“Legacy” can sound grand before a project has done anything. Add words like “transformative” or “world-changing,” and a well-intentioned initiative may start to read like a campaign for its own reputation. The way around that is not to avoid ambition. It is to make the ambition accountable: name the need, share decision-making, show what changed, and say what is still unfinished.

A legacy-driven initiative is not simply a project designed to last. It is work built so that people, institutions, or communities can carry it forward—and judge whether it is worth carrying forward. For working adults leading teams or community projects, that means treating legacy less as a slogan and more as a set of choices about who benefits, who leads, and what evidence counts.

Start with the problem, not the legacy

Purpose-driven leadership begins with a clear account of the problem. Who is affected? What do they say is missing? What has already been tried? These questions help distinguish a response to a real need from a campaign looking for a worthy cause.

“We want to leave a legacy” is not yet a purpose. “Young people in this region have limited access to paid civic leadership opportunities” is more specific—and it invites investigation. A team can ask young residents whether that description fits, learn what barriers they encounter, and revise its plan before spending money on a solution.

Specificity also helps prevent purpose marketing pitfalls. A polished mission statement can imply that an organization has already solved the problem, even when it is only beginning. Describe the work at its actual stage. If a pilot is still testing its approach, call it a pilot. If the need is based on early conversations rather than representative research, say so.

A useful test for purpose claims

- **Can you name the group and the need?** Avoid describing “the community” as if it has one perspective.



- **Can people affected by the issue change the plan?** Consultation without influence is not shared leadership.

- **Can you state what you do not know yet?** Honest limits make a claim more credible, not less.

For a working adult, the practical takeaway is simple: before writing a purpose statement, schedule conversations with the people closest to the issue. Their language may reveal that the original problem—and the proposed solution—needs to change.

Make “legacy” concrete enough to test

Legacy initiatives measurable impact depends on defining what should remain after a launch, a grant, or a founder’s tenure. That might mean a youth council with real budget authority, a training curriculum adopted by partner organizations, or a reliable pathway for residents to influence local decisions. Each is more concrete than a promise to “inspire change.”

It helps to separate activities, outputs, outcomes, and longer-term effects. A workshop is an activity. The number of people who complete it is an output. A change in participants’ skills or access to leadership roles may be an outcome. A broader shift in policy or institutional practice is a longer-term effect—and usually harder to attribute to one initiative.

Level Example measure Question it answers Activity Number of youth-led planning sessions held Did the work take place? Output Number and range of participants who completed a program Who did the work reach? Outcome Participants’ reported access to decision-making roles after six months Did participants experience a meaningful change? Longer-term effect Partner organizations adopting youth decision-making practices Did practices or systems change beyond the project?

Numbers need context. “We reached 500 people” says little without a definition of reach, a time period, or information about who those people were. A smaller measure—such as the share of participants who return to lead a second project—may offer a more useful signal. Pair counts with fielding.edu interviews, observations, or participant feedback, and report both progress and gaps.

For busy leaders, choose a few measures that inform decisions rather than building a dashboard no one uses. Decide in advance who will collect the information, how often, and what the team will do if results fall short.

Let young people lead beyond the launch

Youth-led activism can grow into sustained programs when young people retain meaningful influence as the work expands. A campaign may begin with students organizing around an issue at school. Over time, it might develop into a peer education program, a regional network, or partnerships across countries. Growth alone does not prove success; the important question is whether the people who initiated the work still shape its priorities and receive appropriate recognition and support.

Scaling can change a movement. Funders may request formal structures. Organizations may standardize activities so they can be repeated. Adult staff may take on administrative tasks. Those shifts can help a program endure, but they can also move authority away from young leaders. Clear decision rights help: Which decisions belong to youth members? Which require staff oversight? Who controls funds, public messaging, and the use of participants’ stories?

Build the conditions for responsible growth

1. Resource participation. Budget for transportation, accessibility, translation, food, and stipends where possible. Asking young people to contribute significant time without support can narrow who is able to

participate.. Pretty simple.

2. **Develop adult allies.** Adults can provide safety, continuity, and access to institutions without speaking over youth leaders. Define their role rather than relying on good intentions.
3. **Protect consent and privacy.** A participant's story is not a communications asset by default. Explain where a recording, photo, or quotation will appear and allow people to decline.
4. **Plan for handoffs.** Document processes, train new leaders, and make room for different approaches. A program dependent on one charismatic organizer is vulnerable, not yet durable.

Global programs need particular care. A model that works in one city may not fit another community's language, laws, or organizing traditions. Offer shared principles and adaptable resources, then let local youth leaders decide what should change. For working professionals, the takeaway is to treat replication as a relationship—not a copy-and-paste exercise.

Use organizational development to make change stick

Last month, I was working with a client who thought they could save money but ended up paying more.. Organizational development and change is a doctoral field concerned with how people and organizations understand and navigate change. It offers a useful lens for legacy work because a strong initiative often requires more than a compelling idea: it may involve shifting routines, roles, incentives, relationships, and measures of success.

That lens encourages leaders to look beneath the announcement. If an organization says it wants youth input, can young people influence budgets and program design? If it says it values community knowledge, do staff have time and processes to act on that knowledge? A mission statement and an operating system can contradict each other. The difference shows up in daily decisions.

Fielding Graduate University's School of Leadership Studies includes Organizational Development and Change as a doctoral program category. For professionals exploring this field, the connection is practical: studying change can help leaders examine how a proposed initiative fits into an organization's culture, structure, and relationships. It does not replace listening to participants or guarantee a particular outcome. It can, however, give practitioners frameworks for asking better questions and learning from implementation.



Map the change before you announce it

A concise change map can name four things:

- **Current conditions:** What is happening now, and for whom?
- **Desired change:** What would participants notice if the initiative were working?
- **Conditions required:** What skills, resources, relationships, or policy shifts would make that change possible?
- **Feedback and adjustment:** How will people flag unintended effects, and who has authority to respond?

For a manager balancing a new initiative with existing responsibilities, this map can expose hidden workload. If the plan assumes staff will gather data, facilitate meetings, and maintain partnerships, name those hours and responsibilities before launch. Unfunded work is still work.

Tell the story without turning people into proof

Stories can help an audience understand why a program matters. They can also oversimplify a complex issue or frame participants as symbols of an organization's generosity. Authentic movement building requires more than a moving testimonial: it requires a fair account of who shaped the work, what changed, and what remains beyond the organization's control.

Ask people how they want to be identified and whether they want their words shared at all. Avoid suggesting that one person's experience represents a whole group. If a story illustrates a result, connect it to broader evidence and explain the limits. Do not present a participant's progress as proof that a system has changed.

Audio and digital distribution can extend a conversation when the content is useful to the people involved. A series featuring youth organizers, for instance, might be made available through Apple Podcasts and distributed through iHeartRadio syndication. Those channels can make episodes easier to find; they do not establish credibility or impact by themselves. Build in consent, accessibility, clear descriptions, and a way for listeners to find the work or respond to it.

For working adults communicating across departments or communities, a good test is to ask: would the people described recognize this account as fair? If not, revise it before focusing on reach.

A practical sequence for building a credible initiative

When the work is still taking shape, use a sequence that makes room for evidence and revision:

1. **Listen and define.** Describe the issue with people affected by it, not only with internal stakeholders.
2. **Share authority.** Decide who can set priorities, approve resources, and change the plan.
3. **Set a modest first test.** Choose a pilot or initial phase with a clear time frame and a manageable scope.
4. **Choose measures together.** Track a small number of outputs and outcomes that participants consider meaningful.
5. **Review and report.** Share results, limitations, and changes made in response to feedback.
6. **Plan for continuity.** Identify the people, funding, knowledge, and partnerships needed to sustain or responsibly conclude the work.

This process does not guarantee that an initiative will last. It does make it easier to distinguish durability from mere longevity. A project that continues while excluding the people it was meant to serve may be

enduring in name but not in purpose.

Legacy is demonstrated, not declared

The most credible legacy claim may be the least dramatic: a community now has a decision-making role it did not have before; a partner has adopted a practice and can explain why; young leaders have the resources and authority to continue—or redirect—the work. Those are claims an initiative can document and people can question.

Purpose-driven leadership is not the art of sounding certain. It is the discipline of matching words to evidence, sharing power, and staying accountable when the results are mixed. For working adults, that discipline is a practical starting point: make one promise your team can measure, give the people affected a voice in how it is measured, and be willing to change course when the evidence asks you to.