



Evolving for Growth

Strategic Plan

FY2019 – FY2021

Mission Statement

Empowering one life at a time to reach, transform, and elevate the community through love and building character.



FY2019 – FY2021 Strategic Plan

(July 2018 – June 2021)

With ten years of operational experience and the recent explosive growth where our budget has expanded five-fold in just three years, Higher Ground’s capacity to expand further will require substantive changes in our delivery model as well as staffing, skills and administrative support structure. What won’t change is the quality, passion and care with which we deliver the comprehensive programs that alter the trajectories of our students’ lives.

As we look back at all that has happened, and forward to what we yet want to accomplish, now is an ideal time to develop a thoughtful strategic approach to intentionally and efficiently expand our impact.

In April, 2017, Social Venture Partners in Tucson awarded Higher Ground a three-year capacity building grant that includes both financial and consulting support. With their guidance, our strategic plan defines the intentional changes the Board and senior staff will make to our organization, with measurable outcomes, over the next three years.

The planning process was facilitated by an SVP partner and began with discussions and interviews of a broad range of stakeholders to obtain input, review our mission, and development of a prioritized organizational strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis. We then identified the priorities among the weaknesses, opportunities, and threats and agreed which to address based on the skills, capacity and resources available.

This document provides an overview of Higher Ground’s SWOT analysis as well as the goals and objectives of the strategic plan. The specific tactics and tasks we will use to achieve the desired outcomes will be specified in our implementation plan, a follow-on document that will be developed by staff.

Our plan is entitled, *Evolving for Growth*, to reflect the overarching theme of our goals.

Higher Ground developed a prioritized Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis as its focal point for developing strategic priorities.

Strengths

- Dynamic Executive Director
- Effective programs and outcomes
- Passionate and committed staff
- Responsive to community needs
- Proven ability to build relationships with students, families and community
- Consistency in upholding our mission

Weaknesses

- Funding too narrow – heavy dependence on Cenpatico
- Insufficient quality processes in training, safety and risk management
- Management team’s skills and experience inadequate to support future growth
- Limited financial reporting/controls for planning and execution
- Too dependent on founder who is spread too thin
- Strong program results not well documented

Opportunities

- Growth in state funding/demand for Social Emotional Learning & trauma-related services
- Improve marketing/communication for visibility and funding
- Expansion to schools outside of TUSD
- Expand partnerships to efficiently deliver services and grow fee-for-service programs
- Expand Board to increase skills and leverage networks

Threats

- Changes to behavioral health funding mechanisms and amounts
- School district contracts subject to politics and funding priorities
- Building lease not secure
- AmeriCorps funding not permanent

Strategic Goals

In discussions on the priorities identified in the SWOT Analysis, Higher Ground noted common themes that identified dependencies between many of the weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. These themes resulted in the four goals of the strategic plan.

#1: Higher Ground's internal processes, procedures as well as organizational structure, skills and capacities will support effective program execution and growth.

#2: For improved efficiencies and reach, Higher Ground will deliver its programs primarily through a distributed school-based model within multiple school districts.

#3: Higher Ground will support our growth of individualized student treatment by advancing our RTE mapping tool and protecting and potentially monetizing the underlying intellectual property.

#4: Higher Ground will be funded from diversified sources for sustainability and growth.

While the goals represent the broadest definition of the work to be done, focus is provided via the specific objectives for each goal. The staff will put in place an implementation plan to reach these goals and objectives that will specify the tactics, tasks, responsibilities, resources, and timeline.

On the following pages, each goal is more fully described by the specific SWOT priorities it addresses, a brief statement of rationale, and the associated specific and measurable objectives that we will use to define success.

GOAL #1: Higher Ground's internal processes, procedures as well as organizational structure, skills and capacities will support effective program execution and growth.

SWOT

ELEMENTS:

- Insufficient quality processes in training, safety and risk management (weakness)
- Management team's skills and experience inadequate to support current operations (weakness)
- Expand Board to increase skills and leverage networks (opportunity)
- Strong program results not well documented (weakness)
- Limited financial reporting/controls for planning and execution (weakness)
- Too dependent on founder who is spread too thin (weakness)

RATIONALE: The growth in program delivery now reaching 2,000 students has outpaced the structure of the organization to grow while consistently delivering the quality Higher Ground expects of itself. We've outgrown doing everything "by the seat of our pants," and now need to advance the organization across many functional areas including processes and procedures as well as the skills and capacity of management, staff and Board. This evolution will be planned and executed with a vision towards doubling the program capacity over the next few years. Importantly, a shift in the roles of the co-founders will be a part of the evolution and will eventually result in bringing in someone to run the business side of Higher Ground.

OBJECTIVES:

#1-1: Higher Ground will have an up-to-date set of human resource, safety and risk management procedures with training for staff completed by August, 2018.

#1-2: Higher Ground will have an up-to-date set of operational/program procedures with training for staff completed by October, 2018.

#1-3: By January, 2019, Higher Ground will define, develop and implement procedures for the business/administrative function of its operations.

#1-4: With a vision to double our current student capacity, Higher Ground will evolve the staff structure, map staff skills to positions and begin implementation of a training plan by June, 2019.

#1-5: By June, 2019, Higher Ground’s Board will expand to nine directors with a full governance committee structure, with further expansion to eleven directors by June, 2020.

#1-6: By January, 2020, the management team structure and skill set will evolve to include a focus by the co-founders on program delivery and being the “face of the organization” in the community along with the hiring of a senior executive to run the business/administrative side of Higher Ground.

GOAL #2: For improved efficiencies and reach, Higher Ground will deliver its programs primarily through a distributed school-based model within multiple school districts.

SWOT

ELEMENTS:

- Growth in state funding/demand for Social Emotional Learning & trauma-related services (opportunity)
- Expansion to schools outside TUSD (opportunity)
- Building lease not secure (threat)
- Expand partnerships to efficiently deliver services and grow fee-for-service programs (opportunity)
- School district contracts subject to politics and funding priorities (threat)

RATIONALE: For its first decade of operations Higher Ground very successfully focused on delivering its program via a community-center model in South Tucson. However, expanding our programs have constraints based on the physical capacity of our sole leased building and transportation of students to/from the center. Shifting to a school-based model takes advantage of the inherent geographic distribution of the schools, the familiarity/comfort the target student population and their families have with their school setting, the cost advantage to Higher Ground of utilizing the school district's buildings, and the existing partnerships we have developed in executing our programs. Fortuitously, Tucson has initiated a funded program known as the Community School Initiative to provide services such as those provided by Higher Ground at schools most in need. We are already positioned as the lead agency at the initial target schools, a position Higher Ground can utilize to shift its main program delivery model from a community-center model to the more efficient school-based model.

OBJECTIVES:

#2-1: By August, 2018, Higher Ground will be the lead agency with staff in a minimum of two schools in two school districts funded through the Community School Initiative.

#2-2: Higher Ground will be funded to staff its program delivery model in three Tucson school districts representing a minimum of 90% of total students served annually by June, 2021.

#2-3: Higher Ground will double the number of students served to 4,000 students annually beginning July, 2021.

GOAL #3: Higher Ground will support our growth of individualized student treatment by advancing our RTE mapping tool and protecting and potentially monetizing the underlying intellectual property.

SWOT

ELEMENTS:

- Funding too narrow – heavy dependence on Cenpatico (weakness)
- Strong program results not well documented (weakness)
- Growth in state funding/demand for Social Emotional Learning & trauma-related services

RATIONALE: A strong differentiator of Higher Ground is our RTE mapping process/tool that individualizes student treatment. The tool's impact on our strong results and the cost-effectiveness by which the results can be achieved are significant. In general, the mapping process has continued to evolve as lessons are learned, and the growth in the database now allows relevant predictive analysis. However, the individual student mapping is a manual process which limits its efficiency and continued evolution. Higher Ground needs to shift the process to a computer-based program as a key step in expanding the number of students that can be served. Similarly, the underlying intellectual property needs to be secured and evaluated for potential commercialization.

OBJECTIVES:

#3-1: By December, 2018, Higher Ground will complete the initial steps to secure the underlying intellectual property of the RTE mapping tool for potential commercialization.

#3-2: Higher Ground will implement a first-generation computerized RTE mapping tool with integrated database for internal use by August, 2019.

#3-3: By June, 2019, Higher Ground will formalize the approach, plan, needed resources, expected benefits and timeline to investigate commercialization of the mapping tool, a process that may or may not be pursued under a separate organizational entity.

GOAL #4: Higher Ground will be funded from diversified sources for sustainability and growth.

SWOT

ELEMENTS:

- Funding too narrow – heavy dependence on Cenpatico (weakness)
- School district contracts subject to politics and funding priorities (threat)
- Changes to behavioral health funding mechanisms and amounts (threat)
- Expansion to schools outside TUSD (opportunity)
- Expand partnerships to efficiently deliver services and grow fee-for-service programs
- Improve marketing/communication for visibility and funding (opportunity)
- AmeriCorps funding is not permanent (threat)

RATIONALE: Currently, Higher Ground is overly reliant on funding from Cenpatico and TUSD. With the ever-changing financial priorities at school districts and with the upcoming change in behavioral health funding, there is an elevated risk to the reliability and expansion of the current funding model. We will need to optimize our funding model for stability and growth to include a greater percentage from non-government sources. While Higher Ground has had success with obtaining grant funding, our operational success to date has not been adequately leveraged. Similarly, cultivating private donors has slipped as a priority in the past couple years. While this is already being addressed, Higher Ground’s mission and strong results should allow for a much greater contribution from private donors than is currently being achieved.

OBJECTIVES:

#4-1: By June, 2018, Higher Ground will develop an overall funding strategy that focuses on those funding channels aligned with our mission, programs and fundraising resources.

#4-2: Higher Ground will develop and begin implementation of a formal branding, marketing and communication plan to support our funding plan by September, 2018.

#4-3: Higher Ground will complete a staff compensation review by December, 2018 and address appropriate shortfalls no later than June, 2020.

#4-4: Higher Ground will more than double its annual individual and corporate donations to \$300,000 net per year by June, 2021.

#4-5: Higher Ground will reach annual non-government grant funding of \$300,000 per year by June, 2020.

#4-6: By June, 2021, Higher Ground will have 90 days cash-on-hand for operational flexibility.