2017 Strategic Plan

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Strategic Plan
Executive Summary

It’s time that SHELTER, Inc. explore how it can become more of a regional player in combatting homelessness. SHELTER, Inc. already has a regional presence and is recognized throughout the Bay Area for its rich history and years of serving the homeless and at-risk families of Contra Costa County. The major providers, funders, and thought leaders in our area have all recognized that the homeless problem is not a city or county problem, but rather a regional problem that needs more regional solutions. SHELTER, Inc. already serves individuals and families from outside Contra Costa County and has even assisted families to find housing outside of our county. This Strategic Plan explores some of the building blocks necessary to maintain our leadership position in the near term and to sustain this position in the years to come.

While several elements of this strategic plan address immediate or impending economic conditions, the overall plan is designed to ensure that SHELTER, Inc. is positioned to be well prepared for political, economic, and demographic shifts over the coming years. The primary focus of the plan is long-term sustainability while staying true to the agency’s mission of preventing and ending homelessness.

The Strategic Priorities are grouped into three tiers, each with multiple focal points:

- Foundational Factors
  - Financial Stability
  - Agency Culture
  - Cultural Imperatives
  - Stakeholder Engagement

- Best Practices
  - Metrics Based Methodologies
  - Evidence Based Service Models
  - Leadership Characteristics

- Competitive Sustainability
  - Collaboration Opportunities
  - Geographic Expansion
  - Property Expansion
Vision & Mission Statements

These are our current vision and mission statements. At our 2016 board retreat we discussed updating our mission and vision statements. Each of these should be revisited in the not too distant future.

Vision Statement:
SHELTER, Inc. strives to realize a vision: Re-building lives, one family at a time, by giving them a home, the skills and the resources to live the life they deserve.

Mission Statement:
The mission of SHELTER, Inc. is to prevent and end homelessness for low-income, homeless, and disadvantaged families and individuals by providing housing, services, support and resources that lead to self-sufficiency.

Mission in Action:
SHELTER, Inc.’s work encompasses three main elements:

Preventing Homelessness:
Prevent the onset of homelessness through rental assistance, case management, and housing counseling services.

Ending the Cycle of Homelessness:
Provide 3 to 24 months of housing in combination with supportive services such as employment services, educational services and counseling.

Providing Affordable Housing:
Provide housing for nearly 250 low-income households, including such special needs groups as transition-age youth, people with HIV/AIDS and those with mental health disabilities.
Strategic Priorities

The strategic priorities are grouped into three tiers and the substantial realization of the objectives of one tier may be seen as supporting steps for the next tier. Elements of some tiers can be worked in parallel or in a different order, but eventually each tier creates the successful underpinning for the next tier. If opportunities present themselves out of order they should be seriously considered along with assessing the benefits versus the risks both short and long term.

Tier One – Foundational Factors

Tier One focuses internally on the foundational components of financial stability and building the agency culture. Additionally, the importance of stakeholder engagement is addressed.

Financial Sustainability

It is essential that SHELTER, Inc. reach financial stability (defined as net positive operational cash flow) within the next year. While great strides were achieved in fiscal year 2016-2017, there are many tasks that won’t be finished until sometime in 2018. Even after that, additional adjustments will be necessary.

Long term sustainability is incumbent not only on the near term stability initiatives but also on building the infrastructure and processes necessary to both maintain a stable financial posture and also to build the relationships with funders and donors that will ensure sustained funding. This will require both programmatic and financial discipline.

Agency Culture

One stated goal from the January 2016 board visioning session listed making SHELTER, Inc. the most desirable housing and homeless service provider to work for. The goal’s core are the agency’s values: Accountability, Integrity and Compassion. While compassion is pretty much a given throughout the agency and especially at the direct service staff level, accountability and integrity are the emphasis of our continuous improvement. The enhancements will be focused on refining our hiring practices, continue our management training initiatives at all levels, and resolving any structural issues. The significant turnover in leadership and line-staff has made it difficult to initiate and maintain some of the cultural advancements that we’ve instituted. Adhering and practicing these core values are key drivers to achieve good customer service and employee engagement.

We should also note there has been good progress in the areas of wage equitability, performance management, staff training, and eliminating the artificial barriers of
departments and job titles. These practices, which are already put into place, need to continue. Additionally, the professional development of staff will support growth and employee engagement. With these foundations in place we can achieve stability in the workforce which will serve to nurture the attractiveness of working for SHELTER, Inc.

Not to be overlooked in our agency culture is a clear focus on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). Our agency is frequently asked to provide diversity information regarding our board, leadership, direct service staff and participants. Our Diversity profile is well within the norms of similar human service agencies. Our Equity (not wage, but rather opportunity for equal access and participation) profile is respectable but could also be improved. The biggest challenge for any organization is Inclusion and our agency is no different. We must craft purposeful undertakings to ensure that our agency and staff welcome diversities, all viewpoints are respectfully heard and every individual feels a sense of belonging and inclusion.

**Organizational Imperatives**

There are three key organizational imperatives that need to be embraced at all levels of the organization:

- Achieving Financial Targets
- Exceeding Programmatic Deliverables
- Creating Exceptional Impact

These organizational imperatives must be prominently emphasized by all staff and continually reinforced from one-on-one supervisory meetings to department and agency level meetings.

**Stakeholder Engagement**

Government funders, foundations, major donors, partner agencies, community members, participants, board of directors, leadership, and staff are all important stakeholders that must be cultivated and nurtured to support our mission of preventing and ending homelessness. To achieve this requires strong internal attention to supporting the building and maintaining of these sometimes fragile relationships by our board of directors, leadership and staff.

In particular, another aspect which has long term implications is the stewardship of major donors and, for a portion of them, planned giving. Investing in this strategy has the potential of significantly paying off in decades or perhaps less. In the past year we’ve placed a focus on planned giving and have identified about 10 potential bequests. By properly stewarding specific major donors we can increase this list
several-fold and ensuring the stability and sustainability of SHELTER, Inc. for decades to come.

**Tier Two – Best Practices**

Tier Two accentuates best practices by looking internally to continue our focus on evidence based service models, building on our data collection and analysis towards a more metrics based methodology of program design and evaluation, and enhancing our leadership expertise through training and coaching. It also begins to step externally to embrace collaboration opportunities and possible program expansion.

**Metrics Based Methodologies**

Key funders like Tipping Point Community, our county and our federally funded programs are keen on metrics that parallel for-profit investors aimed at a more desirable Return On Investment (ROI). While our funders aren’t expecting us to quantify their funding in a true ROI model, they are asking for data and information that will better gauge not only our impact but also to compare our efforts with those who do similar work. One can easily surmise that at some point this will be a stronger factor into funding decisions especially when there is more competition for those funds and, more importantly, if those funds are reduced by government cutbacks or an economic downturn.

Today our metrics are rudimentary and overly rely on the county’s Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) database. We have just established our first set of Key Performance Indicators (KPI’s) that will make up our agency dashboard. In the coming months and years we will be using these KPI’s and others to better manage the business of our agency. These KPI’s and dashboards will enable us to better assess programmatic impact and efficacy.

**Evidence Based Practices**

The move to Evidence Based Practices (EBP) in nonprofit human services organizations has gained attention and limited financial support in recent years. Both government and foundation funders are seeking to identify what works and are increasingly looking for nonprofits to demonstrate the quantifiable long-term impact of their programs.

Agency capacity is prerequisite to designing, implementing and sustaining EBP’s. Capacity is generally defined as the resources, systems, competencies and mindset required to fulfill an agency’s mission. More specifically, capacity is a combination of an agency’s mission, vision and values supported by governance, strategic planning, program development, evaluation, management systems, human
resources, fundraising, financial management, public relations and partnerships at all levels. Because the work of human service agencies is highly interpersonal and service intensive it emphasizes the importance of organization culture and the systems required to train and monitor staff performance.

**Leadership Characteristics**

While this may be seen as more of an operational priority, hiring senior program staff that can create program opportunities by playing a major role in grant research and writing can have a strategic benefit and is often seen as a professional development opportunity. This is a model used by small start-up agencies as well as the strong regional players. This is different than our current model of focusing all grant writing in Development and can cultivate program innovation.

Firmly establishing metrics based methodologies and evidence based practices throughout our organization is an indispensable mechanism that will support the validity and impact of service offerings. Senior program staff must be able to research, deploy and maintain these practices in our programs wherever possible.

Rounding out our Board of Directors with deeper connections into our community and business sectors will help to secure our leadership role. Along with a strong management team and talented practitioners we can maintain and enhance both our image and outcomes in our community.

**Tier Three – Sustainability Through Growth**

Tier Three is about sustainability over the long term. This is achieved by focusing predominately on the external characteristics of collaborations and building upon our capabilities, reach and impact by expanding both programmatically and geographically.

**Collaboration Opportunities**

Like any organization, we can’t afford to become stagnant. Almost without exception, all of our funders, both government and foundations alike, are urging and expecting us to collaborate with other agencies to provide a more complete and integrated solution to the problems of housing and homelessness. Today we have Memorandums of Understanding (MOU’s) with scores of agencies which focus mostly on referrals. There are several agencies that we contract with to provide services to our participants where we don’t have the in-house expertise. We need to continue to look at our programs and determine where additional collaboration will bring enhanced benefits to our participants.

Behavioral health issues (i.e., mental health and substance abuse) are both primary and contributory factors to a majority of the homeless that we serve. Enhancing our
ability to provide wrap-around behavioral health services (either through collaboration with other providers or by building up the capabilities internally) will improve our effectiveness in assisting our participants to gain and maintain housing and achieve self-sufficiency.

The more we can integrate needed wrap-around services the greater the impact that we can have with our participants in their desire for sustained self-sufficiency. Increasing the number, strength, and quality of our wrap-around services for our participants is key to our programmatic growth and effectiveness. We need to take seriously any opportunity to consider potential joint ventures, tighter collaborations, and possible mergers. We can enhance our current (and often difficult to navigate) system of care with effective collaborations. The more we can integrate the required services and seamlessly deliver them to those in need the more likely we will be able to shorten the length of homelessness and increase the chance of long-term self-sufficiency.

**Programmatic Expansion**

Income inequality is one of the key drivers for the increase in homelessness. This has a direct impact on closing the gap between income and housing costs. SHELTER, Inc. does address the issue of income inequality with a portion of our participants through our employment services program. We can have a greater impact by enhancing our employment program’s services and reach to help participants gain employment or increase their earning power. Employment services is just one example of potential program expansion.

**Geographic Expansion**

The migration of low-income earning families and individuals will continue to move east and north into less costly housing as the gap between wages and rents increases. We have already seen data showing the movement of homeless from West County to East County where the growing need is overwhelming the currently available services. Many low-income and even mid-income families have essentially been priced out of Central and West Contra Costa County when searching for housing that is affordable.

There is a growing demand for a family shelter in East County but finding the sources of funding are prerequisites. Solano County is likely to be a focus as families move further away from urban centers in search of more affordable housing. SHELTER, Inc. should begin exploratory activities sooner rather than later as the need for housing increases and the funding limitations will only become greater over the next decade and possibly beyond.
Property Expansion

SHELTER, Inc. should also contemplate methods and practices that would provide more affordable housing. Our recent conversion of Lyle Morris Apartments to low-income affordable housing is an example of how SHELTER, Inc. can better serve low-income residents who are priced out of the Bay Area’s escalating housing market.

SHELTER, Inc. presently owns eight properties that house participants in 80 one, two, and three bedroom units plus a seven bedroom home. Along with our administration building, we have almost $10M in equity. A future exploration might be to use this equity leverage to purchase additional housing units, acquire land to build income producing affordable housing or establish a second family shelter.
Closing

There are certain factors that will help to ensure long-term sustainability: a multiplicity of funding sources from both government and philanthropy so that dependency on any single funder is minimized; maintaining our position in the community by being a leader in supporting at-risk or homeless families and children; preserving our unique and critically needed family shelter and prevention programs; strengthening all of our programs by increasing the competencies of our staff; and expanding the types of needed services that we offer either organically or through collaboration. Another aspect which has long term implications is engaging all of our innumerable stakeholders. Working collaboratively with all of our funders and appropriately stewarding our major donors must be of paramount importance for our board, leadership, and staff alike.

While not explicitly stated in our Vision or Mission statements, we frequently assert that “every child deserves a home” and that “we help those who help themselves”. These two phrases differentiate SHELTER, Inc. from the government funders whose focus is on the most vulnerable (i.e., least able to help themselves) and the chronically homeless. This puts SHELTER, Inc. in the interesting position of being the major provider of housing and homeless services in the County with this expressed objective.

SHELTER, Inc. has core strengths that must be maintained to ensure sustainability. The agency’s diversity of programs and funding sources are certainly key. Not to be overlooked is SHELTER’s infrastructure. Continuing to bolster our infrastructure and properly budget and manage our government contracts are essential to supporting our administrative and benefit costs. Finally, data and metrics must become a major component to quantify our impact in the community. Funders are all looking to gauge the impact of their scarce dollars by requiring additional and improved data and metric reporting.