

Aspirations and Key Results (AKRs ... Making progress the AKRon way)

The AKRon way is a means to establish goals that bring needed change and do so urgently.

These Aspirations should advance the mission or purpose of The University of Akron. These Aspirations are bite-sized steps that, when built one on the other, bring substantial benefit to the University.

The **Aspirations** are what we need to do in the next semester.

The **Key Results** are measurable benchmarks or outcomes that affirm that the desired Aspiration has been successfully completed.

Things to think about when writing **AKRs**:

Do not list Business as Usual (BAU) as your **Aspiration** ... the **AKRs** should seek the change that you believe needs to happen to move beyond the current “ruts” that you may be currently stuck in.

Your **Aspirations** should be meaningful, audacious and inspiring to your team and stakeholders. There are some cases where you will purposefully choose less assertive Aspirations since just maintaining or incrementally improving is a momentous task in that moment (e.g., delivering classes in a pandemic).

Your **Key Results** should be specific and time-bound, aggressive but possible, and measurable so that completion of the key result can be verified by others.

Tips to Draft your Aspirations

Reflect on The University of Akron mission statement, the President’s vision statement and the Strategic Action Plan. Now, within your area, think about these questions:

What are the most important things that we need to get done?

What do we need to start doing or changing?

What does success look like?

You should develop your list of **Aspirations** with your team and coworkers, get plenty of feedback before committing to a final draft. They should be significant, concrete, action-oriented and inspirational. You should limit **Aspirations** to 3-5 per semester. Some **Aspirations** will be *Stretch Aspirations* ... those that are considered successful if you get 70% of those key results done. Others will be *Committed Aspirations*, where success only comes if 100% of the key results are met.

Connect to the business model for The University of Akron (probably worthy of some discussion).

Why does our enterprise exist? Who are our customers? What inspires our employees to come to work? How do we pay for this work? Who are our competitors? We sustain ourselves by _____ in order to _____.

When reviewing these **Aspirations** with your team, address these questions

1. Does your **Aspiration** ask for incremental change, a leap or a discovery? (any of these may be appropriate given circumstances)
2. Can you make your **Aspiration** more specific?
3. Do you need to make your **Aspiration** more action-oriented?
4. Can you state the **Aspiration** in a simpler, more concise way?
5. How can you make your **Aspiration** more memorable? Can you tie it to your culture?

Tips to Draft Key Results

Look at each **Aspiration** statement and imagine what things will measurably change at the end of the semester if this **Aspiration** is fully implemented. Ideally, these measures can be continually checked over the course of the semester so that you can assess if you are making progress (called leading indicators). **Key Results** should be:

Specific and time-bound

Aggressive, yet realistic

Measurable and verifiable (ideally several will be leading indicators)

Pairs quantity and quality to seek balance

Be careful to assure that the **Key Results** are necessary AND sufficient to assure that the **Aspiration** is complete as well. A key question is: If I accomplish all of my **Key Results**, do I achieve my **Aspiration**?

Ideally, you should limit **Key Results** to no more than five measures.

Key Results can be categorized as inputs (things that you can control), outputs (things that you produce), and outcomes (describe the thing you are trying to change).

An example - for an enrollment initiative, an input key result can be the total marketing placements for billboards/social media/TV ads; the output can be an increase in applications to UA and an outcome can be an improved campus climate that has regained its confidence due to more students enrolling and a stop in the enrollment decline.

Scoring AKRs

Red, yellow, green ... graded by your localized team and posted on dashboards. For committed AKRs, it is only green or red and 100% of KRs need to be met for a green. For aspirational AKRs, 0-30% KRs is red, 30-70% is yellow and >70% is green. Monitor these bi-weekly and push to have success on several, but not all, AKRs.

Aligning AKRs throughout the UA

We will start by seeking informal agreements between groups to pursue AKRs that are working together to meet the UA Strategic Action Plan as well as the goals of the Board of Trustees and President. We will not start with a directive alignment but rather rely on communication and sharing to adopt a fluid alignment of AKRs throughout our large and complex enterprise. For this reason, we will be establishing a dashboard to collect and share all AKRs developed at the UA.