



connections
FOR THE HOMELESS

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STRATEGIC PLAN

January 1, 2018 – December 31, 2020

Mission: *We serve and catalyze our community to end homelessness, one person at a time.*

Strategic Vision: *Connections for the Homeless partners with the community to provide comprehensive, compassionate, well-resourced, and effective programs in an exceptional workplace. We are the recognized leader on the causes of and solutions to homelessness in the northern suburbs.*

Core Values:

Equity and Inclusion

- We acknowledge that privilege exists and intentionally promote equitable access to resources and representation in leadership and decision making.
- We design solutions with humility and intentionally include voices that have been historically and structurally excluded.

Community

- We are more effective in community than in isolation.
- We build partnerships through authentic relationships.
- We value the expertise of all and use empathy and collaboration to fulfill our mission.

Transparency

- We operate with integrity by being forthright, honest and open with participants, staff, volunteers, supporters and our community.
- We invite feedback in all relationships, commit to self-reflection and strive for continuous improvement.

Generosity of Spirit

- We create spaces that are kind, non-judgmental and affirming of the entirety of every individual's experience.
- We believe that hope, growth and healing take place in a safe, welcoming and respectful environment.

Resilience

- We honor the courage, perseverance and grit of those who deliver, receive and support our services.
- We believe individuals are defined by their strengths and they are experts in their own lives.
- We persevere through challenges and view setbacks as opportunities to redefine and refocus our work.

OVERVIEW OF THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

With new leadership firmly established, the need to look inward and update its mission statement, and a desire to chart a course for a vibrant future, Connections for the Homeless engaged Wishnick & Associates to facilitate a strategic planning process. Leading up to beginning the project, the board of directors named a task force to guide the work and make project related decisions. The task force was comprised of board members, the executive director, and two additional members of the senior management team. Connections' planning process officially kicked off in mid-February, 2017 with a task force launch meeting.

The main objective for this project was to develop a strategic plan and a corresponding implementation plan that would ensure achieving the goals and attaining the strategic vision. An important aspect of the process was broad community engagement as part of the external assessment. Stakeholder assessment activities took place between March and June 2017. Wishnick & Associates brought in a market research firm, GKS Consulting, to conduct the external stakeholder assessment phase of the project. The task force brainstormed a list of external stakeholders who were invited to participate in 1:1 interviews. GKS Consulting conducted 18 individual interviews with an array of funders and donors, civic and local government leaders, and executive leaders from other community organizations. In addition, GKS facilitated two group interviews, one with participants and the other with volunteers. At the same time, Wishnick & Associates facilitated the internal assessment activities. These included three separate SWOT/SOAR (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats, Aspirations, and Results) assessments with the board of directors, management staff, and program staff. The findings reports captured the input and highlighted the themes and trends from the external and internal stakeholder assessments.

During discussion of the stakeholder input, and centered on the desire to take a holistic approach to planning, the task force identified the following as the key strategic areas around which to create the plan:

1. Program and Services
2. Visibility and Communication
3. Financial Sustainability
4. Operations and Management
5. Governance and Leadership
6. Community Engagement

The board of directors' and management team's enduring dedication to the planning process manifested itself in their commitment to two separate full-day retreats. The first retreat, in September 2017, focused on reworking Connections' mission and reviewing the stakeholder input. As part of their leadership role in the strategic planning process, the board members on the planning task force took on a significant role as "content area experts". Each board member prepared a presentation of highlights in the stakeholder findings related to "their" strategic area. Lively discussion confirmed the strategic areas. At the second retreat, in October 2017, Connections' leadership had thoughtful, meaningful discussions that led to a captivating three-year strategic vision and attendant goals, strategies, and action steps to achieve it.

Following the retreats, Wishnick & Associates drafted the plan based on all of the input and refined it with the executive director, Betty Bogg, and then shared it with the planning task force. At a subsequent meeting, the task force went through the draft line by line to ensure full alignment of the goals, strategies, and actions. This robust discussion and revising led to this strategic plan. The final plan was then approved by the board in January 2018.

STRATEGIC AREA: PROGRAM AND SERVICES

Goal 1. Community and shelter programs are robust, impactful, and expanding

Strategy 1.1. Connections commits to and executes robust daytime community programming

Strategy 1.2. There is expanded shelter capacity

Strategy 1.3. Connections has increased capacity for diversion, prevention, and rapid re-housing

Goal 2. Connections for the Homeless has an articulated path to create more long-term housing

Strategy 2.1. There is clear understanding of the alternatives for ongoing funding of additional PSH units

Strategy 2.2. Connections decides whether to add affordable housing units to its programs and services offerings

Strategy 2.3. Connections expands youth housing programs

Goal 3. All programs demonstrate impact and efficacy and embody the agency's core values

Strategy 3.1. Programs and services are evaluated to meet articulate standards

Strategy 3.2. Performance dashboards communicate relevant metrics

STRATEGIC AREA: VISIBILITY AND COMMUNICATION

Goal 4. Connections' mission and programs are well-understood and respected, its brand is clear and compelling

Strategy 4.1. Connections has a proactive, comprehensive, multi-channel marketing and communication strategy with a unified look and voice

Strategy 4.2. Agency ambassadors have tools and information to increase community awareness

STRATEGIC AREA: FINANCIAL STABILITY

Goal 5. Connections for the Homeless is a financially secure, responsive, and nimble social service agency

Strategy 5.1. Reliance on government funding is decreased

Strategy 5.2. Connections has achieved top-line budget growth of 40% in three years

Strategy 5.3. Connections mitigates risk by increasing short- and long-term assets

Strategy 5.4. The necessary systems and processes are in place to have a “real time” view of the agency’s financial situation

STRATEGIC AREA: OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT

Goal 6. Connections has excellent and appealing facilities that support the breadth and depth of the work

Strategy 6.1. Community programming operates in a clean, accessible, healthy environment that promotes healing

Strategy 6.2. All facilities optimally support the agency’s programs and core values

Goal 7. Connection is an exceptional workplace and performance-driven organization that implements best practices

Strategy 7.1. Connections recruits, hires, and retains high performing staff in accordance with the agency’s core values

Strategy 7.2. Compensation and benefits serve to retain current staff and draw high quality staff

Strategy 7.3. Staffing and infrastructure develop in conjunction with expansion plans

Strategy 7.4. Metrics depict organizational effectiveness and guide decision making

Strategy 7.5. Connections staff and board have a culture of trust and are committed to upholding the core values

STRATEGIC AREA: GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

Goal 8. Connections’ board of directors functions at the highest level and all board members are effective ambassadors for the agency

Strategy 8.1. Connections' board of directors is diverse and board members are recognized as community leaders who embody the agency's core values

Strategy 8.2. Connections relies on strong systems to reinforce governance best practices for the board

STRATEGIC AREA: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Goal 9. People choose to volunteer at Connections for the Homeless because their experiences are meaningful

Strategy 9.1. Connections has an abundance of opportunities in which to engage volunteers

Goal 10. Connections has an intentional and creative approach to organizational partnerships and collaborations

Strategy 10.1. Connections has a clear understanding and description of what effective partnerships and collaborations are for the agency

Strategy 10.2. Partnerships and collaborations support and enhance Connections' work and mission

Goal 11. Connections is the leading voice on the causes of and solutions to homelessness

Strategy 11.1. Advocacy is institutionalized