Community Wealth Partners
A Share Our Strength Organization

Where to Start: Setting a Bold Goal

A field guide for setting your bold goal—the first step in pushing beyond incremental progress toward transformational change.

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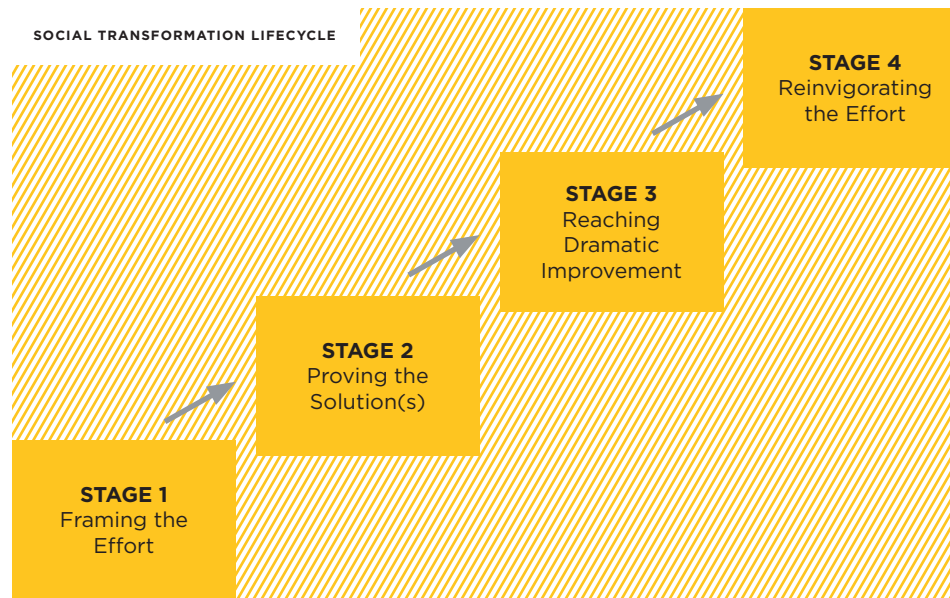WEB www.communitywealth.com

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1. Introduction

At Community Wealth Partners we are focused on one powerful question: Why do some social change efforts achieve transformational results while others only make incremental progress?

Drawing on lessons from our client work and in-depth research on efforts ranging from the anti-malaria and anti-tobacco movements to the designated driver campaign and the reduction in crime in New York City in the '90s, we have developed a set of insights about what it takes to solve social problems at the magnitude they exist. We've also identified four broad stages along which transformational efforts generally evolve, recognizing that social change doesn't happen in a linear fashion (See Social Transformation Lifecycle on page 8.)

As we have examined how transformational change agents define success for their efforts, we have found that they approach this question differently than many of their social sector peers. They push beyond compelling but often ambiguous vision and mission statements and instead define success with bold goals. Such goals lead to decisions that propel change agents on a different trajectory, which ultimately leads to greater impact, faster.

SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION LIFECYCLE

STAGE 4
Reinvigorating
the Effort

STAGE 3
Reaching
Dramatic
Improvement

STAGE 2
Proving the
Solution(s)

STAGE 1
Framing the
Effort

"Nonprofit organizations would be well served to step back from the day-to-day operations and ask themselves what success means, how will they know when they have accomplished their mission, and how will they measure it along the way. It sounds like common sense, but almost no one does it, in part because it's so hard to do. But if you answer those questions with precision and clarity, and articulate the goal you hope to achieve, everything else falls into place."

BILLY SHORE
Founder of Share Our Strength and Community Wealth Partners

CASE STUDY

Share Our Strength

Share Our Strength has pivoted from a broad-based anti-hunger orientation to launching the *No Kid Hungry* campaign with the bold goal to end childhood hunger in America by 2015. This shift required the organization to adopt a different strategy, evolve its culture, cultivate new skills and expertise, and pursue alternate forms of funding. Setting this goal ushered in a new sense of urgency, excitement and accountability within the organization and among stakeholders.

Since setting its goal, Share Our Strength has grown from a $13 million organization to one with a budget over $40 million, the organization's staff size has doubled from 60 to over 140, and more than 400,000 people have taken the *No Kid Hungry* pledge. Most importantly, they have begun to see population-level progress. Since 2011, Share Our Strength and its partners have helped connect children across the country to more than 28 million additional school breakfasts and 6 million additional summer meals. In Maryland, a state of primary focus, participation in school breakfast has increased by more than 8% and participation in the supplemental nutrition assistance program (SNAP) has increased by more than 22%.

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2. Why set a bold goal?

Many organizations and collaboratives find that vision and mission statements provide a general orientation but do not help them make strategic decisions, prioritize among opportunities or measure success. A bold goal need not replace a vision and mission statement, but it should closely align with them while adding a layer of focus and specificity.

For example, City Year's mission reflects its founding ideals of building a stronger country by harnessing the power of young people through service while the organization's bold goal describes the concrete, population-level impact City Year seeks to achieve:

MISSION	BOLD GOAL
To build democracy through citizen service, civic leadership and social entrepreneurship.	By 2023, at least 80% of students in schools where City Year serves will reach the 10th grade on time and on track each year. City Year will reach 50% of off-track students in the cities that account for 2/3 of the nation's urban dropouts."

Ultimately, setting a bold goal can lead to a number of key benefits. We have seen bold goals:

- Introduce a sense of urgency
- Align, inspire and motivate internal and external stakeholders (e.g., staff, board, volunteers, partners, advocates, funders)
- Provide a clear bottom line against which progress can be measured
- Create a lens for focused decision-making and prioritization
- Clarify the type and scale of resources required, leading to growth in resources
- Promote new types of purposeful collaboration

Research by others in the social sector has corroborated the value of setting bold goals. Independent Sector found that the most successful advocacy efforts identify "specific, ambitious long-term outcomes" and sustain focus on these outcomes over many years.[1] Similarly, the Case Foundation engaged in research that suggests that the "most significant cultural transformations" occur when leaders set "big, hairy, audacious goals" to direct their efforts.[2]

LINKS   [1] Aviv, Diana, et al. *Beyond the Cause: The Art and Science of Advocacy.* Washington, DC: Independent Sector, 2012.

[2] Gibson, Cynthia, and Brad Rourke. *To Be Fearless.* The Case Foundation, May 2012. This builds on the work of Collins, Jim. *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap… and Others Don't.* New York: HarperCollins, 2001

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

1. The beliefs, values and long-term direction that guide our work.

2. The compelling and concrete result to which we hold ourselves accountable.

3. The high-level plan and theory illustrating how our actions will realize our long term goal.

4. The actions we take to execute our strategy and how we sustain & improve our efforts in the process.

Vision & Mission

Goal

Strategy

Action Plan & Business Model

WISDOM

"Before our goal, all we could say was 'more of a good thing is probably better.' Having our goal allows us to talk specifically about what our growth will mean for national educational outcomes. And we know that we need to strengthen our impact through strategic growth: today we work with 150,000 students everyday; to accomplish our goal we must be working with 1 million students in elementary through high school."

MICHAEL BROWN
Co-Founder and CEO of City Year

3. Is a bold goal right for you?

Any organization or collaborative can set a goal that pushes its staff and stakeholders to strive for bigger and better results. But not all groups can or should set the type of goals discussed here: goals aimed at lasting, significant impact at the population level.

Questions to Explore

1 Does your group exhibit the qualities listed to the right?

2 Should you set a bold goal?

3 Where do your efforts fit within the ecosystem of other, overlapping efforts?

4 Will your assets allow you to pursue comprehensive, systemic solutions?

5 Are market conditions such that stakeholders will be excited to join this effort?

6 What makes now the right time?

Issues such as hunger and homelessness are multi-faceted, complex problems that require sophisticated and systemic solutions. Tackling such problems at the magnitude they exist requires a willingness and ability to pursue a diversity of strategies, spanning direct service, advocacy and policy, behavior and norm change, and beyond.

Efforts with bold goals must be well-positioned to attract others whose complementary assets and competencies will be necessary to complete the full strategic picture. An honest assessment of a group's role within the greater ecosystem can help determine whether it should set a bold goal to mobilize others, partner with others to establish a collective goal, or join an existing effort that has already established such a goal.

Groups that are best positioned to pursue a bold goal exhibit a few critical qualities:

UNWILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT THE STATUS QUO
The ambition to achieve social transformation often arises from deep frustration with the status quo. A bold goal can turn this frustration into a catalytic spark.

LONG-TERM ORIENTATION
Setting a bold goal is an exercise in establishing a clear focus and committing to stick with it over the long term. Solutions evolve over time, but a group's resolve to achieve the goal stays constant.

HONESTY AND AUTHENTICITY
Successful pursuit of a bold goal requires a group to be honest about its capabilities, limitations and progress. It must be able to authentically engage a diversity of stakeholders, encouraging dissent and tough questions along the way.

COMFORT WITH ACCOUNTABILITY
Setting a bold goal invites others to judge progress. This can be a positive motivator for those ready for such scrutiny, but external pressure can cripple those fearful of such transparency and accountability.

READINESS FOR RESISTANCE, FAILURE AND LEARNING
Setting a bold goal requires making decisions today without having the complete answer; therefore, experimentation and failure are to be expected. There will be critics and there will be those who don't believe that the goal can be accomplished. Groups that are successful have an eager appetite for leveraging disappointment, setback, and criticism to fuel forward movement.

A POSITION OF STRENGTH
Groups struggling with finances or battling significant reputational setbacks likely cannot sustain the messy and grueling process of setting a bold goal and confronting its implications. Acting from a solid foundation lends credence to the believability of a bold goal and inspires confidence among critical stakeholders.

CASE STUDY

City Year

Over its first two decades, City Year helped catapult community service to the national stage, deploying its corps to a variety of service projects in multiple fields and inspiring the founding of AmeriCorps. But, City Year wanted to be able to measure and aggregate clear, consistent impact. In the mid-2000s, after recognizing that its core asset (young volunteers) could power the implementation of proven education reforms and that there was an increasing demand from schools, City Year began to shift toward a focus on serving in schools.

As City Year's leadership charted its education strategy, they identified a specific problem to target: the nation's dropout crisis. Incorporating academic research and internal metrics, City Year mapped out a long-term impact strategy pointed towards a bold goal: "By 2023, at least 80% of students in schools where City Year serves will reach the 10th grade on time and on track each year. City Year will reach 50% of off-track students in the cities that account for 2/3 of the nation's urban dropouts."

Setting this goal has clarified priorities across the organization, providing a clear guide for questions like where to grow and how to assess progress. City Year is seeing promising results across its network: 84% of students in grades 3-5 improved on literacy assessments and 46% of students in grades 6-9 improved their attendance (2012-2013).

4. What makes a strong bold goal?

1. Strong bold goals are inspiring and motivating.

A strong goal captures the hearts, souls and imaginations of diverse stakeholders. Such goals serve as a rallying cry: "Our work is not done here until…." But they are not wistful dreams. They inspire action and forward momentum, reflecting a commitment to make progress today.

Gathering input from a range of stakeholders in developing a bold goal can improve the likelihood that it will inspire and motivate those whose engagement is critical to success. We recommend engaging individuals from within and outside of an organization or collaborative, including stakeholders with a diversity of perspectives (including those who effect and are affected by the social problem) and with different orientations (including champions and skeptics).

Deep stakeholder engagement can help illuminate the direction for a goal, but finalizing a goal generally does not emerge through a consensus process. It often requires a leader or leadership team to step up and finalize the goal.

Strong Goal Examples

Amazon.com
Any book. In your hands. In sixty seconds or less.

The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading
By 2020 a dozen states or more will increase by at least 100% the number of low-income children reading proficiently at the end of third grade.

Malaria No More
End malaria deaths in Africa by 2015.

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Reverse the childhood obesity epidemic in America by 2015.

2. Strong bold goals retain believability.

A goal that is too bold may be dismissed as outlandish, resulting in a level of engagement lower than that necessary to achieve it. A goal that is too believable will not inspire or energize stakeholders, similarly resulting in a low level of engagement. It's about finding the right balance of boldness and believability.

We push our partners to reach beyond that for which they are directly responsible. Some groups resist setting a goal at this level because they fear the goal itself will not be immediately believable to others. It's important to acknowledge that a goal's believability often is not inherent in the goal itself but instead arises from a data-informed, logical strategy that provides the high-level plan for how a group will realize the goal.

In finding the appropriate balance, consider three spheres:

SPHERES OF ACCOUNTABILITY

1. **RESPONSIBLE:**
   What outcomes are you directly responsible for?

2. **INFLUENCE:**
   What outcomes do you influence through partnerships, advocacy or thought leadership?

   What outcomes do you influence through the ripple effects of your own programs?

3. **CONCERNED & CONSULTED:**
   What outcomes, though achieved by others, are you concerned and consulted about?

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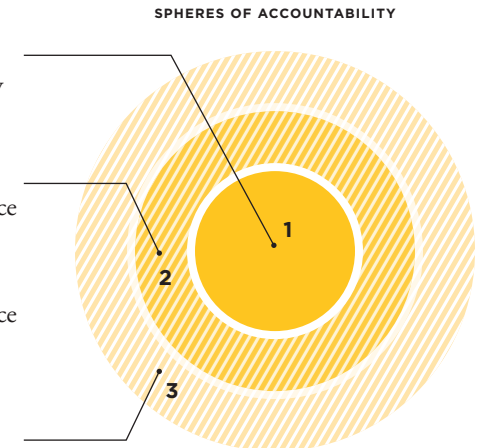
4. What makes a strong bold goal? (*cont.*)

3. Strong bold goals are concrete, establishing clear boundaries.

Questions to Explore
In considering options for a bold goal, ask yourself the following questions:

1 Is the goal bold enough to inspire and motivate key stakeholders?

2 Does the goal retain an element of believability?

3 Is the goal concrete, establishing clear boundaries?

A strong goal is articulated in such a way that any observer could judge whether or not it has been achieved. This means avoiding jargon as much as possible and ensuring a clear definition is agreed upon for each material idea. Share Our Strength's goal, which is to end childhood hunger in America by 2015, seems quite concrete, but upon setting this goal the organization's leadership quickly realized that interpretations across stakeholders differed wildly. The leadership consequently engaged in a painstaking and sometimes contentious process of developing a clear definition for each substantive part of the goal, answering key questions: What constitutes hunger? What ages are included in childhood?

To establish a goal that is appropriately concrete, establish clear boundaries around aspects such as:

- The breadth and/or geographic region of focus
- The population of focus
- The change that will occur for the population
- The timeframe in which the change will occur

In defining what ultimate success looks like, there will always be a few critical aspects along which stakeholders have differing opinions or interpretations. These are the areas to focus on clarifying within the goal.

Breadth	Population	Result	TImeframe
In Communities Where Acme Exists...	...All Youth...	...Graduate High School On-Track...	...By 2020.
For Students In The Schools Where Acme Works...	...All Students Who Are On-Track In 3rd Grade...	...Graduate High School...	...By 2030.
Among Acme's Own Students...	...80% Of Students Who Are On-Track In Pre-K...	...Start 8th Grade On-Track...	...By 2050.

BOLD

BELIEVABLE

CASE STUDY

Lumina Foundation

In the mid-2000s, Lumina Foundation began asking itself: "What does success look like?" Lumina prided itself on a mission-driven approach, but found that its mission—to expand access and success in education beyond high school—rarely provided decisive direction. As the Foundation ruminated, the staff discovered compelling and relevant data: the U.S. was falling behind other countries in post-secondary educational attainment. Pairing this with research showing that 65% of jobs will require such credentials by 2020, the Foundation arrived at Goal 2025: "Increase the proportion of Americans with high-quality college degrees, certificates or other credentials to 60% by 2025."

After setting Goal 2025, the Foundation found that many long-term struggles about direction and prioritization dissipated. Everything was seen and understood in the context of the goal. Outside the Foundation, the clarity and rationale of the goal have inspired action: 38 states have adopted some form of attainment goal and there has been increased interest in evidence-based policies and programs that can get us collectively closer to Goal 2025. At the end of the day, the Foundation is holding itself accountable to the goal itself: since 2008, the percentage of working-age adults with at least an associate degree has steadily risen from 37.9% in 2008 to 38.7% in 2011.

5. Final thoughts

There are a multitude of reasons not to set a bold goal:

1. Others have been successful without one
2. The process of setting and sticking with your goal will be hard and messy
3. Your goal will invite accountability and external assessment
4. Your goal will require admitting that you cannot make progress alone
5. You will not succeed without failing, and then failing again

But for many change agents who have defined success concretely by setting a bold goal, it has made all the difference. They have found the courage to aim for the harder-to-achieve, long-term outcomes that will solve social problems. And they have proven that everything is impossible until it isn't.

About Us

At Community Wealth Partners we dream of a world in which all people thrive. To realize this dream, we help change agents solve social problems at the magnitude they exist.

For more than 15 years we've helped diverse, inspiring change agents make lasting progress in their organizations and communities. Working side by side we reimagine what's possible and promote new ways of thinking. Through this spirit of intense partnership, we help change agents accelerate the pace of change and carry their dream forward.

As a Share Our Strength organization, we bring the successful practices of one of the nation's leading anti-hunger, anti-poverty organizations to hundreds of change agents nationwide.

WISDOM

"We must find the courage to aim for the harder-to-achieve long-term outcomes that will solve social problems. Good is not good enough when people are suffering. And, history has shown us—whether dramatically reducing tobacco use, alcohol-related traffic fatalities, or deaths from malaria—that everything is impossible until it isn't."

WHEN GOOD IS NOT GOOD ENOUGH
Stanford Social Innovation Review, Fall 2013

OUR MANIFESTO

Together, we share a vision.

We dream of a world in which all people thrive.

We strive to solve problems at the magnitude they exist.

We seek ways to make it happen.

We get impatient, sometimes.

We get discouraged, occasionally.

We quietly fear our actions won't be enough to get us there.

But we don't give up.

We keep going.

Because we didn't get into this business because it was easy.

We did it because the dream is worth realizing.

And when the dream asks more of us, we have to be ready to give it.

Be unreasonable.

Try everything.

Explore new avenues.

Find new allies.

Act boldly.

And when the world pushes back,

Dream Forward.

dream forward

Social Transformation Lifecycle

A tool to help you ask the powerful questions necessary for gauging and advancing your progress toward transformational change.

At Community Wealth Partners we are focused on one powerful question: Why do some social change efforts achieve transformational results while others only make incremental progress? Drawing on lessons from our client work and in-depth research on efforts that have tackled social problems at the magnitude they exist, we've identified four broad stages along which transformational efforts generally evolve.

Acknowledging that all such efforts are unique and none progress in a linear fashion, we would encourage you to ask the following questions:

1 Into which stage(s) does your effort seem to fit?

2 Around which questions have you established clear answers?

3 What questions are holding you back?

4 What questions do you need to address before progressing to the next stage?

	STAGE 1: Framing the Effort	STAGE 2: Proving the Solution(s)	STAGE 3: Reaching Dramatic Improvement	STAGE 4: Reinvigorating the Effort
BOLD GOAL & STRATEGY	What is our bold goal? What is our role in achieving this goal?	What is our approach to realizing our bold goal?	How will we scale our approach to reach our bold goal?	How do we need to change our approach, if at all, to realize our bold goal?
SHARED LEADERSHIP	Who are the founding leaders of this effort? How do we organize ourselves to be most effective?	What does it mean to lead? How will this leadership structure be sustained over time?	What changes, if any, do we need to make to the leadership structure as we scale?	How must our leadership structure adapt to sustain the effort needed to realize our bold goal?
STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT	"Who should be engaged? (*key influencers, shared leaders, early adopters, people affected)"	How do we engage early adopters?	What key stakeholders are necessary to achieve scale? How do we convert the "maybes"?	How do we sustain interest? Are there stakeholders critical to realizing our bold goal who we have failed to engage so far?
ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT	What is the micro and macro context?	How will certain environmental factors affect our effort? What factors might help propel the effort forward?	What new micro or macro factors must we consider as we scale? Do we have an opportunity to influence the environment?	How has the micro and macro context changed? What are the implications?
DISCIPLINED EXECUTION	Where do we start? What early wins should we target?	What actions do we need to take to prove the concept? Can we get closer to our goal by narrowing our focus?	What actions must we take to scale? What must we stop doing in order to scale?	What new actions must we take to realize our bold goal?
FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY	How do we envision financially supporting the work in the long term?	How will our efforts be financially sustained?	How do we maintain financial sustainability as we scale?	How will we adapt our funding/revenue streams to reflect internal and external changes?
ADVOCACY/ PUBLIC POLICY	What is the regulatory or legislative environment surrounding this issue?	What are the short-term opportunities to influence policy and systems?	What is the long-term systems change necessary to make dramatic improvement?	How do we achieve the long-term systems change given the current political and cultural environment?
COMMUNICATION	What messages and channels will help build awareness among key stakeholders?	What messages and channels will build engagement, inspire action and contribute to behavior change?	How do we create contagious ideas and equip others to "own" the message(s) and the solution(s)?	How should we adapt our communication strategy, messages and actions?
CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT & LEARNING	What does success look like?	How do we know if our approach is working? What changes need to be made if we're not achieving the desired results?	How do we know if our approach continues to work as we scale? What changes need to be made if we're not achieving the desired results?	How close are we to our bold goal and what do we need to learn to get closer?
CULTURE (VALUES, NORMS, BEHAVIORS)	How do we establish an intentional culture across the effort? (*roles, ground rules, expectations, decision-making)	How do we ensure that we are living what we believe?	How do we maintain our culture as we grow?	How must we adapt our culture to the new context?