

GOALS / SUCCESS SPECTRUM

Getting clear and aligned about goals is a critical practice for any project, big or small. All too often, groups don't take the first step of articulating their goals up-front. Even more often, groups are not specific enough about what success or failure looks like. As a result, groups move forward thinking they have alignment, only to find out later that they don't.

The Goals / Success Spectrum is a toolkit designed to help you get very clear about goals and outcomes. It defines success along a spectrum — from minimum to target to epic — which gives you a much more nuanced and specific sense of what you're trying to accomplish as well as different scenarios for success and failure.

USING THE SPECTRUM

Using this toolkit can be a surprisingly emotional experience, especially when using it with a group. It's perfectly normal to feel vulnerable about exploring some of these questions and writing down possible answers. Make sure you create a safe space for doing these exercises, and if you find yourself feeling uncomfortable, take a break.

Brainstorm on stickies (or directly in your Google Doc) **different scenarios for what success looks like**. Be as specific as possible. If you previously used the Strategy / Culture Bicycle and already have stickies defining different success scenarios, you may re-use those stickies.

Put the scenarios in the appropriate column: Minimum, Target, and Epic.

- **Minimum:** These are the minimum things that must happen in order to call a project successful. These scenarios should almost certainly happen if the group does its work diligently.
- **Target:** These are the things you're hoping will happen. They should be hard, but

attainable. They should have a 40 to 60 percent likelihood of happening if the group does its work diligently.

- **Epic:** This is what success beyond your wildest imagination looks like. Fill this column in twice, as everybody usually self-censors themselves the first time around. Don't be shy! These are not your target scenarios, but it's nice to envision what you really care about.

Brainstorm on stickies (or directly in the Google Doc) **different scenarios for failure**, and **place them in the Failure column**. Be as specific as possible.

Identify the discrepancies on the poster — the same success scenario in different columns, or a minimum success scenario that is more lenient than a failure scenario. **Discuss these discrepancies with the group, and adjust accordingly**.

Once there are no longer any discrepancies on the poster, **do a gut check**. Are the success scenarios too hard or too soft? Are these truly the scenarios that matter most? Is there anything missing? If necessary, either reframe the goals or re-adjust the different success scenarios.

Finally, **come up with some high-level goals** that summarize what you'd like to accomplish and why.

BEST PRACTICES

1. Tell a Story.

A good Success Spectrum tells a story. Anyone should be able to visualize and viscerally feel what their world would look like if the project were successful.

2. Capture Different Levels of Granularity.

You want to capture both the forest (the goals section, which is higher level) and the trees (the

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success spectrum, which can vary in granularity, but should have several specific items).

3. Think About Feelings, Too.

How success feels is as important as the tangible outcomes we seek.

4. Put a stake-in-the-ground. Don't worry about getting it "right" at first.

These exercises can be hard, because we're worried about coming up with the "right" answer. The goal of this exercise isn't to get it "right," but to give you something to target and explore.

In this vein, it's better to be specific and explore scenarios than to leave things vague. For example, if you're coming up with a fundraising target, put in a number, even if you haven't yet done the analysis to test it.

5. The purpose of Epic is to stretch.

Don't censor yourself! I sometimes ask, "What does success really look like?" a second time to give you a second chance to overcome your inner censor. Hopefully, the fact that this is Epic and not expected liberates you from holding back.

6. Don't put Target goals in Minimum.

Your Target column contains your stretch goals. For your project to be successful, you should get 100% of the items in your Minimum column, and 40-60% of your Target column. Sort accordingly.

7. Close the Gap, Avoid Overlap.

Make sure there's no gap between what's in your Minimum and Failure columns. For example, if you're trying to raise money, and Minimum success is \$100,000, but Failure is \$50,000 or below, if you raise \$75,000, is that success or failure? Close that gap!

Similarly, there should not be overlap between your Minimum, Target, and Epic columns. For example, if you're throwing an event, and Minimum success is 100-200 participants, and Target success is 150-250 participants, is 150 participants Minimum or Target? Avoid overlap!

8. Consider Process and Outcomes Goals.

"Run a mile every day" is a process goal. "Be able to run a 10-minute mile" is an outcome goal. There are different pros and cons to these different types of goals, and there is no universal answer as to what's best for you. However, when you're in the process of formulating your goals, consider both types of goals. Try on how they feel, and think about how they might impact your strategies.

9. Cluster Items in Rows or Multiple Spectrums.

Sometimes, goals and success naturally fall into categories. In these cases, you could either create a new row per category or an entirely new Spectrum.

10. Review, Reflect, and Keep Practicing.

Taking the time to create and align around a Success Spectrum is valuable for both individuals and teams. However, to get the most value out of this tool, using the Success Spectrum should be an ongoing practice, not a one-off. Put your Spectrums somewhere so that everyone will be constantly reminded of them. Review your Spectrums regularly to stay oriented and aligned, and take the time to reflect on the Spectrum afterward to assess success and make meaning of what you learned. The more you practice, the better you will get at working strategically and collaboratively.

HISTORY AND CREDITS

Eugene Eric Kim and Amy Wu (Duende) created this toolkit. The idea of defining success along a spectrum was inspired by Kristin Cobble. The idea of explicitly incorporating failure scenarios was inspired by Seb Paquet, who also named the "Epic" column.



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