



WHAT IS IT AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

There are several definitions of a social entrepreneur. Put simply, it is an individual or group who works to meet a need that traditional structures have not met. Social entrepreneurs see problems that government, companies and nonprofits are not yet solving.

Social entrepreneurs are defined by their resourcefulness and their relentless pursuit of innovative solutions. They work to get to the root cause of complex problems. They challenge the status quo – rules, norms, practices, power dynamics, relationships and resource allocation. They connect dots by creatively collaborating and designing fresh solutions.

For example, Wangari Maathai, the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize, identified an unsolved issue in Kenya – poor families were

turning to natural resources to meet basic needs but in doing so, destroyed the environment around them. Furthermore, once the resources ran out, they would still be left in poverty. Maathai founded Green Belt Movement in 1977 to address both the environmental destruction and poverty in Kenya through an innovative solution – employing those experiencing poverty to plant trees so they could provide for their families without causing harm. The organization has grown to 30 countries, planting over 45 million trees in Kenya alone.¹

These entrepreneurial leaders draw upon the best thinking in both the business and nonprofit worlds to develop strategies that maximize their social impact. They operate in all kinds of organizations: large and small, new and old, religious and secular, nonprofit, for-profit and hybrid.

THE ANATOMY OF A SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR²



FIVE THINGS TO CONSIDER ABOUT SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP



1. We all have a role to play. While not everyone can or should become a social entrepreneur, we can all look at the issues that impact our world and support social entrepreneurs who are addressing those issues.



2. Social entrepreneurship is on the rise. While the term social entrepreneur is still fairly new, younger generations are identifying with this form of entrepreneurship more and more, in large part driven by greater civic engagement than older generations.



3. Challenge the status quo. In order to tackle the root causes of the issues that impact our world, social entrepreneurs must look at existing rules, norms and practices, and design new solutions to create meaningful change.



4. Innovation doesn't mean reinventing the wheel. Being innovative doesn't always mean coming up with a new idea. Sometimes innovation means taking a solution that's "obvious" in one context and applying it to another.³



5. Collaboration is key. The appeal of being the "hero" can be great, but true innovation and impact comes when there's collaboration. Effective social entrepreneurs leverage an ecosystem of support, whether that be from funders or other partners, to meet their goals.

¹ [Wangari Maathai Biography](#)

² [The Anatomy of a Social Entrepreneur](#)

³ [Medium: Obvious Ideas](#)



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Explore what it takes to be a social entrepreneur with [Social Entrepreneurship 101](#)



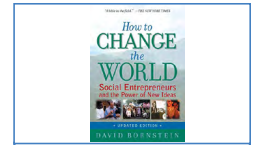
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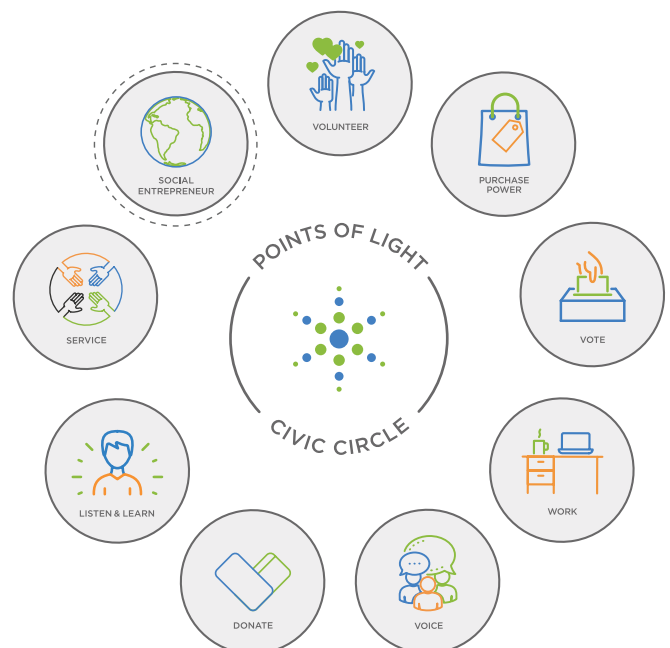
THINK ABOUT IT...



- Are there any social entrepreneurs you know or have supported? How were they seeking to address the root cause(s) of an issue?
- What are some of the issues or causes you would like to see improved in your own community or globally?
- What are the barriers to making these improvements? Do you understand the root causes of these barriers and, if not, how can you learn more about them?
- How can social entrepreneurs support the causes you care about?
- How would you influence others to support social entrepreneurs?

WHAT NOW? WHAT NEXT?

- Learn about the systems in place that impact the issues or causes you care about. What role can you play in addressing these systemic issues?
- Do your homework and look for social entrepreneurs who are tackling the issues you care about, and explore how you can support them by sharing your time, money, talent, voice and more.
- Social Entrepreneur is just one activity in the Points of Light Civic Circle that you can use to lead and lend support to causes you care about. To learn more, visit <https://pointsoflight.org/civicle/>.



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