



Big Hairy Audacious Goals (BHAGs): A Tool for Goal Setting

The Bonner Community Engagement Curriculum

BWBR Description: *Bonner Curriculum workshop introduces participants to a visionary tool for goal setting, “Big Hairy Audacious Goals,” from Built to Last, documenting successful organizations.*

Overview:

This workshop can be a fun, imaginative way for a team to grapple with their work project and articulate its vision in new ways. BHAGS (pronounced “bee-hags”) are Big Hairy Audacious Goals — a term coined by authors Jerry Porras and James Collins in their book “Built to Last,” which examines the qualities of successful visionary companies. They found that one factor that distinguished successful efforts from unsuccessful ones was the use of ambitious, even outrageous, goals to motivate people and focus them toward concrete accomplishments. While we in the student service arena are in the “business” of service and social change, the lesson and process captured by BHAGS can be fun and useful. By imagining and refining real BHAGS, a team can let loose their creative, motivating energies. BHAGS by definition are inspiring, “hit you in the gut” goals, and they can be helpful for any team’s project, however big or small.



**3rd or 4th
year**

Category:

Project planning and management; goal-setting; visioning

Level:

Middle to higher level; excellent for student leaders or participants embarking on a shared project

Learning Outcomes:

- Participants are exposed to BHAGS, which are straightforward though audacious goals, through a working definition, some examples, and some different kinds/ models of BHAGS that can be useful for projects or organizations.
- Participants have the opportunity to create BHAGS for their own team, major project, or organization.
- Participants can leave with concrete BHAGS that describe their teams work goals in an inspiring, integrative, and compelling way.
- Exercises provide participants with a way to stretch their visioning and creative thinking skills.

How to Prepare:

In this guide, you will find a structured, highly engaging workshop outline. The basic idea is to facilitate the proposed activities. If the group you are offering this to works on one project (e.g., is about to organize a service project or conference, or to create a new campus initiative) then you can simply take folks through the workshop. If, on the other hand, the group represents many different student, campus, or community organizations, you may need to modify some of the activities to focus more on a train-the-trainers approach. Our suggestion is to focus on something unified and shared for the group to illustrate the process. For example, the focus could be, “What is the kind of reputation and impact that we want our college/university to have in the local communities where we work?” That will allow many different programs and initiatives to collaborate in the process of setting BHAGS, as you will see.

How to Do/Brief Outline:

If you want to use this workshop in the structured outline provided, it should contain the following components. You can modify as needed.

The time will vary according to the size of your group, your presentation style and pace, and the complexity of the group’s focus. For example, if you want to use this at an all-program meeting with 60 students, you’ll need longer and to use small groups.

Below’s plan is for a shorter (1 hour) workshop involving a small group (such as a class meeting).

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|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1) Introduce framing quotes | suggested time 5 minutes |
| 2) Set out the challenge | suggested time 5 minutes |
| 3) What the heck is a BHAG? | suggested time 10 minutes |

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|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 4) Begin generating BHAGs | suggested time 20 minutes |
| 5) Narrow down and refine BHAG | suggested time 10 minutes |
| 6) Share and discuss next steps | suggested time 10 minutes |

Part 1) Introduce framing quotes

Suggested time: 5 minutes

You may want to open this up by using a quote or thought of some kind to set a tone with participants. The tone should be about creativity and openness to ideas, even ludicrous or wacky ones. If you believe that students or participants are going to resist using a concept that originated in a business book, framing the exercises may indeed be helpful. As you will see, this workshop is truly creative (and certainly doesn't have to feel corporate or businesslike at all). In our experience, service programs of many types have found this process inspiring and helpful. You can open up with this framing quote and take comments from participants or request them to enter the session with this kind of mindset:

"The problem is never how to get new, innovative thoughts into your mind, but how to get old ones out. Every mind is a room packed with archaic furniture. You must get the old furniture of what you know, think, and believe out before anything new can get in. Make an empty space in any corner of your mind, and creativity will instantly fill it."

- Dee Hock, a rebellious banker who founded the million-dollar VISA company and didn't make a fortune from it, who now promotes cutting-edge ideas about organizations, leadership, and management. (You can find him on the web).

"We shall not cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."

-T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets

"What keeps me going is goals."

-Muhammad Ali

"No matter how many goals you have achieved, you must set your sights on a higher one."

-Jessica Savitch

Find other quotes online. Search for goal quotes. For example, see:

<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/goals.html#zq2RcGEaGLxMRT76.99>

Part 2) Set out the challenge

Suggested time: 5 minutes

Prepare the details of your imagined statement in advance. You need to pick the focus and time frame (this one is set during the current year, but you can move toward a longer future if desired -- see below). The purpose of this statement is to jolt people (in a positive way) into a space of imagination about the future:

Imagine ... it's getting close to spring semester and you're out walking through the campus heading for your next class. The air smells like cut-grass, the birds are singing. All of a sudden, you're approached by a man on a bicycle resembling the scary guy in Willy Wonka's Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. He jumps off, steps close to you and says, "Look, I've got a \$100,000 [or change amount] dollars in my pocket and I'm looking for you, but first you need to tell me what are the core vision and values of _____ [insert the name of your service project/organization, program, or college service effort] and how YOU at _____ [insert name] will make good use of this one million bucks?"

Fortunately, you've got a BHAG in your back pocket:

So, you say, "At _____, we are going to" [insert appropriate example such as]:

Examples (to get you thinking). Create one for your purpose:

- For service project: "engage more than 50% of students in AmericaReads programming that results in 90% of students in local elementary schools reading above grade level at age 8."
- For service project: "author a policy initiative that equalizes funding between the rich and poor neighborhoods around our campus"
- For program: "create an Alternative Spring Break program that engages 25% of our student body in spending their break serving and learning in our state"
- For program: "create a mentorship program that offers high school students assistance with college preparation and results in a decreased drop-out rate from school"

- For college: “build a service center that engages 75 percent of students in meaningful service activities for at least 10 hours per week every year”

Hopefully, by now you have sufficiently gotten people’s focus. Now you can transition into the next part of presenting the BHAG concept.

Part 3) What the heck is a BHAG?

Suggested time: 10 minutes

Present, in your own way, the following information:

A BHAG is a Big Hairy Audacious Goal.

BHAGS were coined by James Collins and Jerry Porras in Built to Last, a book in which the authors analyze companies who successfully defined the industry standard for their products (like Ford, Sony, Nordstrom, Walmart, IBM) and their less visionary (but frequently economically successful) counterparts and then suggest what qualities make visionary companies visionary.

In Built to Last, Collins and Porras outline a number of characteristics that they find shared among these successful visionaries. One of the key characteristics they found was that the visionaries used ambitious, seemingly unattainable goals to motivate their work.

Whatever your own stance on business and what we can learn from for-profit practice, leave that aside for a minute. This workshop is not the place to debate the merits of this idea or the book. Rather, we can take this simple idea and explore it as a way to set our own inspiring goals. These kinds of goals can help our own service efforts, organizations, or campus experience.

Present the definition of a BHAG.

BIG HAIRY AUDACIOUS GOALS ARE:

- **Action-oriented**
- **Clear (who, what, where, by when)**
- **Compelling and gripping ~ people "get it" right away**
- **Bold; bordering on hubris and the unattainable**

Next, you want to give them examples of the four TYPES of BHAGS that were observed by Collins and Porras.

FOUR TYPES OF BHAGS:

Target
Common foe
Role model
Internal transformation.

Present the following examples to give participants a clear idea:

Target BHAG:

- Ford: "Democratize the automobile" (early 1900's)
- Sony: "Become the company that most changes the worldwide image of Japanese products as being of poor quality" (early 1950's, before SONY emerged)
- Some public service project: "Change the way the U.S. non-profits poverty reduction by training organizations in impact assessment"

Common foe BHAG:

- Phillip Morris: Knock off R.J. Reynolds as the number one tobacco company in the world" (1950s)
- Nike: "Crush Adidas" (1960s)
- Some social entrepreneur's project: "Make it unacceptable for a toxic waste dump to be placed in a poor urban community ever again"

Role-model BHAGS:

- Giro Sport Design: "Become the Nike of the cycling industry" (1986)
- Watkins-Johnson: "Become as respected in 20 years as Hewlett-Packard is today" (1996)
- Some non-profit organization: "That more residents participate in the You Can Make a Difference National Service Day than watch Superbowl Sunday."

Internal transformation BHAG:

- Rockwell: "Transform this company from a defense contractor into the best diversified high-technology company in the world" (1995)

- General Electric: “Become number one or two in every market we serve and revolutionize this company to have the strengths of a big company combined with the leanness and agility of a small company” (1980s)
- Some social change project: “Become so good an engaging families in supporting their children’s literacy that statewide organizations and schools contact us for the model”

As facilitator, you may want to keep in mind the following:

- You can note that the examples cited ~ with the exception of the third ~ are listed in Built to Last's appendix along with hundreds of other real examples from existing for-profit companies.
- Encourage workshop participants to stay on task with creative aspect of trying a new tool and not get off track; it’s OKAY to be directed and audacious!
- If you want other information or examples, see the book Built to Last or make up some other ones for your campus / community context. The index contains many examples.

Part 4) Begin creating BHAGS

Suggested time: 20 minutes

Next, begin the interactive portion of the workshop. If you need a bit more context-setting to keep the group moving, keep this in mind:

Ambitious goal-setting is certainly not new to the daily, ongoing work of public service efforts. These efforts devote immense time and energy to making a dent in problems that, unfortunately, may exist long after our lifetimes and for which the human dimension make progress hard to articulate or measure. Nevertheless, the process of goal-setting is widely used by non-profit organizations and campuses. It is both a required process (often by funders and leaders) and extremely useful.

In the next activity, we will have the opportunity to imagine and brainstorm our own BHAGS. I encourage people to think “outside the box” and articulate inspirational, audacious, and motivating ideas. For those of you who are participating in order to do this process with your own teams/groups, you can recreate this activity with volunteers, other students, board members, working committees, or others. This process can be helpful in developing a shared vision and simply-stated but compelling visions and goals for the future of your efforts.

Determine the approach you want to use for this section:

- 1) Have the group brainstorm BHAGS. They can do this overall or you can go type-by-type (e.g., common foe, role model, etc.) to try to stimulate divergent thinking.
- 2) Break participants into 4 groups (group sizes can range from just a few to 5-6 people.) Each group must create 1-2 BHAGS within a 10-15 minutes period. Each group focuses on one type of BHAG (target, common enemy, role-model, or internal transformation). Groups can use whatever process they choose and will be supplied with flip chart paper and markers. After 10 minutes, groups report on their BHAGS.

Part 5) Narrow down and refine BHAGS

Suggested time: 20 minutes

The main objective here is to work with the individuals or small groups to determine what could be a handful (2-3) BHAGS that actually STICK for them. These BHAGS can be things that will guide their work as they move forward in their planning and completion of service work.

Have people work on them and report them out.

Get feedback.

Perhaps vote or poll the list and narrow to a few for your purposes.

Try to make the purposes real (such as BHAGs for your service trip, or a project, or a fundraising goal).

Part 6) Create steps for application and follow up

Suggested time: 10 minutes

Determine how you'd like to end the workshop or transition into future activities. Some suggestions include:

- 1) Complement your BHAGS by generating a mission statement that summarizes and frames those BHAGS.
- 2) Have people prepare and present skits or dramatic presentations capturing BHAGS. Perhaps this can be presented at a future meeting.
- 3) Discuss how and when the group and its leaders will track progress on selected BHAGS. Have the group create calendar-deadlines or progress-oriented tools that can visually show progress on BHAGS (e.g., a big poster-board thermometer for recruitment or fundraising efforts that gets a little "hotter" each time progress is made).

You could use the following quote to end and reinforce the next challenges ahead – how to turn BHAGS into reality in your work. "Keep in mind that there is a big difference between being an organization with a vision statement and becoming a truly visionary organization. When you have superb alignment, a visitor could drop into your organization from another planet and infer the vision without having to read it on paper."