Elevating the Impact Management Profession

Insights and Collaborative Opportunities from the 2026 Professionals in IMM Survey

Authored by Sienna Jackson and Sara Olsen, Social Value US | October 2026

Executive Summary

Across the United States, a dedicated workforce of researchers, practitioners, and organizations is working to change the way society accounts for value. United by a shared mission to maximize the positive effects of institutional activities and establish rigorous standards for social value data, the Impact Measurement and Management (IMM) profession has made tremendous strides over the last decade.

Yet, as the field matures, it has reached a critical inflection point. To better understand the lived experiences, friction points, and needs of practitioners on the ground, Social Value United States (SV US) conducted the **2026 Professionals in IMM Survey**.

The findings illuminate a highly educated, deeply experienced workforce that is frequently navigating a fragmented and structurally ill-defined landscape. Practitioners report significant career friction, with IMM often treated as a back-office compliance function rather than a driver of strategic leadership. SV US believes these challenges can be addressed in part through greater collaboration among individuals and organizations in the impact management ecosystem.

Methodology & Scope

This analysis is based on 30 responses to the 2026 IMM Professionals Survey, collected between February and October 2026.

The survey was promoted via LinkedIn and sent to leadership of several organizations, including Social Value US, Impact Frontiers, and the American Evaluation Association's Social Finance Topical Interest Group, who distributed it to their members and contacts. Please contact Sienna Jackson, sienna@zorancreativestrategy.com, if you would like a copy of the survey.

- **Data Exclusions:** Of 32 initial submissions, two were excluded due to email addresses that appeared to be fake and near-duplicate text. A cluster of seven submissions received close to the same time on April 10 was flagged for review and deemed valid. These submissions were included in the primary dataset (n=30); sensitivity checks excluding them (n=23) showed they did not substantively change the findings.
- **Confidentiality:** The identity and personally identifiable information of all respondents have been strictly protected during analysis.

> **Analytical Limitation:** As a small, self-selected sample, this data is directional rather than statistically representative. It serves as an indicator of trends and a vital starting point for broader sector dialogue.

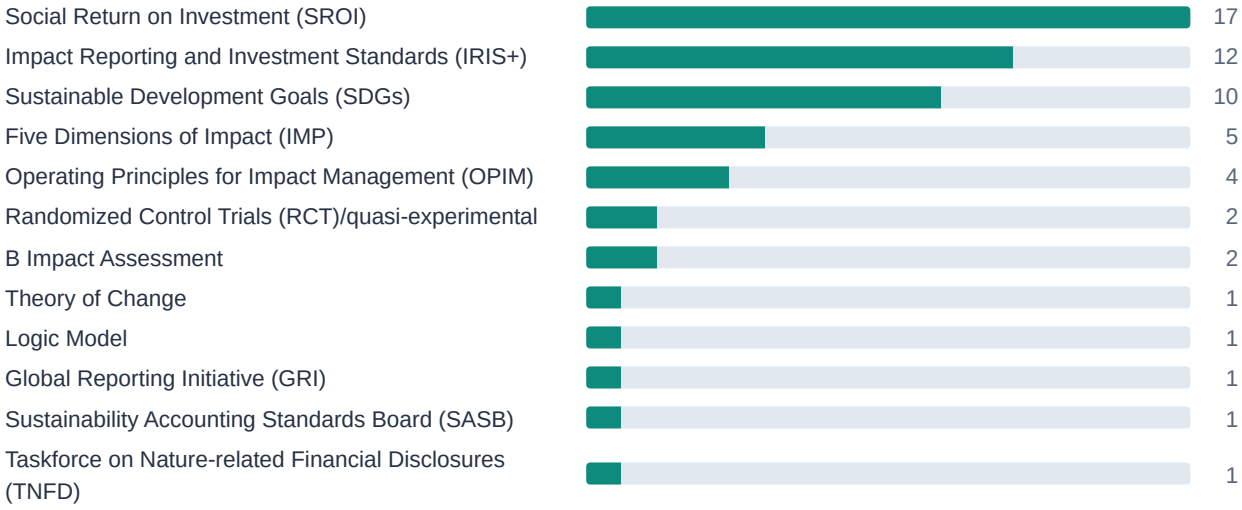
Current State of the Profession

Survey respondents were committed, mid-career professionals charting their own courses in a field that lacks standardized career ladders.

- **Demographics & Experience:** The average respondent is 43 years old with a median of 15 years of relevant experience. The workforce is highly educated (73% hold a master's degree or doctorate). The sample leans female (60%) and White (73%).
- **Compensation Disparities:** The median compensation band is $100,000–$124,999. However, directional gender disparity is present: no men reported earning below $75,000 while four women did, and men were concentrated at the highest reported bands.
- **Tooling Fragmentation:** Dedicated impact management software remains the exception; most practitioners rely on general-purpose tools like Excel and Salesforce.

The most widely known frameworks among respondents are Social Return on Investment (SROI), Impact Reporting and Investment Standards (IRIS+), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Five Dimensions of Impact from the Impact Management Project (IMP) and the Operating Principles for Impact Management (OPIM) were each mentioned by four to five respondents.

Most Familiar Frameworks



n = 23. One response "5Ds" is included in the tally for 5 Dimensions of Impact.

Ecosystem Challenges

Through thematic coding of open-ended responses, five recurring pain points emerged that structurally define the current professional landscape:

- **Understaffing & Capacity:** Organizations often commit to impact management in principle but fail to resource it in practice, leaving practitioners overwhelmed.
- **Limited Strategic Influence:** IMM professionals want a formal seat at the decision-making table (e.g., investment committees) rather than being relegated to post-hoc reporting.
- **Underdeveloped Career Pathways:** Job satisfaction is lowest among early-career professionals (4.75 out of 7), who lack structured pipelines for mentorship and advancement.
- **The Recognition Gap:** Job satisfaction is tightly linked to labor type. Those performing strategic, "promotable" work scored 6.11/7, while those doing administrative, "non-promotable" work scored 5.00/7.
- **Field Fragmentation:** Overlapping standards and duplicated terminology result in repeated reinvention of the wheel.

A Call to Action: Ecosystem Collaboration

These challenges are associated with lower job satisfaction and can hinder systemic change. However, SV US believes they present clear opportunities for collective, cross-network action:

1. Harmonize Field Standards

Building on widely recognized frameworks like SROI, IRIS+, and the SDGs, the sector should promote existing and/or co-develop and disseminate high-integrity, interoperable standards that reduce practitioner fatigue.

2. Develop Shared Career Infrastructure

Cross-organizational mentorship programs and visible, globally recognized credentialing ladders will provide the structural support early-career professionals clearly need.

3. Empower Practitioners with Business Cases

Understaffing is a challenge. The sector should collaborate on standardizing well-contextualized benchmarks, such as time to outcome, cost to produce, and stakeholder value. These would help organizations see their strengths and investment priorities. Equipping practitioners with data that proves IMM's ROI helps move the function from administration to leadership.

4. Strengthen Connective Tissue Across Networks

Practitioners belong to multiple groups, including the American Evaluation Association (AEA), the Global Impact Investing Network (GIIN), Toniic, and Impact Frontiers. Professional organizations should serve as hubs through joint programming and shared referral pathways.

5. Address the Tooling & AI Gap

The ecosystem should provide curated tool guidance, shared template libraries, and urgent, practitioner-facing guidance on navigating the ethical and privacy implications of artificial intelligence.

6. Commit to Workforce Diversity

Actively diversifying the talent pipeline—and ensuring institutional decisions prioritize historically underrepresented voices—should be a shared, long-term capacity priority for the entire field.

Conclusion

The 2026 Professionals in IMM Survey suggests that U.S. impact practitioners are deeply committed to their work, but they require a robust, cohesive professional infrastructure to fully realize their potential.

At Social Value US, our core thesis is that **through collaboration, we can collectively improve the impact feedback loop to create a better world**. We invite our peers, partner organizations, and practitioners across the ecosystem to join us in elevating this vital profession.