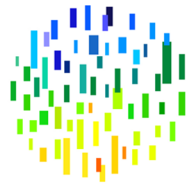## Research Brief #1: What are Handprints?

shine
Sustainability and Health
Initiative for NetPositive Enterprise

Handprints are changes, relative to business as usual, measured with footprint metrics.
To understand their role and importance we need to start by understanding footprints.

What is a Footprint?

A **footprint** is a metric used to represent an amount of environmental or social impact. Footprint metrics usually address things we want to reduce like emissions of pollutants or consumption of resources, so "less is better." There are separate footprint metrics to address different topics or "**areas of concern**." [i]

Something important has been missing from the whole footprint-reduction framework: **people and organizations can also *do good* in relation to these areas of concern.** We can and should continue to reduce the harm – the footprints -- that we cause; but more than that, we can actually be **forces for good** in relation to these areas of concern. You can do more good than harm in the world, and become "net positive." **Net Positive means** "giving more than you take" or "putting back more to society and the environment than you take out." We use footprints to measure our taking. And we use a new metric, handprints, to measure our giving in relation to these same areas of concern.

> **Handprints are changes, relative to business as usual, measured with footprint[1] metrics.**

What are handprints?

Handprints are changes, relative to business as usual, measured with footprint metrics. Handprints are a "more is better" kind of thing: positive handprints represent progress in relation to the area of concern. You create a positive handprint when you cause a positive change in relation to an area of concern. That positive change can happen **anywhere** on the planet; it doesn't matter whose footprint(s) the changes might reduce.

In the traditional footprint-reduction frame, we just worry about cleaning up the messes that we've made, our footprints. But with the handprint-creation frame, we expand our potential scope for action to include the whole globe! And in doing this, we make something wonderful and inspiring possible: the potential to be net positive, net beneficial.

Here's an example. We all need energy to survive -- people and companies alike. With energy efficiency, we can reduce our energy consumption, and all the related footprints. That's good. With handprinting, we can also help other people and organizations increase *their* energy

efficiency. You might buy LED bulbs for your friends; if you do, you'll be reducing their footprints… and growing your handprint!

Handprint creation is an Expansion, not an Alternative, to Footprint Reduction

Now, handprints aren't about "greenwashing" or trying to "change the subject" to only focus on positive impacts. First, handprint creation is done **in addition** to footprint reduction, not instead of it. We compare our handprints to our footprints, and we expand our efforts so that we are still shrinking our footprints while also growing our handprints. Secondly, your handprint includes **all** change that you cause that measurable with footprint metrics – not just the positive changes that you cause. If your company somehow promotes more wasteful energy use by others, this would be a negative handprint. When we start considering our handprints, we recognize that we have more power, and more responsibility. **We expand the scope of influence for which we are accountable**.

Handprints are comprehensive: they capture **all** change that you cause, both inside and outside your footprint. This means that **reductions to your footprint are a subset of your handprint**, as shown in the simple figure below.
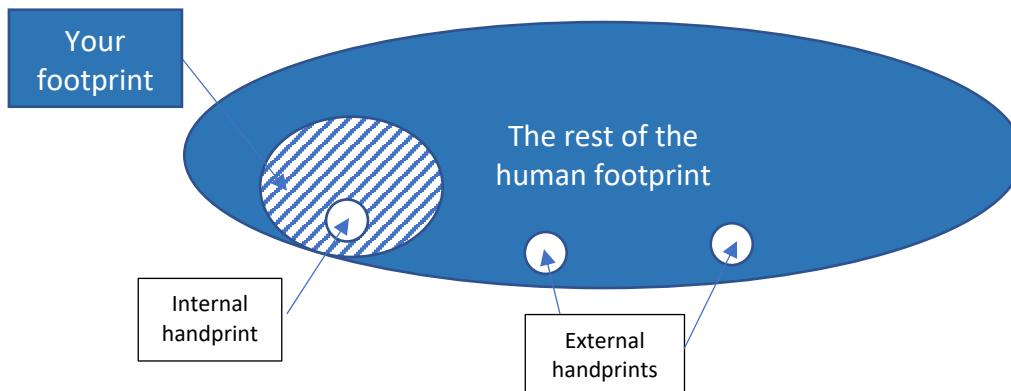
Reductions to your footprint are called **internal handprints** because they occur inside (and reduce) your footprint. Positive changes that occur outside your footprint are called **external handprints**. These may be reductions to some other actor's footprint, or they may be positive changes that aren't reductions to any footprint. Internal and external handprints are equally valuable at enabling us to become Net Positive or net beneficial for the world. Who wouldn't want to be Net Positive!? And who wouldn't want others to be?!

Literature
G. Norris, J. Burek, E. Moore, R. Kirchain, J. Gregory. Sustainability Health Initiative for NetPositive Enterprise handprint methodological framework. Int J Life Cycle Assess (2021). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11367-021-01874-5

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[i] The ISO 14044 international standard for life cycle assessment (LCA) defines a footprint as "metric(s) used to report life cycle assessment results addressing an area of concern" where an area of concern is an "environmental subject defined by the interest of society."