



Living Our Faith Stories: Building and strengthening our pastoral relationships

VI. SMART Goals

Assessing Progress

A resource of:

Toronto Southeast Presbytery
Ministry Articulation Profile Advisory Group
Harry Brown, Ian Manson, Anne Shirley Sutherland, Jean Ward

Written by Donna MacCandlish
Donna MacCandlish and Associates

2018

SMART GOALS

“Leaders understand that it is not any one person’s job to define the goals of an organization, but rather that of stakeholders who must work together to shape a vision. Evaluators know that goals or benchmarks are best developed collaboratively, with numerous stakeholders working together to describe success.”

Holy Clarity – Sarah B. Drummond

In our fourth booklet in the ‘Living Our Faith Stories’ series we discussed processes for setting goals tied to missional priorities, developing action plans and engaging others in the process. Building upon that, when establishing goals, whether Big Audacious Goals or otherwise, we need to ask ourselves:

- What do we want to accomplish? Anticipated outcomes? What will success look like – overall, for participants in the activities planned, for the ministry leadership team and for the congregation?
- Why is each goal important? Is it attainable?
- Who needs to be involved, what actions need to be taken?
- What resources need to be committed – both financial and non-financial?
- What are the timelines, milestones and deliverables?
- How will we measure success?

In setting goals it is helpful to apply **SMART** criteria. The **SMART** acronym is widely used in goal setting. It helps provide clarity and focus to the goal setting process. And well-formulated goals are well understood by everyone. **SMART** is usually cited to stand for: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**elevant and **T**ime-Based, however it may have several variations, meaningful in different ways depending on the nature of individual ministry goals.

Here are some ways in which **SMART** can be used:

- Specific, significant, stretching
- Measurable, meaningful, motivational
- Attainable, agreed upon, achievable, acceptable, action-oriented
- Relevant, realistic, reasonable, rewarding, results-oriented
- Time-based, time-bound, timely, tangible, trackable

Consider which descriptors may be most useful to think through your goals and objectives.

ASSESSING PROGRESS

Once an initiative is implemented, it is important to assess progress along the way. This enables us to gauge how we're doing compared to our plan and to change our game plan where outcomes are not unfolding as intended. Assessing progress allows us to share learning with others who can benefit in our United Church communities. It also provides opportunities to celebrate successes.

It is a good practice to review progress on an annual basis. It may also be appropriate to set review dates tied to specific milestones. For instance, a relatively large, mid-town Ministry is embarking on a three year program in the fall of 2018 to achieve goals tied to their MAP priorities and missional stretch – Big Audacious Goals tied to Extravagant Welcome and Growth. They will undertake community research with completion targeted for April, 2019. This will guide their program planning and program launch activities that will take place subsequently through to 2021. In this case it would make sense for them to set the first review date, tentatively in May, tied to research completion (April), with subsequent reviews tied to milestones in their Ministry's plan.

So, when setting review dates, consider your milestones.

In assessing progress here's a sequence of questions we can ask:

- Did we achieve / are we on track to achieve / the goals we set?
- Are there goals that were not met / are not likely to be met?
- Did we achieve / are we on track to achieve / the outcomes hoped for:
 - For participants?
 - For the ministry leadership team?
 - For the congregation?
- Were our financial projections accurate / tracking to be accurate? Did revenue and expenses materialize / are tracking to materialize / as planned?
- Were actions taken as planned? What changes were made along the way? Did they work?
- Were those who needed / need to be involved / actually involved? If not, why not?
- What did we learn / are we learning?
- If we aim to continue this project / initiative, what modifications, if any, do we need to make?

OUTCOMES

Many of the goals we establish will be measurable, not just in numbers (“quantitative”), but also in terms of quality. These “qualitative” outcomes may capture measures of knowledge, abilities, values, experiences, perceptions, attitudes, feelings and the like. Drawn from testimonials, before and after surveys and focus groups, they may be of a spiritual nature and reflect people’s perceived changes in their spiritual life such as a deeper sense of community, increased sense of sharing, a greater sense of self, forgiveness of others, forgiveness of self, greater acceptance of self, a richer prayer life and feeling more at peace.

To illustrate the real-life impact of some quantitative and qualitative outcomes, here are examples of initiatives and outcomes which are taking place in communities within Toronto. Each involved plans to reach out in new and different ways and to build relationships within their communities, inside and outside the walls of the church.

Example 1

In 2014 a ministry in the east end of Toronto introduced a pilot project with the goal to enable participating seniors to strengthen their acceptance of the many changes that occur in the later years of life. This included dealing with the loss of autonomy, helping them find new sources of fulfillment, revisiting the role of faith and religion and being open to the fullness of life and relationships. The pilot included films, memoir writing and sharing individuals’ stories, all designed to help people make sense of their past lives and articulate their legacy. Post pilot, this initiative is being extended through a module focused on ‘Learning to Let Go’ of old identities and things from the past and to transition into a new way of being.

Quantitative outcomes:

- 42 participants have participated in three workshops to date, engaging people from the congregation, other congregations and persons with no affiliation, many travelling from a distance. Workshops have been over-subscribed with wait lists established.

Qualitative outcomes that are being measured:

The degree to which participants:

- experience reduced loneliness / isolation
- find meaning in their older years
- feel enhanced ability to accept death, illness and change
- make new connections / build relationships / form new communities
- are confident letting go of previous priorities and committing to new things
- have deeper insights into themselves
- are more spiritually healthy having learned a new form of self-care

The degree to which leadership:

- furthers its reach into the community
- deepens people's spiritual lives
- strengthens bonds between current members and renews commitment to their faith

The degree to which the congregation:

- expands programming pertaining to its small group work

Example 2

In 2015, a downtown Ministry launched a mission with a goal to reach out to Portuguese-speaking people across Toronto to create an intentional Christian community. This highly inclusive, welcoming mission aimed to build relationships and help new immigrants through bible study groups, Sunday evening services and free weekly ESL classes – all bridges intended to instill hope and fellowship. Connections were, and continue to be, made over coffee, in hospitals, in pubs and at community centres where the “power of listening” is alive and well.

Quantitative outcomes:

- 25-30 Portuguese-speaking people, ranging in ages from 25 to 40, attend Sunday evening services (numbers grow to 50 for special services such as Thanksgiving and Christmas)
- More than 600 individuals, including 20 volunteers, have attended 16 ESL sessions over four years
- As of fall, 2018 the Ministry’s Facebook page has over 1,600 active followers.

Qualitative outcomes:

- Numerous testimonials have been shared, with common themes: “enriching my vocabulary”, “making new friendships”, “being useful to people”, “feeling happier”
- An annual event grew out of this initiative during which toys, food baskets, clothing and school supplies are distributed to families in need providing gifts to children and hope to their parents.

Example 3

In 2014 a relatively small Ministry went out into the community, outside the walls of the church, through a new, creative Fresh Expressions initiative to engage with individuals not necessarily involved with the Church. It turned empty lawn space into a bountiful community garden where volunteers tilled the soil, nurtured the plants and packaged their harvest for distribution. Program participants, mostly from the community, attended related workshops and community events free of charge. All this activity is on-going.

Quantitative outcomes:

- Participation has steadily grown, with over 80 individuals (mostly from outside the congregation) now actively involved in 'Garden Together' sessions held twice weekly from April until the first frost
- In 2018 four events were attended by adults and children: seed starting workshop (20); Environmental Fair (100), healing plant workshop (30), and a fairy tale garden workshop and interactive tour (30).
- Over the 2018 growing season, 63 kilograms of food were harvested with half contributed to a local food bank.

Qualitative outcomes:

- The initiative fostered collaboration among a diverse group of participants, including local politicians, members of the local Business Improvement Association, and like-minded community organizations, thus enriching the Ministry's reach.
- Feedback attests to participants having "learned a lot", "met new people", "strengthened friendships" and "exercised more in the soil-scented outdoors".
- Success of the project enhanced the organizers' abilities to attract funding, additional to that provided at the outset, in turn enabling growth in the scope and impact of the initiative.

IN CLOSING

“Evaluation has had a bad press in the secular world. Frequently targets are imposed from outside, are not owned by those involved, and privilege some stakeholders (such as funders) over others (such as those served by the initiative). Surely we do not want the same culture creeping into the church? However, if rooted in healthy theology, evaluation in the church can feel very different:

- It will be welcomed by the witnessing community as a tool for discerning the Spirit’s guidance.
- It will not be done to the community, but will be a shared process, owned by all the parties involved.
- It will be an instrument of the Spirit, not of a particular stakeholder...

A local church, denomination, or network will understandably want to know that the community is remaining faithful to the gospel, that it is progressing towards agreed objectives, and that it is proving fruitful.”

Being Church, Doing Life: Creating Gospel Communities Where Life Happens, Michael Moyna.



Living Our Faith Stories Resources

- I. Getting Started**
- II. Prayer and Reflection Resources**
- III. The Context for our Ministries**
- IV. Setting Goals**
- V. The Missional Stretch**
- VI. SMART Goals**