simple way to understand this is, "what you do is not who you are." The strategic organization modifies programs and services, drops them, or adds new ones as it adjusts to the needs in its community – always influenced by looking through the first set of lenses.

For a fuller understanding of The Foraker Nonprofit Sustainability Model, check out our book **Focus on Sustainability: A Nonprofit's Journey** or visit our website where you will find short videos about each of the lenses.