

Washington County Economic Opportunity Council, Inc.
Strategic Plan
2014-2017
Adopted by EOC Board July 23, 2014

Mission

We support Individuals and Families in attaining Self-Sufficiency
By providing Services, Sharing Resources and through Community Collaboration.

We Value:

The Resiliency of the Human Spirit
Each Individual's Right to Self-determination
The Integrity and Professional Behavior of Our Staff
Our Customers' Engagement and Active Participation in the Services Received
Our Responsibility and Accountability for the Operation of Quality Programs

Background: Washington County Economic Opportunity Council, Inc. (EOC) is an agency in transition. Incorporated in 1966, EOC is a 501(c)3 corporation, operating within the Community Action Network; with a solid package of Community Action programming (Head Start(HS)/Community Service Block Grant(CSBG)/Weatherization(Wx)). Programs have been delivered consistently, and proudly. In most cases the programs and services operated within EOC are more well-known than EOC itself. As a Community Action Agency, EOC is subject to the Performance Goals established by Federal Health and Human Services (HHS) – Office of Community Services. These standards set parameters for evaluation of one agency against another across the country. All Community Action Agencies are required to use a Performance Planning and Measurement System called ROMA (Results Oriented Management and Accountability)

In 2012 changes in Management and Board Leadership set a course to re-envision the agency; its operations and programs. In the fall of 2012 the first step in this change process began with the consolidation of the financial functions for all agency programs within one location. The start of FY 2013 marked the first time that all accounting and budget management was done together, with a planned building of the systems and policies to allow us to maintain responsible financial management while ensuring ongoing program operations.

2012 and 2013 provided significant challenges to our grant funding programs with the implementation of sequestration we suffered a 5-6% reduction in our Federal Grants across all programs, forcing us to restrict and limit programming to remain within our available resources. At the same time as we were undergoing cuts to our funding we were trying to meet the challenges of the mandates of the Affordable Care Act and growing regulations emphasizing Performance Based Criteria for all programs. There has been a growing recognition by Management and the Board that our heavy reliance on Grant Funding for ongoing funding and our lack of unrestricted cash reserves limited our ability to innovate new programs, support our staff and bring in new programs to expand our service delivery network.

At a Retreat in January of 2014, Members of the Board of Directors and Senior Management of EOC began the process of building a strategic plan that will guide EOC's efforts to move forward and grow from being a respected, if not well known, Community Action Agency to a dynamic and robust not-for-profit.

This discussion created the foundation for our further planning efforts by establishing suggested revisions to the EOC Mission Statement and establishment of broad strategic priorities as follows:

1. Branding and Agency Identity
2. Staff Recruitment, Retention and Development
3. Programming Infrastructure and Opportunities for Change

The Board then charged the Senior Management of the Organization to go back and expand on these Priorities to develop a Strategic Plan that conforms to the Performance Standards of Community Action, and will allow us to work within the constraints of ROMA.

What follows is a full exploration of the opportunities and challenges of the Strategic Priorities and planned activities to move us toward achievement of our goals. When complete the strategic plan will include project work plans and outcomes to measure the success of our actions. It is the intention to use this plan as a basis for an agency wide quality improvement plan that can be reported on regularly and amended as necessary.

Strategic Priority #1 – Branding and Agency Identity

The simple question “What do we want to be when we grow up” would seem to be the simple summation of issues around branding EOC. In discussion the answer to that question becomes more complex and varied. Discussions around branding are really a discussion of how do we move from an already established Community Action Agency to a high performance Not-for-profit. Programs within EOC are for the most part better known than the agency within which they are operated. There is high visibility and acceptance of Employment and Training, the Head Start Program and Weatherization as valuable, well run programs within the county (and they are), but people do not immediately associate those services with EOC. Not only is identity of specific programs a public perception but in many cases staff identifies themselves as employed by the program and not the Agency.

A second consideration is our name and our location leads people to believe that we are a county agency. Being perceived as a county agency and living within close proximity to other county programs presents challenges to fund raising (people perceive that they have already given enough to government in taxes) and for our staff in terms of pay and benefits comparisons. With those thoughts in mind we have divided a branding discussion into internal and external considerations.

External – EOC is the second largest not-for-profit entity in Washington County (Fort Hudson Health Systems is the first). EOC was formed by the County fathers in order to draw in the funding available in the Economic Opportunity Act in 1964, there has always been close organizational and programmatic ties between the County and EOC.

The use of the County Name in front of EOC implies county connection. Our location in the County Municipal Center further supports a perception of EOC as part of the county government. How do we balance the obvious financial and programmatic supports that the county provides to us of in-kind and space that satisfies our matching requirements with the need to recognized EOC as a whole entity worthy of community support? Our connections within the community are mostly related to service and programming. Branching out and establishing ties to the business community through participation in the regional chamber of commerce, service organizations and with School districts all can potentially raise awareness of EOC as a stand-alone entity worthy of support and partnership. Changing our name by moving Washington County to the end of the name rather than the beginning changes the emphasis from Washington County to Economic Opportunity. Developing a new logo that emphasizes our programs’ common service to individuals, families and communities rather than an over lay of the county outline could potentially lift our visibility.

Internal – Our single most important resource is our staff. It is as important they recognize and value their part as an employee of EOC as it is that the community recognizes us as a single agency. Over the years programs within the agency have operated as silos, with separate personnel, fiscal and programmatic requirements. There is a program centered culture and very much a feeling that “that program gets something we don’t get” that leads to disconnect and distrust of EOC as a whole. This disconnect, makes efforts to create “One Agency”; through the establishment of shared fiscal processes, personnel policies and administration, difficult because the distrust of staff undermines our best efforts.

Communication and transparency of actions at all levels must be consistent across all programs and at all levels of operations from Senior Management to the last person hired. There must be clear pathways to communicate changes to policy, practice and programs that allow all staff to hear those changes, participate in decision making as appropriate, and voice concerns in a way that demonstrates value and respect between and among all staff.

With access to open and transparent communication comes the responsibility for using the established pathways of communication and chain of command to allow for the establishment of expectations about behaviors and performance for all staff that are clear across the entire agency. It is the establishment of expectations and performance standards that will allow us to create a culture of “One Agency” that is not less than each of its parts, but greater than the sum of them all.

The hallmark of a high-performing Not-for-Profit is a strong and dedicated Board of Directors; in addition to staff, they are the greatest public voice for EOC. EOC is governed by a Tri-partite Board as established under Community Action Legislation. Balancing membership between Elected Officials, Community Members and Representatives of Low-Income/Customers creates unique challenges and opportunities moving forward. For many years, long term Board Leadership stagnated the board; lack of term limits, succession planning and limited changes to governance structure (by-laws), restricted engagement of existing Board Members.

Recruiting new Board Members for vacancies is challenged by having to first identify individuals who fit the open category and who are also willing to serve. Lack of public visibility makes recruitment a challenge – first you have to answer “What’s an EOC”? As the Agency emerges as a known community entity we would hope that membership on the Board becomes a valued privilege.

The Board has taken significant steps toward engagement in the governance of EOC. New Board leadership has contributed to greater transparency and involvement by the Board in discussions and active decision making. Building on these changes is vital to the Agency’s

continued growth. Changes to the By-laws that govern the structure and expectations for the Board will support future development of the Board.

Strategic Priority #2 – Staff Recruitment, Retention and Development

EOC employs approximately 130 full and part-time staff, with a \$4.1M annual payroll. Without our staff we could not operate high quality programs. As has been noted earlier, operating programs within silos, within the larger agency, has created discrepancies in salary, benefits and personnel management.

EOC; as with most not-for-profits in general, and Community Action Agencies specifically, does not pay salaries and/or benefits that are consistently competitive with the government/private sector. For those people who dedicate themselves to the work of Community Action, the belief is that the rewards/satisfaction of service balances out lower pay. Due to stresses on funding availability the prevailing mindset has been to identify opportunities to reduce staff without reducing program operations. This “do more with less” mentality has eroded any single staff’s satisfaction with their work load as they are only able to do less with less. As requirements for performance measurement and attainment of measurable goals spreads across our programs as a condition of funding – we will have to address issues of salary equity, hours worked and professional development opportunity as they impact recruitment and retention of quality staff.

There are inconsistencies in hours worked between programs – Head Start operates on a 40 hour work week. This consists of 7 hours of worked time each day and a paid one hour lunch. The other programs of EOC work a 7 hour day and have an unpaid lunch. Priority should be given to move all staff to consistent work schedules – taking necessary steps to guard against negative impacts to current salaries due to moving to consistent hours. Only when all staff is working on similar schedules can we establish salary equity and make determinations of what comprises adequate staff to meet performance and outcome measures that demonstrate quality funding.

There are many issues related to pay equity between programs and for longevity within programs. The Head Start program routinely compares their individual hourly rates with other Head Start Programs across the region – While comparable salaries are paid – the seasonal nature of this program produces overall salaries that make many of our Head Start Staff eligible for assistance through public benefits. Historic practices have created disparities not only between programs but between positions within programs – new employees are brought on at the lowest levels and people who have been in their positions for many years can be making incomes that are greater than the starting salaries for other positions

requiring greater skills or education. Typically starting salaries grow at a slower rate than hourly rates of current staff – This has created a gap between newer staff and long term employees that is not necessarily indicative of work, skills or level of responsibility.

Emphasis on professional development of all staff will allow us to cultivate the skills and abilities necessary to operate our programs going forward. Allowing existing staff to build on their strengths by providing opportunities for cross training, skills enhancement and cross program promotional opportunities, will assist us in developing and maintaining a culture of excellence, retain institutional memory and reward personal achievement for all of our staff.

Strategic Priority #3 – Programming Infrastructure and Opportunities for Change

Programming Infrastructure – Increased emphasis on performance management and attainment of measureable outcomes as a condition of grant funding is the new reality for grant funded programs. The ability to record, maintain and analyze program operations to support those needs will require a necessary investment in new and better technology. Handling technology needs is necessary not only to operate those programs we are currently providing but necessary to be able to initiate any new programming in the future. We are currently at maximum capacity within the County Municipal Center. Offering new programs and services will have to make maximum use of existing space including our Head Start Centers.

EOC's pathway to technology use is as varied as its programs and the diversity of its program locations.

As currently configured there is no single technology source, provider or support network that works across all programs – nor is there a unified way to make technology decisions that takes into consideration impacts of one choice on all. By virtue of the location of some programs and administration within the Washington County Municipal Center the County plays a large role in the provision and support of technology to EOC – Internet, Phone, email and Websites are all supported within the County Systems – which comes back to the agency as in-kind support. Head Start; because it exists outside the county systems and is geographically spread across the county, purchases those same support systems from a private company. The separation of the 2 systems limits communication and perpetuates the separation between the program and the agency.

The development of a consistent application of technology will require planned analysis of technology needs across all programs – Recommendation will be to issue a proposal for technology analysis and recommendation for future consideration - Analysis to include, computers, phones, email, internet access and website/social media development.

Opportunities for Growth – As noted we are heavily reliant on Federal and State Grant funding – with little opportunity for the growth of unrestricted funding to invest in other programs and services. Consolidation of financial systems has allowed us to monitor spending and use existing grant resources more effectively to maximize our ability to retain and convert unrestricted funds. We need to identify, within individual programs opportunities for expansion of services that complements our existing programming and allows us to diversify revenue without significantly increasing expenses.

Some of our best opportunities for growth may lay in diversifying our existing programs to meet identified community needs. We need to identify opportunities to offer the services and support in a way that allows for increased private investment – either by consumers or corporate donations. Our community needs assessment should identify opportunities for value added programming that can allow us to further enhance our unrestricted resources.

Recent State initiatives around Universal Pre-K and Regional Economic Development Grant opportunities allow us the best opportunity to bring in additional funds through collaboration and partnership with other programs and service providers. As a 501(c)3, we can act as a funding pass-through for community projects without having to bear the cost of additional program operations, such as space and staff. By balancing our mission with our resources, our goal should always be to ensure that the programs and services necessary to support the development of self-sufficiency within our community are available, not that we are responsible to deliver all those services ourselves.

Community Needs and the Strategic Work Plan

The Strategic Plan guides our agency activity for the next 3-5 years. The identification of challenges and opportunities allows us to develop measurable projects and activities that support our Mission and achieve our Overall Strategic Priority of becoming a Robust, Performance Driven Not-For-Profit. Achievement of Goals and outcomes will become the expectation of all Grants, public and private going forward.

ROMA (Results Oriented Outcome Management and Accountability) is a Management System developed to as part of the *Government Performance and Results Act, 1993* to measure program effectiveness by focusing on results, service quality, and customer satisfaction. ROMA is the Management Standard that all Community Action Agencies are required to use to measure performance. Community Action measures its impact across 3 domains – Individuals/Family, Community and Agency.

ROMA has established 6 National Goals that allows Performance to be measured across all Community Action Agencies:

1. Low-Income People become more Self-Sufficient **(Individual/Family)**
2. The conditions in which low-income people live is improved **(Community)**
3. Low-Income people own a stake in their community. **(Community)**
4. Partnerships among supporters and providers of services to low-income people are achieved. **(Agency)**
5. Agencies increase their capacity to achieve results. **(Agency)**
6. Low-Income people, especially vulnerable populations, achieve their potential by strengthening family and other supportive systems **(Individual/Family)**

Each Goal has a range of National Performance Indicators that provide a measureable outcome that is in turn collected nationally to demonstrate the impact of Community Action – By monitoring our individual outcomes we can in turn understand the impact that our activities, services, and customer interactions have across the 3 Domains of Community Action,

ROMA demands that all programs and services support a Community Need identified through a Community Assessment. The Strategic Work Plan identifies strategies that meet those needs and support the Priorities established by the Board of Directors as outlined in this Plan. Over

the life of the Strategic Plan; activities, services and projects will be undertaken to address the needs in support of our Strategic Priorities. The success of those activities will be measured by the documented achievement of outcomes defined by the performance indicators.

Identified Community Needs will be updated annually based on Community Assessments that are both quantitative and qualitative in nature. Needs are identified from program assessment, customer feedback and available Community information such as the US census, Community Health Assessment and Economic Development Reports. Management at all levels is responsible to identify, prioritize and respond to emerging needs on an ongoing basis.

These activities are listed under the National Goals that they will be measured by. Activities can impact in one goal or several depending on the nature of the activity. Each strategy is linked to the strategic priority it supports and are broken down into Short Term (within the next year), Medium (one to two years), Long Term (greater than 2 years). Further work at the program and staff level will break these activities down into the specific work plans necessary to meet measurable performance outcomes.

Senior Management will be responsible to report to the Board of Directors and interested Advisory and Policy Councils as to the progress on this plan. It is imperative that those bodies are able assess the success or failure of specific activities and make recommendations to adjust strategic priorities in a planned way.

2014/15 Community Needs

1. ***Lack of access to basic needs services*** – Basic need services are anything related to food, clothing and shelter. There are several factors that make this a high level need in Washington County. Lack of Grocery Stores and retail makes access to basic needs difficult for all county residents but of larger import to low-income individuals who may lack access to transportation as well as the financial resources to adequately purchase basic necessities. Washington County also has a high dependence on assistance programs such as SNAP, Medicaid and Temporary Assistance. There is a high usage of Food Pantry, HEAP and to meet those basic needs. Lack of knowledge about benefits available to meet basic needs, assistance paying for needs and being able to get to them are all addressed in whole or part through our programs. **Agency Resources/Programs – Home and Family Services, Energy Services, Head Start, Community Partnerships**

2. ***Significant numbers of households are employed in low-wage jobs*** – While unemployment in Washington County is low – the percentage of people who are under employed or employed in positions that does not pay a living wage is significant – as measured by the number of individuals working but still eligible for public benefits (working poor). This is due not only to a lack of jobs that pay a higher wage but the lack of skills and experience for employees to step into available jobs that offer higher wages. This is due to lack of education, skills and transportation. **Agency Resources – Employment and Training, Family Development, Community Partnerships**

3. ***Lack of Access to regular, reliable transportation to meet medical, social or employment needs*** – There is no coordinated transportation system in Washington County. Public transit systems that come out of Glens Falls are available in the Communities of Hudson Falls and Fort Edward. Currently available transportation is separated by the program that operates it for the target populations that they serve. **Agency Resources – Home and Family Services, Community Partnerships**

4. ***Low Income children and Families face barriers to school readiness*** – Head Start currently provides the only comprehensive support for children and families to allow them to prepare and succeed being ready to enter kindergarten. Conversations with PreK and Public School officials site the lack of connection to families and availability of supportive services as a barrier to a child’s success in public school programs. Current funding and policy focus is looking to expand early childhood learning opportunities to help children and families succeed at school readiness. Opportunities exist to build on the Head Start model of Comprehensive family support in partnership with public schools and private daycare providers. **Agency Resources – Family Development, Community Partnerships**

Summary Strategic Work Plan – 2014/15

Individual/Family	Community	Agency Capacity
<p>Goal 1 - Low Income People Become more self-sufficient –Outcomes from supportive activities necessary for the movement towards self-sufficiency and the reduction and elimination of barriers preventing self-sufficiency. Self-Sufficiency is more than employment and employment related activities.</p>	<p>Goal 2 – The Conditions in Which Low-income People Live are Improved –Outcomes that describe the allocation and focusing of public and private resources for antipoverty purposes, improvement in the community infrastructure, and creation of employment and other resources to support low-income people in their transitions toward self-sufficiency.</p>	<p>Goal 4 – Partnerships among supporters and Providers for Services to Low-Income People are Achieved – Outcomes measure the impact of partnerships and collaboration on clients and the communities.</p>
<p>Goal 1 –Strategy/Strategic Priority/Time Frame</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Expand Training Opportunities for Consumers to improve capacity to achieve self-sufficiency – SP#3 – Employment and Training, Family Development – Short and Medium 2. Increase Access to Basic Need Services – SP#3 – Home and Family Services, Energy Services, Family Development – Short, Medium and Long 	<p>Goal 2 –Strategy/Strategic Priority/Time Frame</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase access and availability of Job Training Programs in Partnership with Employers – SP#3 – Employment and Training and Family Development – Short and Medium 2. Increased Basic Need Resources – SP#3 – Long Term 3. Strengthen Transportation Network, Build Sustainability – SP#3 – Home and Family Services. 	<p>Goal 4 –Strategy/Strategic Priority/Time Frame</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase Community Partnerships in support of Agency and Program Goals.

<p>Goal 6 – Low-Income People, Especially Vulnerable Populations, Achieve their Potential by strengthening Family and Other Supportive Systems - Outcomes are achieved by persons or families who maintain a level of stability or well-being as a result of Community Action</p>	<p>Goal 3 – Low Income People Own a Stake in Their Community – Outcomes describe the participation of low-income people in community organization and community activities including volunteer and paid involvement, It includes business and home ownership, indicators of positive community change.</p>	<p>Goal 5 – Agencies Increase their Capacity to Achieve Results – Agencies that are well run and meet accepted standards of excellence demonstrate continuous improvement and capacity to meet the needs of low-income individuals and families and communities. These Outcomes are measured by the agencies adherence to National Performance Standards and governing rules and regulations.</p>
<p>Goal 6 –Strategy/Strategic Priority/Time Frame</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Build Mentoring Programs that support client achievement of self-sufficiency – SP#3 – Home and Family Services, Family Development, Employment and Training - Medium and Long Term 2. Strengthening School Readiness Skills for Children and Families – SP#3 - Family Development, Employment and Training – Short, Medium and Long Term 3. Increase Coordinated Services to meet consumer identified needs – SP#3 – All Programs – Short, Medium and Long Term 	<p>Goal 3 –Strategy/Strategic Priority/Time Frame</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Orientation Program for volunteers, community and Advisory Groups to build capacity for community engagement – SP#2&3 – Family Development, Home and Family Services – Short and Medium 2. Promote continued engagement of consumers in Community Activities – SP#2 – Family Development, Home and Family Services – Medium and Long Term 	<p>Goal 5 –Strategy/Strategic Priority/Time Frame</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Quality Improvement Reporting to the BOD quarterly 2. Initiate Social Enterprise Opportunities to increase unrestricted funds to support agency growth – 3. Increased Collaboration across all programs within the Agency. 4. Improve Financial Process 5. Expand Human Resource Role to Support Recruitment and Retention of Agency Staff. 6. Develop and sustainable technology plan for the Agency