

# Net Positive Principles

January 2019

## Notes on this Document

- This Document is intended to provide guidance on the principles and aspirations shaping net positive strategies.
- It was developed through the Net Positive Project. The Net Positive Project is facilitated by the following organizations. Interested parties are encouraged to contact the listed individuals
  - BSR ([dkorngold@bsr.org](mailto:dkorngold@bsr.org))
  - Forum for the Future ([Z.LeGrand@forumforthefuture.org](mailto:Z.LeGrand@forumforthefuture.org))
  - Greg Norris of the Sustainability and Health Initiative for Net Positive Enterprise (SHINE), an initiative at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health ([gnorris@mit.edu](mailto:gnorris@mit.edu))
- This document is not intended as a standard, certification, or basis for net positive claims.
- This document reflects the latest version of the Principles as of January 2019. The documents are subject to revision as the work of the group and its participants continues, and as the field evolves.

# What Were the Net Positive Principles Designed to Achieve?

The Net Positive Principles aim to enhance organizational sustainability strategies so that they reflected elevated ambition and collectively go beyond reducing harm to deliver positive outcomes for society and the environment.

The Principles will equip aspiring net positive organizations with:

- ◆ An accessible framework with four guiding principles that define the net positive ambition and any associated strategy
- ◆ Guidance on the shifts in mindsets, behaviors and outcomes within organizations that facilitate success on an organization's net positive journey
- ◆ A common language for raising ambition and inspiring collaboration among others in the net positive movement

Organizations can use the Principles to:

- ◆ Devise a net positive approach that goes beyond conventional sustainability strategy and is aligned with the latest thinking in the movement
- ◆ Assess their own activities and see how their current approach could evolve towards a net positive ambition
- ◆ Establish a communications tool to help explain the concept internally in their organizations and externally with interested stakeholders

# Four Principles Can Define a Net Positive Strategy

Net positive strategies aim to put more back into society, the environment, and the global economy than they take out.

## Material

### ***Focusing on what matters most***

Net positive strategies focus on an organization's greatest impacts on society and the environment as well as its largest areas of unique future potential. These are defined by internal and external stakeholders considering impacts along a company's full value chain. All material issues must be addressed to achieve net positive – thus a positive impact in one material issue cannot compensate for the negative impact or 'footprint' in another material area.

## Systemic

### ***Influencing change across entire systems***

Net positive strategies not only catalyse positive change across a company's value chain—from raw material extraction through the use and disposal of its products and services—but they influence wider social, environmental, and economic systems. This recognizes that a single organization is unlikely to create and sustain positive social and environmental outcomes on its own. Given the dynamism of these systems, the scope and boundaries of a net positive strategy must be continually reassessed to acknowledge and manage relevant effects, and to ensure greatest impact.

## Regenerative

### ***Creating long-term, sustained and absolute impact***

Net positive strategies revitalize the natural world, strengthen social communities, and improve individual well-being. They generate long-term beneficial impacts and do not cause irreversible losses. The positive impacts that are created in one material issue exceed existing negative impacts or 'footprints' without irreversible loss in other material areas. While net positive is a journey, and progress is recorded, absolute reductions or improvements matter most.

## Transparent

### ***Sharing progress openly and honestly***

Net positive strategies require action, progress, and measurement that are clear, credible, and easily accessible in communications. Attribution of all material impacts – both positive and negative – must be measurable and demonstrable, and independently verified where possible. Net positive information should be presented within clearly defined sustainability context and reporting boundaries, and should be disaggregated to show effects on relevant issues, stakeholders, ecosystems, etc.

In applying these principles, net positive strategies should consider the unique sustainability context related to specific issues, stakeholders, value chain partners, geographies, ecosystems, landscapes, and populations. Positive impacts in one area do not compensate for negative impacts or 'footprint' in another; rather all relevant effects should be acknowledged and managed in aspiring for net positive impact.



# The Principles Require a Shift in Mindset, Behaviors and Outcomes

	Mindset shifts	Behavior shifts	Outcome shifts
<b>Material</b>	<b>Prioritize impact and potential</b> Net positive is a journey, starting with an organization's most material issues. A company reaches the final milestone once all material issues generate positive benefits overall.	<b>Include partners</b> At every opportunity, organizations adopt an inclusive approach to strategy development and execution and define material areas through consultation with stakeholders.	<b>Integrate strategy</b> Focusing on areas of biggest impact and opportunity, a company inevitably must consider shifts to its core business or operating model.
<b>Systemic</b>	<b>Recognize interdependence</b> Organizations recognize their place within broader systems and that they cannot achieve net positive on their own.	<b>Collaborate widely</b> Organizations enter into transformative partnerships with stakeholders in their value chain, community and wider system.	<b>Create an enabling context</b> Organizations influence the system around them – including changing policy, business standards, consumer behaviors, community norms, etc. No lobbying contradicts net positive goals
<b>Transparent</b>	<b>Embrace open communication</b> Organizations are honest about the journey they are on. They continue to innovate and experiment, documenting the progress and the lessons learned.	<b>Ensure true and balanced reporting</b> Reporting on progress is honest, consistent, authentic, transparent, balanced and independently verified where possible. Boundaries and scope are clearly defined across the value chain.	<b>Demonstrate progress and absolute impact</b> Progress and absolute impacts on material issues is clearly demonstrable if not measurable via open communication. This includes reporting on both negative and positive impacts.
<b>Regenerative</b>	<b>Encourage experimentation</b> Net positive strategies need to foster a culture of taking risks, incubating new ideas, and scaling niche solutions.	<b>Ground evidence in science</b> Organizations use evidence-based methodologies to improve conditions in the natural world and society.	<b>Create long-term, positive impact</b> No aspect of a NP approach mistreats individuals, degrades society, or harms the environment, however, efforts to drive long term positive outcomes are approached with the same rigor as efforts to minimize footprint. This requires environmentally restorative, socially inclusive and locally empowering approaches that can be sustained beyond the work of any one company.

# Net Positive Project Participants

Since its inception, the NPP has benefited from participation and support by the following companies:




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