



THE  
CENTERBRIDGE-BAIN  
PARTNERSHIP GRANT

**UNCOMMON  
IMPACT**

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 **CPRL** | Center for Public  
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# Introduction

The Centerbridge Foundation (Centerbridge) provides support to nonprofit organizations in the education sector with the aim of improving access to education and economic opportunities for young people. In an effort to help organizations address critical strategic challenges, Centerbridge and Bain & Company (Bain) launched the Centerbridge-Bain Partnership Grant Opportunity (the Partnership Grant) in 2012.<sup>1</sup> Through the provision of grant funding of up to \$500,000 over four years, four months of dedicated Bain consulting, and additional leadership and management support, the Partnership Grant seeks to strengthen grantee organizations' ability to execute on their missions and, in doing so, positively impact the sector more broadly.

In 2013, Centerbridge and Bain awarded a Partnership Grant to Uncommon Schools (Uncommon). They selected Uncommon based on its track record of closing achievement gaps and its potential to effect widespread change through the development of Uncommon Impact, the organization's formal sharing and dissemination arm. Uncommon Impact distributes a rich array of effective practices that Uncommon has developed and tested in an effort to improve educational achievement nationwide.

With funding and thought partnership from Centerbridge and consulting support from Bain, Uncommon was able to dedicate the time and resources needed to establish Uncommon Impact and create and execute its strategic plan. This case study documents the award of and work enabled by the Partnership Grant, as well as the evolution of Uncommon Impact into one of Uncommon's three top organizational priorities. The case study begins with background on Uncommon Impact, including the sharing and dissemination work that took place within Uncommon prior to Uncommon Impact's formal establishment. Next, the case study documents the role of the Partnership Grant in establishing Uncommon Impact and describes its progress to date. Finally, the case study highlights forward-looking challenges facing the initiative and distills a set of key considerations, both for Uncommon Impact and for the future administration of the Partnership Grant.

## Background

Uncommon Schools is a nonprofit network of 49 public charter schools across Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New York.<sup>2</sup> Its mission is to reverse racial and socio-economic achievement gaps, and to prepare students to enter, succeed in, and graduate from college. Each of its schools maintains high academic standards for students, with a focus on accountability and data-driven instruction. Uncommon supports its schools in a variety of ways, including through curriculum development, assessment design, professional development, back-office services, and teacher recruitment.<sup>3</sup>

Uncommon's practices have proven effective. For example, although 83% of its students are economically disadvantaged and 94% are Black or Latino, five times as many Uncommon alumni graduate from college compared to their low income peers. In 2015-2016, Uncommon elementary students in NYC reversed the economic achievement gap, outperforming non-economically disadvantaged students by 23 percentage points in Math and 12 percentage points in ELA.<sup>4</sup> Overall, Uncommon students in NYC outperformed the city average by 19 percentage points in Math and 8 percentage points in ELA.<sup>5</sup>

Recognizing that it had important resources at its disposal—the expertise of its teachers and leaders and the effectiveness of its schools—Uncommon developed Uncommon Impact to formalize the organization's commitment to improve student achievement beyond the walls of its own classrooms. The organization's dissemination of effective practices began in 1997 with the decision to open the doors of North Star Academy to visitors and educators from across the globe—including parts of Latin America, Asia, and Europe—many of whom now

implement Uncommon's instructional practices in their own schools.<sup>6</sup> As its network grew, Uncommon continued its informal sharing and open door policy, often exchanging visits and materials with traditional district schools located in the same buildings as Uncommon schools.

In addition, Uncommon disseminated its effective teaching and leadership practices through the publications of Uncommon Chief Schools Officer for High Schools and K-12 Content Development, Paul Bambrick-Santoyo, who wrote *Driven by Data and Leverage Leadership*, and Managing Director of Teach Like a Champion, Doug Lemov, author of *Teach Like a Champion* (which has sold more than one million copies since its publication in 2010, and has been translated into eight languages).<sup>7</sup> Building on the work of Bambrick-Santoyo, Lemov, and many others across Uncommon, Uncommon Impact recognizes that there is great demand for the tools and effective practices that have contributed to Uncommon's success. Responding to that demand has become a key part of the organization's mission.

# Uncommon Impact and the Centerbridge-Bain Partnership Grant

To capitalize on the potential for broadening its reach outside its own schools through more formalized and structured dissemination of effective practices, Uncommon applied for the Partnership Grant in 2013. In addition to seeking financial support focused on this effort, Bain's support would be critical in developing and executing a strategic plan for sharing its content, curriculum, and practices; aligning Uncommon Impact to the organization's broader work and priorities; and determining how, if at all, to price its services and resources.

Centerbridge and Bain considered Uncommon as a strong grant partner and Uncommon Impact as a compelling investment. Uncommon already had an established record as a pioneering charter management organization with a proven commitment and capacity to use the dissemination of its work to effect widespread change and improve education outcomes for children outside of its own network. Carrie Braddock, Director of the Centerbridge Foundation, explained, "Centerbridge and Bain look to support organizations that help to contribute to building the ecosystem of high-performing education organizations in New York City. Uncommon is a best-in-class organization. We were eager to support their efforts to scale their impact and collaborate with district schools." These qualities and interests provided the basis for a productive and mission-aligned partnership between Uncommon, Centerbridge, and Bain.

## Establishing Uncommon Impact

With financial support from Centerbridge, Uncommon was able to dedicate staffing resources to formally establish Uncommon Impact. Uncommon hired a Director of Uncommon Impact, who began working at the start of the Bain consulting engagement.

Bain's consulting engagement was initially scheduled for June to October 2013, but was extended by an additional two months to complete the project, given Bain's capacity to provide more assistance. The six-month engagement facilitated a close and collaborative working relationship between the three-member Bain team, the Chief Talent Officer of Uncommon and the Director of Uncommon Impact.

The consultation set and met three objectives. First, Bain helped Uncommon Impact solidify its goals. Some of those goals were externally focused: providing better professional development for teachers, codifying and spreading effective practices, and strengthening relationships with the communities in which Uncommon operates. Others were internally focused: developing Uncommon educators' capacity to share and teach effective practices as means of recruiting, enhancing, and retaining staff.

Second, Bain facilitated an inquiry into what aspects of Uncommon's content would be most effective to share. That inquiry strove to capitalize on Uncommon's numerous strengths, while finding the right balance between its internal resource constraints and external demand for particular content.

Third, Bain helped Uncommon Impact determine which method of delivery was best, and whether the priority should be to reach more teachers and leaders through more high-level dissemination, such as books, or to provide more direct delivery, but to fewer participants at a time and overall. Taking into account Uncommon's resource constraints and Uncommon Impact's objectives, Bain proposed a mixed solution.

Uncommon CEO Brett Peiser summarized the major benefit to Uncommon from the Bain consulting as access to "millions of hours of expertise; the minute you confront a problem Bain has seen it before and can help you navigate it from there." In particular, the consultation provided Uncommon with the ability to be more strategic—to take on only what it has the capacity to accomplish, to make sure that whatever it does take on is feasible and aligned to its goals, and to be disciplined about how it approaches its work.

Over the course of the consultation, Bain and Uncommon confronted and overcame two key challenges. First, the Director of Uncommon Impact was appointed near the start of the engagement, which meant that the Director was tasked with shaping the initiative while developing a deep understanding of the broader organization. To ensure sufficient institutional knowledge, the Bain-Uncommon working team included both the Uncommon Chief Talent Officer—who had been with the organization longer—and the Director of Uncommon Impact. In addition, Peiser stayed closely involved with the project.

The second challenge, common to projects of this sort, was a lack of complete agreement at the start on what Uncommon Impact should look like. Although there was clearer consensus on Uncommon Impact's goals, it was initially difficult for Bain to make concrete practical recommendations because of differing views on preferable modes of delivery, the prioritization of breadth versus depth, and the importance of pricing. Bain's method of reconciling these differences was not to be prescriptive but rather to construct a variety of scenarios that made plain their relative feasibility (or lack thereof) and to identify trade-offs of each approach. The Bain team used these scenarios in a series of workshops that surfaced competing and shared viewpoints and helped the Uncommon team reach consensus.

Taken as a whole, Bain's support provided a structure for developing Uncommon Impact's dissemination goals, identifying the content it should share, understanding the spectrum of available delivery models, and considering how Uncommon Impact fit into the broader organization. Since the conclusion of the Bain engagement, Centerbridge's additional grant funding has supported the implementation of conclusions reached.

## Evolution During the Partnership Grant

With the strategic direction defined and the financial resources necessary to lead the execution of Uncommon Impact's strategic vision, the initiative has flourished over the past three years. In 2016, Impact was named as one of three top organizational priorities in Uncommon's five-year vision. Uncommon Impact's efforts can be categorized into three broad categories of work: work led by the Teach Like a Champion (TLaC) Team, work led by Bambrick-Santoyo in conjunction with the Relay Graduate School of Education, and Uncommon-driven district partnerships.

### Teach Like a Champion Team and Paul Bambrick-Santoyo

Throughout the lifecycle of the Partnership Grant, the TLaC Team, led by Lemov, and the Relay work, led by Bambrick-Santoyo, have expanded their sharing work that began before—and moreover inspired—the formalization of Uncommon Impact. Both Lemov's team and Bambrick-Santoyo focus on codifying effective practices, capturing effective practices on video, naming the observed techniques, and developing resources and workshops to teach others to use the named techniques.

Lemov, Chief Academic Officer Erica Woolway, Director of Professional Development Colleen Driggs, and the rest of the TLaC Team have developed and delivered 13 external workshops on effective teaching techniques to a number of districts and schools, including the districts of Austin, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Clark County, Dallas, Denver, Houston, London, New York City, and Washington DC. As is the case with all Uncommon Impact workshops, the TLaC workshops leverage a video library of high-performing teachers to show what effective techniques look like in action. Bambrick-Santoyo described the power of videos: "Seeing is believing. If you have videos of best practices that you can share, people can see it, and believe it, and follow it."

In addition, the TLaC team develops and disseminates "Plug and Plays," digital packages of materials needed to run trainings in schools. These Plug and Plays focus on the three areas of expertise that were codified during the Bain consulting engagement: improving teaching, deepening content knowledge, and strengthening leadership.<sup>8</sup>

Bambrick-Santoyo—inspired by and in partnership with many others at Uncommon, including Chief Schools Officer K-8 Julie Jackson; Associate Managing Directors Juliana Worrell, Nikki Bridges, and Serena Savarirayan; and Director of 5-12 Literacy Steve Chiger—also extended the sharing of Uncommon's best practices that began before Uncommon Impact's formalization. Bambrick-Santoyo leads workshops with a number of partners, including the University of Virginia School Turnaround Program, and estimates that he has trained over 17,000 leaders across the globe. Furthermore, Bambrick-Santoyo is a co-founder of the Relay Graduate School of Education National Principals Academy Fellowship, a program that trains sitting principals to become instructional and cultural leaders, and Dean of the Leverage Leadership Institute, a program that expands the leadership capacity of high-performing principals from across the nation. Many of Relay's instructors

and much of the curriculum used by Relay in the training of principals and principals' managers come from Uncommon Schools.

Bambrick-Santoyo and the TLAC team continue to publish books. In 2016, they released three new publications: *Reading Reconsidered*, by Doug Lemov, Colleen Driggs, and Erica Woolway; *Get Better Faster*, by Paul Bambrick-Santoyo; and *Teach Like a Champion Field Guide 2.0*, by Doug Lemov, Joaquin Hernandez, and Jennifer Kim.

### District Partnerships

Whereas the work of Bambrick-Santoyo and the TLAC team over the past three years looks much like the sharing work done prior to the Partnership Grant, Uncommon Impact's third major category of work—its district partnerships—constitutes a formal body of work that started after the Partnership Grant was awarded and Uncommon Impact was established. These partnerships—particularly with the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE)—provided the testing ground for the strategic plan that Uncommon Impact developed in consultation with Bain.

In 2013, Uncommon Impact received a New York State Charter School Dissemination Grant that allowed Uncommon to implement its vision for expanding its external sharing. This grant paved the way for Uncommon to establish partnerships with educators in NYCDOE schools, which began during the 2014-2015 school year through a professional development collaboration with principals and teachers in 17 district schools across several NYCDOE districts. The collaboration took place through four full-day workshops for instructional staff and through principals' enrollment in the Relay National Principals Academy Fellowship program. Some educators took it upon themselves to deepen the collaboration, attending school visits at various Uncommon schools and exchanging additional instructional resources.

Impressed by Uncommon Impact's quality, New York City Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña asked Uncommon to intensify the relationship with the NYCDOE in the 2015-2016 school year by focusing the partnership on Districts 23 and 19. Uncommon Impact provided professional development sessions focused on strengthening leadership, improving teaching, and deepening content knowledge to over 400 educators (including teachers, principals and district staff) in the two districts.<sup>9</sup> In addition, 12 of 24 principals in District 23, and three from District 19, participated in the Relay National Principals Academy Fellowship, and superintendents participated in a three-day Principal Managers Training Intensive at Relay.

The work with the NYCDOE has led to the establishment, more recently, of partnerships with Newark Public Schools (NPS) and the Rochester School District (Rochester). In the case of NPS, the district's Executive Director of Literacy, Samantha Messer, attended and was impressed by an Uncommon Great Habits Great Readers workshop. She subsequently visited Alexander Street Elementary, a school that was managed by NPS until the 2014-2015 school year, when NPS asked Uncommon Schools to take it over. Struck by the improvement in culture and in students' proficiency levels, she arranged for additional visits to Alexander Street, both for herself and for other NPS leaders, and pursued an Uncommon Impact partnership in order to transfer effective practices to NPS district schools on a broader scale.

In the case of Rochester City School District, Uncommon Impact received a second New York State Charter School Dissemination Grant to launch a Summer Teaching Fellows program. This program, which just completed its first summer, focuses on teacher pipeline and diversity development, with the goal of recruiting and selecting college juniors to participate as teaching fellows in Rochester City Schools, 80% of whom will return as full-time staff at host schools upon graduation.

## Noteworthy Progress

### External Progress

Uncommon Impact's ultimate external goal is to improve student achievement to close the achievement gap. To do so, Uncommon Impact believes that it must provide high quality resources and services that lead to changes in practice, that it must train and support large numbers of educators each year, and that it must strengthen and scale its relationships with its district partnerships to expand its reach.

Although Uncommon has yet to obtain rigorous evidence that it is achieving its external end goals, there are early indicators of the positive impact its work is having on student achievement at dedicated partner schools. The NYCDOE schools with strong participation in the 2015-16 Uncommon Partnership, which focused on Common Core-aligned reading strategies, on average saw more than double the ELA growth than the rest of the schools in their districts.<sup>10</sup> The Brooklyn Landmark School, which opened in 2013 and serves a student body that is 93% economically disadvantaged and 95% Black or Latino, outscored the schools in its District by nearly 30 percentage points in ELA and 52 percentage points in Math after 1.5 years in the partnership with Uncommon Impact.<sup>11</sup> After 2.5 years in the partnership, Brooklyn Landmark School

outscored the schools in its District by 48 percentage points in ELA and 52 percentage points in Math.<sup>12</sup> The leader of the Brooklyn Landmark School attributes this level of achievement in large part to her work with Uncommon.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to student achievement data at dedicated partner schools, several leading indicators, including the quality of resources and services and the strength of relationships with district partners, suggest that Uncommon Impact is making meaningful progress.

Quality of Resources and Services

The quality of Uncommon’s content is unquestionably seen as one of its chief strengths. The former Superintendent of District 23, Mauriciere de Govia explains, “Uncommon’s strength is the tools, the research around the tools that they use across culture, assessment, observation; and it is the practicing of those tools and the consistency that is done through calendaring to exercise those tools that make those successful – it is the Uncommon way.”

Attendees of Uncommon Impact’s workshops express high levels of satisfaction with the quality of the content and delivery. Survey results from the NYCDOE in 2014-2015 school year demonstrate that participants have found the level of facilitation high, and, perhaps most importantly, that the content is actionable and will enable them

to improve student achievement in their classrooms (see Table 1). De Govia elaborated on the perceived quality of content and workshops: “People appreciated the quality of the professional development. There was really positive feedback around that ... the tools are so user friendly once you get the rhythm of [them].”

To ensure the workshops are high quality, Uncommon tests and iterates upon workshop content, form, and delivery with its internal staff before using it with external audiences, and only a select group of master practitioners serve as external facilitators. As Chief Advancement Officer and former Director of Uncommon Impact Samantha Tweedy explains, “Uncommon works hard to make sure that any professional development that it provides internally is A+++++, so that by the time Uncommon Impact is sharing it externally, it is of an incredibly high quality.” Workshops utilize a “see it, name it, do it” framework: participants see videos of effective techniques in action and analyze the footage; name the techniques in the clearest and most precise language possible; and practice implementing the techniques through low-stakes role plays with fellow workshop participants. These role plays provide practice opportunities so that participants can uncover their questions and build muscle memory for effective practices before trying them out in their own classrooms.

Table 1. Survey results from Uncommon Impact’s NYCDOE Trainings (maximum score=5).

| Question                                                                                   | Average Rating<br>(2014-2015) | Average Rating<br>(2015-2016) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| This PD will help me to improve student achievement at my school.                          | 4.6<br>(n=532)                | 4.6<br>(n=530)                |
| The content of this workshop is highly actionable.                                         | 4.7<br>(n=533)                | 4.6<br>(n=532)                |
| Presenters were well-prepared and organized, and explained concepts and materials clearly. | 4.8<br>(n=530)                | 4.7<br>(n=534)                |
| Planning and pacing made workshop engaging and productive.                                 | 4.5<br>(n=529)                | 4.5<br>(n=518)                |

The demand for resources outside of professional development also speaks to the quality of Uncommon Impact's products. To date, over 1,000 Plug and Plays have been purchased. Combined, Teach Like a Champion workshops and Plug and Plays trained over 1,500 teachers and leaders in the 2015-2016 school year.

### Strength and Scale of District Partnerships

A second significant sign of progress has been Uncommon Impact's ability to build strong relationships with the districts in which it operates and to grow those relationships over time. Despite the complicated politics involved, Uncommon saw an opportunity for educators from all types of schools to come together and improve their practice to benefit students. Uncommon Impact has shown that it is possible to formally establish substantive, productive relationships between charter and district schools in many of the cities in which it operates.

This achievement was on display when Chancellor Fariña attended and spoke at two separate Uncommon Impact workshops and later approached Uncommon to deepen the partnership. Fariña's presence sent an important signal to those participating, and beyond, that districts and charters can partner and learn from one another. This support enabled the further development of partnerships with District 23 and others. In a recent statement describing the state of district-charter collaboration, Fariña stated, "We're particularly close with Uncommon Schools."<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, it is in its partnerships with the NYCDOE that Uncommon Impact has accomplished some of its most meaningful work. As the former Director of Uncommon Impact, Amie Sugarman, describes it, "the work partnering with New York City was the shining star of Uncommon Impact's work." And as Senior Fellow at the Kauffman Foundation, Richard Whitmire, observed after visiting both Uncommon's Leadership Prep Ocean Hill and its district partner, Brooklyn Landmark Elementary, "Most noticeable were Landmark's adoptions of instructional practices Uncommon has fine-tuned for years."<sup>15</sup> The same is true of Newark, where Messer reports having been surprised, given the political environment, by the enthusiasm and excitement with which Uncommon Impact's offerings have been taken up by district schools.

The fact that Uncommon Impact has been able to grow its relationships to new districts and reach more schools within each district is another indicator of the strength of these partnerships and of quality of its program. Every district that has entered into a partnership with Uncommon Impact has subsequently tried to expand that partnership. For example, the relationship with District 19 grew out of an existing relationship with District 23, and District 19 then requested a continuation of the relationship for an additional year. Successful relationships in New York have, in turn, given rise to the establishment of new relationships—still in their early stages—like that with NPS.

### Number of Educators Served through In-Person Professional Development

Uncommon Impact aims to serve 2,000 educators per year with professional development support. This past year, Uncommon Impact served close to that number, including through district partnerships, Teach Like a Champion workshops, and Great Habits Great Readers workshops. In addition, Uncommon Impact trained 15 NYCDOE principals through the Relay National Principals Academy Fellowship.

### Internal Progress

Uncommon Impact's internal goal is to positively affect student achievement by improving staff recruitment within the organization. Uncommon reports an increase in the frequency of candidates referencing its sharing and partnership work as one of the reasons they are interested in joining the organization.<sup>16</sup>

Uncommon hopes Uncommon Impact will help retain talented staff as well. Peiser explains, "Internally, it is so important to provide career opportunities to teachers and leaders. It is very rewarding to teach 6th grade math, but being able to go to another school or district and share the work you are doing is similarly moving and helps retain and develop teachers and leaders as well." To better understand Uncommon Impact's effect on retention efforts, Uncommon plans to survey presenters at the close of the year about their experience in leading Uncommon Impact offerings.

# Forward-Looking Challenges

Uncommon Impact has already faced and addressed a number of challenges. For example, Uncommon has forged consensus on its strategic plan, worked to ensure sufficient institutional knowledge when onboarding new leadership, and bridged the politically sensitive charter-district relationships in a number of cities. However, Uncommon Impact's leadership recognizes that hurdles inevitably lie ahead. Two key challenges that Uncommon Impact will continue to navigate include constrained internal capacity and the capacity of its partner schools.

## Constrained internal capacity

Internally, the heart of Uncommon's work is running its schools effectively. A challenge for Uncommon has been how to prioritize Uncommon Impact without taking resources from its core mission. This challenge is particularly acute because it is often the same human capital resources that are critical to both aspects of Uncommon's work. Those individuals who run external professional development either do similar work within Uncommon, or are teachers or leaders in schools. As Virginia Graham, a member of the Bain consulting team, explains: "They have so much they want to do, which is wonderful—but there are a limited number of people they have who can run and teach in their schools and provide the learnings to others. Almost everyone felt that it was important to have practitioners run the trainings ... But that is a time question – you can only be in one place at once."

Capacity difficulties have been partially addressed through the democratization of the personnel able to deliver professional development. Three to four times more people are positioned to deliver professional development externally today than has historically been the case.

## Defining and Measuring Success

Uncommon, as an organization, places much value on gathering data to inform its decision-making and understand its areas of strength and growth. Consequently, the organization feels a sense of urgency to define indicators of success for Uncommon Impact's long-term goals. Doing so may prove to be challenging, as Uncommon Impact will need to determine what measures of changes in practice and student outcomes are both reliable and allow for valid inferences about Uncommon Impact's influence on practice and student achievement. Uncommon Impact will also need to consider how long it takes before changes in student achievement are observable.

After identifying these indicators, Uncommon Impact will need to articulate goals that are rigorous and realistic so that it can assess the extent to which it is achieving its long-term aims. Doing so may involve carefully defining the population of educators and schools served by each of Uncommon Impact's offerings and defining targets that are appropriate for each population and service. This identification is complicated because of the range and diversity of partner schools. The measurement will also require consent from participants to track their progress and student outcomes over time.

However, having rigorous research as evidence of Uncommon Impact's effectiveness will be critical to securing the resources required to support this work and to expand into additional districts.

## Capacity of Partner Organizations

Sharing and dissemination work is time consuming, not only for Uncommon Impact but also for the "consumer," who must engage with materials and attend trainings on top of routine daily work. The challenge is to ensure that the benefits of the partnership are perceived as sufficient to justify the time expended by partners. Thus far, Uncommon Impact has addressed this challenge by forging strong relationships with its district partners and by engaging interested parties as participants in its professional development opportunities.

As Uncommon Impact expands to serve more and more traditional district partners, its burden to sell participants on its value and to help participants find the time and resources needed to internalize the content may increase. Partners with school models that diverge considerably from that of Uncommon might find it more challenging to achieve the degree of success they anticipate resulting from the partnership and to sustain the level of engagement required.

# Forward-Looking Considerations

Reflecting on the progress achieved thus far and the anticipated challenges that remain ahead for Uncommon Impact has revealed a set of considerations for Uncommon, Centerbridge, and Bain.

## Considerations for Uncommon

As Uncommon Impact continues to evolve its work, it would be well served to continue differentiating its workshops based on participants' contexts and framing them in such a way to increase participant buy-in. In addition, as it expands its work with districts, Uncommon might want to determine the extent to which it intends to engage in two-way sharing of effective practices and ensure that its messaging and actions align with its intentions. While Uncommon has learned a great deal from its partner schools, that aspect of the model has not been as codified to date.

### Differentiation and framing of workshops

Uncommon Impact's workshops are among its strongest assets. Although the level of satisfaction and engagement is extremely high, Uncommon Impact has experienced lower levels of engagement from participants who have difficulty understanding how the presented content fits into their school contexts.

Uncommon Impact should continue to address the varying needs of participants in a few ways. First Uncommon Impact has had numerous conversations with district leadership to understand the participants' needs and tailor content accordingly. As was the case with NPS, to make these conversations fruitful, Uncommon Impact might encourage district leadership to attend other Uncommon trainings so that they have a clear sense of what to expect in the workshops and can develop concrete recommendations about how content and delivery could be adjusted.

Another practice that should be continued is to set clear expectations for workshops and frame them in such a way as to increase buy-in from participants once the workshop design is finalized. Helpful practices include opening the workshop with a statement from a district speaker about the shared mission of district and charter schools and highlighting Uncommon's open door policy that invites visitors to observe the shared practices in action.

### Clarity of roles and expectations in district partnerships

Uncommon frames its relationships with districts as partnerships, which can create the perception that the sharing and dissemination of effective practices is intended to be bidirectional. This perception could be valuable for overcoming charter-district tensions. Yet if this perception does not manifest itself in practice, Uncommon might run the risk of weakening relationships with skeptical district partners, be it district or school leaders.

Accordingly, Uncommon Impact might want to examine the extent to which it intends to engage in an equal exchange of effective practices. Then, Uncommon Impact might want to evaluate its messaging and actions to ensure that they are aligned with its intentions. It is also important to note that there are no "silver bullets" in education; improving student achievement is hard work and requires doing a range of things well.

## Considerations for Centerbridge and Bain

The overwhelming consensus from Uncommon Impact leadership, past and present, is that the Partnership Grant has been instrumental to Uncommon Impact's success. As Centerbridge and Bain continue efforts to identify and support grant partners that require assistance with strategic challenges, there are several considerations that can be distilled from the Uncommon Impact Partnership Grant about how to ensure equally as successful partnerships in the future.

### Buy-in of senior leadership and of a dedicated project lead

Working with a project lead and organizational leadership that is invested in the project is essential to the initiative's success. Confirming that a dedicated project lead is installed in the organization prior to, or immediately following, the commencement of the partnership is ideal, as is having points of continuity within the organization whenever staff

turnover occurs. In his role as CEO, Peiser has prioritized Uncommon Impact and has been available for direct engagement, including with Bain, when needed. His involvement ensured that staff turnover within Uncommon Impact did not negatively affect the prioritization of the work within the broader organization.

### Scoping the Consulting project at the Outset of the Engagement

The Uncommon Impact Partnership Grant made clear how valuable it is to have a set project scope in place from the outset. Having clear goals, tasks, and deliverables increases the effectiveness of Bain's consulting work. Based on the Uncommon Impact engagement, Centerbridge and Bain are working to ensure that future grant partners have the opportunity—if they have not done so already when awarded the grant—to understand what they want to achieve and scope the project accordingly. Without this direction, much time can be lost trying to come to consensus about what can and should be accomplished in the consultation.

### Identification of indicators of success early in the engagement

Centerbridge, Bain and Uncommon share the belief in the value of using data to inform decision-making. At the same time, both organizations understand that prematurely defining measures of progress and success that are inflexible will ultimately hinder understanding of advancement toward and achievement of impact. With organizations, such as Uncommon, that enter the Partnership Grant with the intent on developing a new strategy or initiative, it might not be possible to articulate measures of success for the undefined venture.

As a result, Centerbridge has started to consider how to incorporate the definition of such measures into the strategic planning process as a way to assess progress throughout the implementation period. These key progress indicators (KPIs) are used to guide ongoing check-ins and annual progress updates, with the recognition that they may evolve over time as new challenges or opportunities arise. Being clear upfront about KPIs benefits the grant partners because having well-defined measures of success that are aligned to their overarching strategy and project goals will help facilitate candid reflection and continuous improvement.

In addition, Centerbridge is exploring opportunities to support its grant partners on tracking outcomes over time and on longer-term impact evaluation through access to external researchers.

## Conclusion

Through the establishment of Uncommon Impact, Uncommon has been able to make great strides in realizing its mission to improve student outcomes beyond its own network. The Partnership Grant played a valuable role in formalizing Uncommon Impact. The organization needed Centerbridge's financial resources to dedicate staff to Uncommon Impact. Bain's consulting team offered valuable guidance and additional capacity to think deeply about how to more effectively share and disseminate Uncommon's work. Finally, both Centerbridge and Bain have provided ongoing thought partnership through the implementation of Uncommon Impact's strategic plan. The two firms continue to believe that this type of learning, sharing of resources, and collaboration is a positive trend for the sector.

When commenting on recommendations she would make for evolving the Partnership Grant, Tweedy stated: "More of the same ... It is not a normal funding relationship. They are your partners. They truly want to plan, think, react with you. They are flexible and in it for the outcome; they are not in it for themselves at all. They let partners do what they think is right for the project."

Uncommon has been a role model and pioneer with regard to collaborating with co-located schools and districts. Uncommon Impact's approach has shown much promise in its early years: materials and workshops have been extremely well-received, the team has created strong partnerships with districts and traditional district schools, and Uncommon has increased its internal capacity to share effective practices with schools outside of its network. Although information on student achievement is yet to be collected and rigorously studied, existing directional evidence strongly suggests that Uncommon Impact is having a positive influence on the partners it serves. This initiative has provided a visible and concrete example of educators working together toward their shared goal of better serving the students in their classrooms. Given the difficult and deeply entrenched challenges in the education system, more of this type of collaboration and creative problem-solving should occur at all levels.

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