



Higher Ground

reach. transform. elevate.

Strategic Plan

FY 2024 - 2027

Transforming culture and systems

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Empower one life at a time to REACH, TRANSFORM, and ELEVATE their communities through love and building character.

Executive Summary:

Since our establishment in 2007, Higher Ground's mission has been to empower one life at a time to REACH, TRANSFORM, and ELEVATE their communities through love and building character. Through collaboration, we've turned schools into hubs for resources, programs, and services, focusing on empowering youth, their families, and their broader ecosystem. Our initiatives aim to facilitate the transformation of systems and cultures, improving the lives of individuals and families affected by poverty, trauma, and opportunity gaps prevalent in our schools.

We provide and connect students and families to resources that help stabilize their lives. Simultaneously, we collaborate with them to foster executive function skills—such as grit/resilience, self-control, and agency—that are crucial for overcoming challenges, making sound decisions, and achieving their goals.

Our conviction is that everyone has the potential to succeed and they are the experts of their own lives. We partner with our students and families to identify and develop their strengths, build on their existing support systems, and create a pathway for achieving their aspirations. Recognizing the need to prop-up their ecosystem, we also support their school community through professional development, strategic alignment, and creating a culture of compassion and excellence. As a results-oriented organization, we operate on evidence, science, and compassion, ensuring students and families flourish.

In executing our previous strategic plan, Higher Ground learned the importance of data-driven decision-making, building strong relationships with key stakeholders, continuous improvement, flexibility and adaptability, and collaboration. These lessons led to the expansion of our services, increased reach, and strengthened relationships with key stakeholders. We focused on the implementation of our data-powered life coaching and our full service community school implementation, Restart SMART, at several school sites in Tucson along with one in Chandler. We also built strong relationships with schools, organizations, businesses, and government agencies while investing in technology and the development of our app BeMapt™.

What distinguishes us is our commitment to listening to our students, families, and communities, prioritizing the voices of our students. Our tools empower us to modify our approaches and initiatives based on community feedback and data. We consistently adapt in response to the outcomes and insights we gather. As we move forward, we are determined to keep this approach at the heart of our organization.

Join our transformative journey as outlined in this strategic plan to elevate communities and empower lives. Your active involvement, advocacy, and financial support are essential in bridging the opportunity gaps and fostering lasting change in Arizona and catapulting our organization to its next phase of growth.

In the next phase of our growth, our intention is to be recognized as the leading resource for those working to transform culture and systems across communities in Arizona. Based on the success and key lessons learned from our previous strategic plan, our strategy is to enable other changemakers, providing them with insights, resources, innovative tools, strategies, and connections to various thought leaders. Concurrently, we will continue to develop and deliver high-quality services, build strong relationships with key stakeholders, and empower our current communities. We will achieve this through five main strategic goals:

1. Develop clear communications to advance our strategies and create statewide buy-in. By the end of 2027, Higher Ground will have established a compelling, consistent, and widely recognized communications presence that effectively articulates our unique approach, methods, and outcomes, ensuring that key stakeholders across communities understand and advocate for our transformative work.
2. Develop a scalable scope and sequence for data-powered life coaching and Higher Ground strategies. By the end of 2027, we will leverage current training to develop a scalable scope and sequence for data-powered life coaching and Higher Ground strategies. We will create a training and certification program that is both effective and efficient, and utilize this to partner with other organizations to deliver our strategies.
3. Fine-tune and improve our data-powered life coaching system and BeMapt™ technology. By the end of 2024, we will have fine-tuned and improved our data-powered life coaching system and technology to prepare BeMapt™ to be adopted as an edtech product in K-12 schools by 2026. We will invest in research and development, partnering with the community and research scientists, to ensure our technology integrates cultural compassion and remains at the forefront of innovation.
4. Establish a statewide alliance of community schools educational innovators in Arizona that will collaborate with other states to share best practices and resources. By the end of 2027, we will have established a statewide alliance of educational innovators in Arizona that will collaborate with other states and organizations to share best practices and resources. We will build relationships with schools and other organizations within Arizona and other states, and we will lead in supporting the development of a shared vision for education reform in our state.
5. Establish sustainable sources of funding to support our mission. By the end of 2027, we aim to establish diversified and sustainable sources of funding that will ensure the continuity and expansion of our transformative programs. This includes cultivating partnerships, grants, donations, and innovative revenue streams to support our mission of empowering individuals and families.

We believe that these five goals are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. By achieving each goal, we will step closer to seeing our organization become the leading resource for those working to transform culture and systems across Arizona. We are confident that we can achieve our goals with the support of our partners, families, communities, and donors. We are grateful for your continued support as we work to transform the lives of individuals and families in Arizona and beyond.

Introduction:

This strategic plan outlines the five goals that Higher Ground will pursue from 2024 to 2027. It also includes the rationale for each goal, explaining why we chose this strategic direction and outlining the alternative direction we did not choose. The intention is that by achieving each of these 5 goals, we will become recognized as the leading resource for those working to transform embedded school culture and systems across communities. Organizations, individuals, schools, community leaders, and policy makers who seek to bridge the opportunity gaps in our communities will gain our valuable insights, resources, innovative tools, tested strategies, and relationships with thought leaders and changemakers.

For each goal, we have outlined objectives that highlight areas in need of intentional improvement to ultimately achieve the projected goal. Each of these objectives have an ideal timeline identified, as each of the goals are interdependent and time-sensitive. It also includes a summary of identified existing roadblocks and obstacles for each goal, primarily focusing on internal issues that describe Higher Ground's current conditions.

Finally, a parallel operational plan is available that provides a detailed outline of the resources, metrics, and daily activities that Higher Ground will undertake to achieve this strategic direction. The operational plan will also include details of the existing roadblocks and obstacles to ensure that everyone involved with Higher Ground is aware of these challenges and understands the subsequent actions and objectives necessary for achieving our goals.

Lastly the operational plan will also identify the primary risks and threats to our intended goals, along with a mitigating action. These risks and threats are likely to emerge if we are successful or regardless of how well we implement our objectives. The threats are elements external to Higher Ground's operations, and a mitigation strategy is developed in response to reduce each specific threat. Most objectives in this strategic plan will be further broken down into specific tasks with timelines and milestones.

Before delving into the specifics, it's essential to understand some key terms related to Higher Ground's initiatives.

Definitions:

- **Full Service Community Schools** - A national model, Full Service Community Schools serve as central community hubs. They combine academic, health, and social services with extracurriculars and community engagement. The aim is improved school performance and increased family involvement through local partnerships. Each school is unique, but shares a vision grounded in a framework consisting of: integrated student support, extended learning opportunities, active family-community engagement, collaborative community leadership, rigorous community-connected classroom instruction, and a culture of belonging, safety, and care. Currently (2023), Higher Ground is the only organization in Arizona with nationally recognized community school models.
- **Restart SMART** - Restart SMART is Higher Ground's advanced adaptation of the Full Service Community Schools Model, aiming to bridge widened opportunity gaps from the COVID-19 pandemic. Merging the community school model with Higher Ground's effective data-powered coaching system, this approach focuses on creating Strategic, Mindful, Agile and Aware, Resilient, and Trauma-Responsive schools. Building on Tucson's rich Community Schools heritage, its goals include rapidly adapting the model in high-poverty areas, swiftly addressing post-pandemic trauma and exacerbated poverty, embedding life skills and trauma response across schools, advocating for essential policy changes, and securing diverse funding and partnerships. Currently (2023), there are 8 Restart SMART sites, nationally recognized as community school models, 7 in Tucson and 1 in Chandler consisting of public district schools and a public charter school. [A blueprint for Restart SMART is available here.](#)
- **Data-powered Life Coaching System** - Also known as mapping within the organization, Data-powered Life Coaching is a patent-pending, data-driven strategic coaching system designed to address the multifaceted challenges faced by youth and families, invented by Higher Ground founders, Jansen and Barbara Azarias-Suzumoto. It offers a holistic view of a student's situation, turning data into actionable plans tailored for students to support them in scaffolding character skills they need. Its focus is on compassion, adaptability, and proactive decision-making. The ultimate outcome is a unified school community, streamlined in purpose and effort around the student's needs.
- **BeMapt** - BeMapt™, leveraging our Data Powered Life Coaching System, is a revolutionary mobile and web-based application. It connects youth with live coaches and resources, guiding them towards healthier life decisions. Its design ensures better help-seeking behaviors and relationship building. The application also intends to fortify school culture and responsiveness
- **RTEAZ** - RTEAZ is a type 1 supporting organization of our nonprofit organization, Higher Ground a Resource Center. RTEAZ's primary purpose is to monetize Higher Ground's technology to fund the mission of the nonprofit organization Higher Ground.

Goals:

1. **By the end of 2027, Higher Ground will have established a compelling, consistent, and widely recognized communications presence that effectively articulates our unique approach, methods, and outcomes, ensuring that key stakeholders across communities understand and advocate for our transformative work.**
2. **By the end of 2027, we will leverage current training to develop a scalable scope and sequence for data-powered life coaching and Higher Ground strategies creating a training and certification program.**
3. **By the end of 2024, we will fine-tune and improved our data-powered life coaching system and technology to prepare BeMapt™ to be adopted as an edtech product in K-12 schools by 2026.**
4. **By the end of 2027, we will have established a statewide alliance of community schools in Arizona that will collaborate with other states to share best practices and resources.**
5. **By the end of 2027, we will establish diversified and sustainable sources of funding that will ensure the continuity and expansion of our transformative programs.**

Goal #1:

By the end of 2027, Higher Ground will have established a compelling, consistent, and widely recognized communications presence that effectively articulates our unique approach, methods, and outcomes, ensuring that key stakeholders across communities understand and advocate for our transformative work.

Rationale:

Clear and effective communication is crucial for any organization aiming to bring about systemic change. As Higher Ground advances its transformative initiatives, our commitment to data-driven excellence remains unwavering. Instead of utilizing conventional communication methods that focus on either data or stories, we will implement a communication strategy recognizes the immense power of anecdotes and making them compelling by underpinning accurate data and rigorous analysis. By synergizing data-driven insights with evocative storytelling, we bridge the gap between statistical evidence and the profound human experiences that drive our work. This balanced approach ensures that our communication resonates deeply with stakeholders while maintaining the credibility that comes from rigorous data analysis. Thus, we shun the alternative path of relying solely on anecdotal accounts, ensuring that our transformative efforts remain anchored in the duality of hard evidence and heartfelt narratives.

Summarized Identified Obstacles/Roadblocks:

Higher Ground's current communication faces challenges such as inconsistent messaging leading to misunderstandings, limited community awareness of our initiatives, potential confusion with other organizations' methods, staff turnover affecting continuity, the nuanced transition of our Restart SMART strategy which may need additional clarity, and the complexities of a polarized political landscape potentially skewing perceptions of our endeavors.

Goal 1 Continued:

Objectives:

- By February 2024, develop a comprehensive communication operational plan that emphasizes our non-partisan approach and focuses on the tangible positive outcomes of our work, effectively mitigating potential perceptions of partisanship and maintaining our commitment to community-driven transformation.
- By June 2024, implement the comprehensive communication operational plan starting with targeted messages to various stakeholders with clear impact reports, storytelling mediums, and multiple communication channels.
- By August 2024, establish a comprehensive staff retention and development system that prioritize a nurturing work environment, wellness, continuous professional growth, and mentorship to ensure longevity of staff with essential institutional knowledge, enhancing consistent communication bridging past and future endeavors. (non-negotiable milestone)
- By December 2024, launch various communication platforms (podcast, YouTube, social media, educational platforms, radio) with sustainable content schedules, ensuring that our narrative reaches a broad audience in an engaging manner.
- By August 2025, establish a functional steering committee at a 5-year-old Restart SMART school site that will transition the school to a sustainable community school. This committee will ensure strategy fidelity, support sustainability, and serve as a communicated success story, engaging stakeholders in understanding and advocating for our transformative model. (non-negotiable milestone)
- By December 2025, establish a dedicated team for managing and updating the content across platforms, ensuring that the messaging remains consistent and aligned with Higher Ground's evolving strategies and successes.
- By January 2027, achieve comprehensive engagement within Arizona, ensuring the adoption of Higher Ground's methodologies, strategies, and outcomes in multiple sectors, supporting the final objective in Goal #4. This will involve refining and communicating our approaches, doubling down on quality, and continuing to establish sustainable mechanisms at each of our school sites.

Summarized External Threats and Mitigation Strategies:

Detractors may spread misinformation about Higher Ground, while the surge of communication platforms and message saturation pose challenges. In response, we're committed to promoting a fact-based narrative, enriched with recent data and impactful stories. We'll also carefully select and prioritize our communication platforms for efficiency and resonance. Furthermore, partnering with like-minded organizations will help us co-create content, ensuring we reduce message redundancy and amplify engagement.

Goal 2:

Higher Ground will leverage current training to develop a scalable scope and sequence for data-powered life coaching and Higher Ground strategies by the end of 2027 creating a training and certification program.

Rationale:

Higher Ground aims to grow while maintaining high quality and fidelity. Instead of expanding the number of schools and communities where we implement Restart SMART strategies, we seek to leverage our experience, tools, and comprehensive training to empower organizations pursuing community development initiatives in their local neighborhoods. We recognize that we cannot and do not want to be the sole organization implementing this work in Arizona. However, we understand that maintaining quality and fidelity to the model is essential for every effort to achieve sustainability.

Summarized Identified Obstacles/Roadblocks:

Higher Ground's training faces several intricate challenges as it scales. The current model is not systematically designed for effortless adaptation across diverse organizational contexts, making scalability a nuanced endeavor. While internally we champion value alignment, externally replicating this dedication to our values and priorities is daunting. Add to this, the current absence of stringent accountability measures and the task of ensuring genuine understanding and faithful implementation across the board becomes more complex. As we aim for broader reach, maintaining both the integrity of our outcomes and the fidelity of our methods is paramount. Moreover, in our pursuit of excellence, we're cautious to ensure our curriculum doesn't inadvertently add to the prevailing pressures on educators, or become a potential stress catalyst within our own structure.

Summarized External Threats and Mitigation Strategies:

As Higher Ground ventures into collaborations, we foresee challenges, notably the uncertain reception of our methodologies and the fidelity of their adoption. The alignment of values with potential partners remains a prime concern, and the variability in the application of our practices, even with comprehensive training, poses risks. Our mitigation approach is thorough: starting with comprehensive dialogues to ensure mutual understanding of mission and values, we remain steadfast in our ethos, prepared to part ways if alignments drift, encapsulated by our "Some will, Some Won't, So What?" philosophy. Coupled with this is an unwavering commitment to rigorous training, ongoing monitoring, and evaluations, bearing in mind the weight our reputation holds in these strategic collaborations.

Goal 2 Continued:

Objectives:

- By October 2023, create measures of understanding and other training tools that act as short- and long-term assessments, ensure no mission drifting, and allow for individualized learning tailored to different staff members and roles within the organization.
- By January 2024, transform current training content into a comprehensive curriculum that includes clear progression, scaffolding of skills, rationalized methodology with role specific content, internal support systems for learner progress, and other outside professional development sources implemented within the organization. (non-negotiable milestone)
- By February 2024, have a clearly established quality assurance and implementation framework, tightly integrating training and real-world strategy application, with regular quality assessments to ensure theoretical content consistency, personalized professional development, and a feedback-driven curriculum refinement process with evidence of advancing our key results in our Restart SMART sites and other projects. (non-negotiable milestone)
- By March 2024, work with a research institute such as American Institute for Research (AIR) to identify all measurable outcomes from our Restart SMART strategies and data-powered strategic coaching to create clear links to these outcomes in our training curriculum.
- By December 2024, transform all content into an organized online LMS that is readily available with several early adopters from other nonprofit and education partners, with a system of continuous improvement to ensure features and effectiveness are consistently evaluated and adjusted.
- By January 2025, ensure our work is transferable from the sites to the community by starting one steering Committee training utilizing our LMS to help achieve Goal #1 Objective C.
- By May 2025, establish a formal partnership with the accredited institution to turn content in our LMS into a leveled curriculum available for post-secondary education that generates financial streams for Higher Ground.
- By August 2026, implement leveled curriculum in post-secondary institution settings.
- By December 2026, implement curriculum and tools at multiple settings in the state of Arizona, exploring national conversations and working with national groups around community school implementation.
- By June 2027, work with the state of Arizona to become the accrediting body and training center for any school, organization, or groups working on turnaround strategy involving community school principles, system & culture shift in high poverty schools, and other elements of addressing trauma responsive environments.
- By August 2027, work on actively exploring and establishing national-level partnerships and conversations to share our LMS, continue learning best practices on community school implementation, and fostering collaboration to increase impact and use of our LMS to further cement our Goal # 1.

Goal 3:

Higher Ground will fine-tune and improve its data-powered strategic coaching system and technology by the end of 2024 to prepare BeMapt™ to be adopted as an edtech product in K-12 schools by 2026.

Rationale:

Rather than relying on solely providing our services on a traditional in-person format which has many limitations for funding sources, growth, and impact, Higher Ground seeks to develop an ed-tech product and use advancements in AI, data analytics, and predictive algorithms to support our work while amplifying the compassion and human relationships we focus on. Utilizing technology, we can streamline and improve our system making it more accessible and allowing us to reach more students, families, and communities with our data-powered life coaching system and technology.

Summarized Identified Obstacles/Roadblocks:

Higher Ground faces multifaceted challenges in streamlining its data-powered life coaching system and BeMapt™ development. Striking a balance in product design—ensuring both user engagement and effectiveness—is intricate. While user-friendly design is essential for adoption, it shouldn't compromise key outcomes like fostering resilience and life skills. Although strides have been made in utilizing the data-powered life coaching system, its consistent application and comprehension remain varied across sites. Moreover, expertise and in-depth understanding of the system and BeMapt™ are concentrated among a handful of staff, highlighting gaps in internal communication and proficiency. Higher Ground, in its current configuration, doesn't possess a specialized team for the system's technical evolution or BeMapt™, leading to dependency on external partnerships. Data management and security emerge as other vital concerns, given the ever-present threat of cyber breaches and the significance of the data held. The organization also grapples with the scarcity of comprehensive research on edtech efficacy in K-12 settings, challenging the advocacy and assessment of BeMapt™. Marrying advancements in AI, Large Language Models, and School Information Systems demands nuanced expertise. Finally, competing in the edtech landscape necessitates hefty resources and a visionary stance, which, for a nonprofit like Higher Ground, translates to fundraising hurdles and prolonged timelines compared to for-profit counterparts.

Summarized External Threats and Mitigation Strategies

In the ever-evolving landscape of edtech, Higher Ground grapples with the myriad challenges that come with the development and introduction of BeMapt™. Public sentiment is polarized, with divergent views on edtech's value – some laud its merits, while detractors deem it frivolous. Such disparity can not only sway BeMapt™ adoption rates but also influence governmental stances, potentially affecting funding or regulatory measures. Moreover, the saturated edtech market, teeming with competitors, can impede Higher Ground's bid for a distinct space.

Goal 3 Continued:

Keeping BeMapt™ current amid swift tech advancements is another uphill battle, particularly when for-profit entities have a resource edge. Additionally, safeguarding the confidentiality of certain students, such as those identifying as LGBTQIA+ or those undergoing domestic trauma, is paramount. As for countering these external threats, Higher Ground acknowledges its mitigation quandaries, especially for the app. The present blueprint involves onboarding experts with relevant knowledge. Concurrently, by actively collaborating with student users, Higher Ground aims to continually fine-tune its approach to these overarching challenges.

Objectives:

- By October 2023, identify foundational metrics to ensure success and understand the implementation elements between traditional deployment of data-powered strategic coaching system and technological application through BeMapt™.
- By January 2024, launch multiple beta tests documenting the success of BeMapt™ independent of Higher Ground's other strategies or compared with Higher Ground's more traditional approaches to show effectiveness. (non-negotiable milestone)
- By February 2024, collaborate with early adopter school district leadership on technology policy, system integration, and identification of funding sources including existing school line items, grants, federal funding, and private foundations. (non-negotiable milestone)
- By June 2024, complete comprehensive RTEAZ business plan that incorporates all the learning from successful beta tests, school district collaboration, market research, and lessons from early adopters and initial clients with a matrix that shows BeMapt™'s unique features from other available edtech apps.
- By August 2024, create a system that ensures diverse student focus groups representative of communities for deployment and have continued input in future interactions of design, improvements, and features.
- By October 2024, begin hiring a separate set of personnel for RTEAZ starting with an experienced edtech business administrator reporting to Higher Ground's CTO, then hiring and managing personnel in advertising/marketing, BeMapt™ life coaches, support staff, and administration team.
- By January 2025, develop deployment strategies for every socioeconomic level of student/family (marketing, family finances, access, gap populations, etc.)
- By August 2025, develop continuous improvement strategies within Higher Ground to ensure continuous data and learning for RTEAZ staff for further development of tools.
- By December 2025, begin formal recruitment of national thought leaders consisting of experts in psychology, sociology, neuroscience, urban planning, community development, economics, political science, spirituality, public health, and other related fields as an internal and external resource for Higher Ground staff that will have clear integration and ensure no mission drifting.
- By July 2026, establish RTEAZ as a company with the foundation for healthy business operations to market and deploy BeMapt™ in the EdTech field with positive revenue growth, statewide partnerships, regulatory compliance, and clear operational structure.
- By December 2027, use revenue from BeMapt™ and other RTEAZ products and ventures to support Higher Ground nonprofit initiatives and is a primary tool supporting Goal #1.

Goal 4:

Higher Ground will establish a statewide alliance of leaders who support community schools in Arizona that will collaborate with other states to share best practices and resources by the end of 2027.

Rationale:

Statewide consensus in Arizona is missing on a unified vision for improving the quality of our education especially for our lower-income communities. A statewide alliance of community schools will provide this unified vision. The Higher Ground Method have proven to be effective in improving education, and by creating ambassadors for this strategy, Higher Ground can help to facilitate its implementation in Arizona.

Summarized Identified Obstacles/Roadblocks:

Arizona's journey to implement community school strategies faces several pronounced barriers. Firstly, the state suffers from a noticeable dearth of champions advocating for community schools, leading to a muted recognition of its value in education. The contemporary socio-political environment further complicates matters, demanding painstaking and time-intensive relationship-building to gain allies. This challenge is compounded by the alliance's inherent reliance on a plethora of partners, some of whom have clashing priorities or political views. Despite the essential nature of these collaborations, a prevailing 'education meeting fatigue' and Arizona's history of botched education reforms make stakeholders wary, often sidelining pivotal dialogues. These past missteps have not only diminished enthusiasm but have also fragmented reform efforts, creating silos that hinder comprehensive progress. A significant impediment is the glaring gap in localized data concerning community schools' efficacy in Arizona, despite a wealth of national research. Moreover, the state's politically charged discourse around education hampers garnering sustained political commitment and necessary resources. This turbulent landscape is further agitated by its unpredictable nature and the need to delineate governance from operational intricacies, ensuring the board focuses on strategy rather than day-to-day functions while being well-versed in Higher Ground's Restart SMART Strategies and Data-Powered Coaching.

Summarize External Threat and Mitigation Strategies

A notable external threat arises from existing educational reform entities in Arizona, which might view community schools as rivals rather than allies. Unlike many reform models that prioritize curriculum and policy enhancements, community schools emphasize addressing students' foundational needs—such as food, shelter, and healthcare—as a precursor to academic success. This distinct approach may not resonate universally and might even be misconstrued as a critique of purely academic-focused reforms

Goal 4 Continued:

To navigate this delicate landscape, Higher Ground is committed to positioning community schools not as competitors, but as vital complements to existing initiatives. Our strategy hinges on forging partnerships, grounded in data-backed evidence of our holistic approach's merits. By consistently engaging stakeholders and being receptive to varied perspectives, we aim to underscore mutual respect and collaborative spirit. This endeavor is further bolstered by potential joint ventures and advocating for all-encompassing educational policies, all overseen by our governing board to ensure harmonious integration and positive reception.

Objectives:

- By October 2023, develop curriculum/assessment for the Higher Ground Governing Board members to share Higher Ground strategies around community school to fidelity.
- By January 2024, develop a committee within the Higher Ground Governing Board to become statewide ambassadors of the RS methodologies with clear governance boundaries, tasks, action, and accountability towards achieving this goal
- By February 2024, identify key stakeholders, allies, influencers, and partners using the Higher Ground values, philosophy, mission, and vision and begin recruitment of a committee subgroup to advance Higher Ground's methods.
- By May 2024, establish clear guidelines and integration between Higher Ground Governing Board and our external team to amplify efforts around communication, advocacy, public relations, and fund acquisition.
- By June 2024, equip Higher Ground Governing Board and its committees with communication tools be responsible for developing professional relationships and leveraging their influence to champion Higher Ground methods on a strategic basis. (non-negotiable milestone)
- By January 2025, establish meeting routines and practices within that Higher Ground Governing Board that lets members contribute to learning, growth, and advocacy while combatting meeting fatigue with minimum of once a quarter reporting of activities to the entire board.
- By June 2026, initiate the expansion of the committee subgroup into a statewide alliance, incorporating representatives from various sectors. This alliance will advocate for and promote the Higher Ground way as a key strategy for transforming education in high-poverty communities. (non-negotiable milestone)
- By January 2027, have an external analysis of the utilization of the Higher Ground Governing Board as the primary vehicle to advancing a statewide alliance to measure effectiveness, risk, and legal issues to ensure continuation or the pivot to a different strategy.
- By December 2027, establish a diverse statewide alliance that is passionate about advancing Higher Ground's methods, with representatives from various sectors, that is integrated into Arizona's key decision-making bodies. This presence should be visibly demonstrated through public promotion of the Higher Ground way - such as billboard advertisements, public conversations, commercials - and reflected in bipartisan support and investment.

Goal 5:

By the end of 2024, establish and begin implementation of a robust financial fundraising and sustainability measure that ensures the long-term viability and growth of Higher Ground. This includes diversifying funding sources, developing sustainable revenue streams, cultivating strategic partnerships with funders, foundations, and donors, and implementing effective financial management and accountability practices.

Rationale:

As Higher Ground continues to advance its mission, the importance of financial sustainability becomes increasingly evident. Rather than relying solely on short-term funding and government-related sources, establishing a comprehensive and robust fundraising and sustainability measure that combines private and public funding is essential. By adopting a proactive approach, we ensure that Higher Ground's transformative work is not hindered by financial constraints. This alternative approach encourages us to be well-prepared for the future, laying the foundation for consistent impact, expansion, and empowerment within the communities we serve.

Summarized Identified Obstacles/Roadblocks:

Higher Ground faces financial challenges, notably an over-reliance on government funds, with one source contributing a whopping 60% of total revenue. In the prevailing educational milieu, forging lasting ties with foundations is a meticulous and prolonged endeavor. Furthermore, Arizona's saturated educational sector has led to donor fatigue, accentuating the need for Higher Ground to distinctively articulate its unique value amidst intense competition.

Objectives:

- By March 2024, have a fundraising and financial operational plan reviewed and approved by HG Executive Team and Governing Board
- Beginning July 2024, Higher Ground will maintain a minimum of 120 days cash-on-hand for operational flexibility. (non-negotiable milestone)
- By October 2024, Higher Ground Executive Board will have clear involvement and impact in fundraising efforts and individual donors with at least 5% of Higher Ground's FY 24-25 revenue coming directly from board efforts.
- By December 2024, Higher Ground's revenue related to non-government grants and donations will account for 20% (currently at 10%) of total revenue. (non-negotiable milestone)
- By March 2025, Higher Ground will have a plan to engage statewide and national private foundations, establishing relationships and effectively communicating our success to them.
- By December 2026, Higher Ground will have multiple large foundation donations that support multiple efforts of the organization.
- By December of 2027, Higher Ground will have multiple sources of funding with no single funding source accounting for more than 40% of the budget with at least 30% coming from private donors, foundations, and corporations.