

**CONSUMER CREDIT COUNSELING SERVICE  
OF MARYLAND AND DELAWARE, INC.  
STRATEGIC PLAN 2020-2025**

**Executive Summary**

In January 2020, CCCSMD management and the Strategic Planning Committee of the Board of Directors began to draft a Strategic Plan for 2020-2025 in anticipation of the current plan's expiration in August 2020.

This effort was sidetracked in March when the pandemic hit the United States and CCCSMD had to close its offices and shift to a fully virtual environment. Between March and September, the staff focused primarily on ensuring continuity of services as well as seeking additional/new funding (including an SBA loan) to continue to operate. In late September, the Board and management made the decision to resume the planning process. Two strategic sessions --one in October, one in November—were held with the goal of presenting the 2020-25 Strategic Plan at the December Board Meeting for consideration and approval.

Following a 10-year revenue decline brought on by the advent of for-profit competition and internet-based solutions, under new leadership and governance starting in 2016, CCCSMD undertook a wholesale restructuring. The objective has been not only to right-size operations, but also to fundamentally transform it into a more client-centric, quality-driven and efficient organization.

These changes have enabled CCCSMD to significantly improve its community visibility and appeal among funders and stakeholders. The organization has also improved its soundness and overall financial position through further diversification of funding sources, innovative partnerships and the development of new, promising delivery models,

Over the next five years, it is critical for the CCCSMD team – led by its executives and Board of Directors - to establish a solid path toward financial sustainability and growth without compromising the competitive advantages it has regained.

## Background and Competitive (SWOT) Analysis (completed in December 2019)

### Strengths

- Team committed to supporting and helping clients (mission-driven)
- Core competencies and services have been streamlined, clarified and are delivered consistently
- Client experience – including follow-up process and QA/QC - vastly improved
- Doing more with less / lean and mean
- Internal processes, QA, training streamlined (dedicated resources)
- Strong institutional knowledge (at managerial and supervisory levels)
- Stronger community-based partnerships than in the past

### Weaknesses

- Ability to adapt to a changing environment and think critically has been a challenge for some Financial Advocates (FA's);
- FA's buy-in is a critical component of our success. They are the face of the organization (along with our community outreach team);
- On-going issues with phone system (appear to finally be resolved with upgrade to PanTerra – over a year ago);
- “SPOF – Single Point Of Failure - syndrome” – everyone plays a key role and we only have limited back-ups for client account-oriented activities (disbursement; check issuance, etc.);
- NFCC: limited technical/financial support; making progress in regulatory and legislative space; more engaged with creditors than in past 5-10 years;
- Clear and concise messaging, more unified look and feel, better define our Identity;
- Still operating in 31 States, while really only “active” in 4 states (MD, FL, VA and CA);
- On the financial front, cash influx (grant payments and draw-downs) are somehow unpredictable, creating cash flow issues at times.

### Opportunities

- Internally: still room for improvement with FA's engagement. Need to explore opportunities to create camaraderie, team-oriented environment. Will revisit scorecard and reward system in 2020;
- Be more strategic in our hiring practices (to include reviewing the criteria used and hiring process itself);
- Revisit Single/Universal counseling model in light of pending recession/economic crisis: eliminate hand-off between FA1 and FA2/3 (in pilot since 11/1) – all FA's are able to fully serve every client calling;

- Identify further opportunities to generate revenues through new partnerships/alliances, new services and programs, expand in high-need, underserved geographic areas;
- Need to better leverage our data, outcomes and testimonials;
- Marketing: \$120,000 nonprofit Google Ad – we have just been pre-approved!
- Hiring of an internal marketer would be of tremendous help in unifying our voice, messaging and content (blog; social media and press releases)

## Threats

- Creeping competition: from other industry players (CCCS agencies; debt settlement agencies; credit repair companies) but also from FIs themselves (debt consolidation loans; internal settlement and repayment programs)
- Lack of understanding of DMP products among general population – including among financial services professionals (like Certified Financial Planners/Financial Advisers).
- Looming recession: how do we best prepare/gear up for the upcoming downturn?

## Strategic Planning Initiative - Purpose Statement

The purpose of this initiative is to develop a five-year strategic plan for CCCSMD that will include a set of core Strategies, Goals and Objectives

**Strategic Priority #1** – Create a **BRAND and IDENTITY** that generate Awareness, Excitement and Loyalty

**Goal 1:** Review and update the organization’s **Vision, Mission, Core Values and Differentiators** to reflect its current and future focus – to be adopted by 12/31/2020

In February and March 2020, Board Members and select staff members attended two strategic sessions led by John Kelley from W3 Affinity to discuss and brainstorm on possible updates to the long-standing Mission and Vision statements. There was consensus that both needed to be shortened, more aspirational and inclusive of the wide diversity of clients and services we support.

*Current Mission: “To help stabilize communities by creating hope and promoting economic self-sufficiency to individuals and families through financial education and counseling”*

**Proposed Mission:** “The Mission of CCCSMD is to improve the financial lives of the individuals and communities we serve.”

*Current Vision: “Consumer Credit Counseling Service of MD & DE, Inc. envisions a community of informed and financially literate citizens who are empowered to achieve their goals, and impart the knowledge and skills needed for financial stability to future generations”*

**Proposed Vision:** “The Vision of CCCSMD is to provide every client and community we serve with a path toward financial independence.”

During those monthly meetings, the committee also focused on defining CCCSMD’s set of Core Values, as well as Differentiators:

**Proposed Core Values:** Dedicated; Advocate; Accessible

**Proposed Differentiators:**  
Personalized; Impactful; Responsive

## **Goal 2: Strengthen the **CCCSMD Brand Awareness and Name Recognition****

- Develop and Update Brand Identity (logo; color etc.) and Messaging to reflect enhanced and additional services, and so they can be easily understood by all Stakeholders (Clients; Staff; Board; Partners) - by Q1 2021
- Revamp and Roll-Out an Optimized Website that reflects the updated Brand Identity, Target Markets and conversion metrics – by Q2 2021
  - Develop client engagement and conversion dashboard with W3-Affinity to be presented to management on monthly basis and to the Board on quarterly basis – by Q2 2021
- Create Stakeholder Materials and Flyers – including an Annual Impact Report - that can be easily and widely shared – by Q2 2021
- Update Brand Identity on annual basis – on-going
- Review and update (if applicable) Website on an annual basis – on-going

## **Goal 3: Develop Communications and Marketing Plan to include Digital Strategy designed to create a stellar reputation and increase referrals and conversions**

- Grow Social Media following and engagement by 20% year-to-year – on-going
- Identify metrics that reflect audience engagement, and create report(s) to track progress – by Q2 2021
- Get CCCSMD to be recognized on top pages for keywords most closely identified with our core services (debt management; housing and financial education) – on-going
- Maximize CCCSMD Nonprofit Google grant, and track progress on monthly basis – on-going
- Develop and enhance consumer engagement and retention tools, such as online locator, online counseling request tool, text messaging etc. – on-going

## **Strategic Priority #2 – Establish a **SUSTAINABILITY Strategy** focused on clearly-identified core Markets, Services and Populations Served**

CCCSMD has four core services/competencies, one of which does not yet generate any funding (consumer advocacy):

- Credit Counseling
- Housing Counseling
- Public Education and Outreach
- Advocacy and Consumer Protection

**Goal 1:** Establish various sustainability scenarios and **Select path forward**. How much funding do we need to generate – by program/service line – to self-sustain and decrease our dependence on reserves? Completed in October 2020

- In May and June 2020, we tracked each staff member's time by department and activity to determine the total time and \$ spent for each line of service. Based on this exercise, we were able to build four distinct Sustainability Scenarios.

On October 8<sup>th</sup>, the Strategic Planning Committee elected Scenario 2 – Aggressive growth in Housing and Education vs. on-going decline in debt counseling:

- 20% decline in DMP
- 20% growth in housing
- 20% growth in public education and community outreach

**Goal 2:** Establish **market penetration and expansion strategies** by identifying specific geographic areas (city, county and State) where there are unmet needs, funding opportunities and promising partnerships – on-going

- Identify Key Markets (including geographic and demographic segments) CCCSMD should focus on from 2020-2025:
  - Based on a Board survey completed in October 2020, the following geographic recommendations were identified as priorities:
    - Grow Statewide in FL and VA – by Q4 2021;
    - Explore growth opportunities in CA and DC – on-going;
    - Monitor potential additional opportunities in the Mid-Atlantic Market – on-going
- Additional Priority Populations (beyond existing client served) were also identified by the Board and included:
  - Homeowners at risk of losing their home
  - Renters at risk of eviction
  - Seniors (50+)
  - Potential Victims of Fair Housing Issues
  - Individuals in need of credit building/rebuilding services
- CCCSMD Team to complete market analysis for each geographic area and population, - by Q3 2021

**Goal 3:** Identify **needed resources and establish revenue projection goals** for each additional service line and for each new market to ensure sustainability of services – by Q3 2021

**Goal 4:** develop and present a comprehensive market update for Board and Stakeholders by Q4 2021 and on an annual basis thereafter

### **Strategic Priority #3 – PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT & FUNDRAISING**

**Goal 1:** Analyze, review and identify Core Programs to be developed/delivered in support of the strategic direction and in response to the current economic and social environments – on quarterly basis

#### **Housing – Goal 20% increase in Revenues year-to-year**

- Become a “premier” recipient of federal, state and county tax-payer dollars in MD, VA, FL and CA
  - Grow the HUD National Intermediary by adding a minimum of one sub-grantee each fiscal year between 2021 and 2025
  - Seek additional state and county funding in VA, FL and possibly CA
  - Continue to secure annual HUD and DHCD Housing Counseling funding
  - Renew HUD Fair Housing Grant award each year from 2021 through 2025
  - Explore additional federal grant opportunities
- Establish direct referral partnerships and fee-for-service agreements with lenders, servicers, realtors etc.
  - Develop three significant direct referral relationships (minimum 100 client referrals/year) in each key market (MD, VA, FL) – annual basis
  - Formalize one “significant” (\$25k/year) fee-for-service agreement in each market – annual basis
- Work with “grant finder” organizations each year to get a comprehensive report on funding opportunities in key markets – annual basis

#### **Public Education/Outreach – Goal 20% increase in Revenues year-to-year**

- Develop annual Community Outreach and Local Partnership outreach plan – by Q1 2021 and each year thereafter
- Develop and/or update content aligned with priority markets and the current economic environment – on-going
  - Focus on financial institutions and credit/lending institutions, including:
    - Credit Unions
    - Realtors
    - Employers
    - Consumer Protection Agencies (city/county/state)
    - Community/neighborhood (membership-based) organizations

- Work closely with elected officials (such as AG, Governor, state agencies) on state and countywide consumer campaign initiatives such as PROTECT Week, Debt Collection etc. – on-going – minimum one campaign per year in each state (MD, VA, FL)
- Explore opportunities to seek joint funding opportunities with other community-based partners, including legal aid and other human services’ providers – on-going
- Track attendance and outreach efforts’ impact using quantitative and qualitative metrics, with a focus on long-term impact (3+ months) – on-going

### **Preserve/maintain our DMP portfolio**

- Develop a comprehensive outreach strategy with regional, statewide and local creditors (banks; credit unions; hospitals) in order to establish additional referral programs – by Q1 2021, and then on an annual basis
- Revisit Fair Share Program contributors
  - Roll-out comprehensive assessment of participating and paying creditors – completed Q3 2020
  - Develop and implement outreach efforts to capture unpaid fair share – by Q1 2021
  - Develop and implement outreach effort to add new creditors to the DMP list – minimum of 10 new creditors per year/on-going
- Enhance DMP client retention efforts by strengthening follow-up efforts and formalize annual check-ins with clients – on-going
- Formalize cross-selling opportunities through QA and targeted follow-ups – on-going
- Consider/Seek the acquisition of a minimum of 200 new DMPs from another CCCS entity – on-going

**Goal 2:** Review existing delivery mode(s), assess effectiveness and identify new potential channels (if applicable) – on a quarterly basis

**Goal 3:** Develop annual Comprehensive Partnership Development Plans designed to help us meet our Target Markets’ and Fundraising Goals over 5 years – to be presented to Board each year by Q1; updated internally on quarterly basis

### **Strategic Priority #4 – OPERATIONAL SOUNDNESS**

**Goal 1:** Establish a rigorous cost containment strategy and additional opportunities for cost savings (including possibility of hiring consultant; review innovative technology solutions)

- Carry out a comprehensive review of major annual expenditures (>\$10k), identify saving opportunities and alternative options – by Q1 2021

- Implement changes where feasible with annual goal savings of \$50k
- Perform annual review of all expenditures and identify additional savings opportunities – annual basis

**Goal 2:** Establish a Succession Plan

- Update existing succession plan by Q1 2021 and get Board approval by Q2 2021

**Goal 3:** Update Divestiture Plan from States by the end of CY 2020

- Update divestiture plan by Q4 2020 and get Board Approval at December meeting
- Track and report progress to Board at Q2 and Q4 meetings each year

**Goal 4:** Develop and Publish a comprehensive, streamlined Operations Manual – by Q3 2021

- Operational soundness and Best-In-Class practices - Update all Policies and Procedures by Q2 2021
- Implement comprehensive counselor’s on-boarding, certification and on-going training program by Q3 2021

**Goal 5:** Maintain and renew all necessary agency accreditation(s), licensing approvals as well as individual certification(s) – on-going

**Goal 6:** Cultivate a Culture of Excellence by attracting, training and retaining passionate, committed and high-performing, diverse talent – on-going

- Identify and share “growth and engagement opportunities” with the entire team – on-going
  - Provide well-identified leadership and project management opportunities
  - Enhance personal/educational development opportunities
  - Communicate annual goals, achievements and milestones to team
- Revisit incentive and reward program(s) by Q1 2021 and annual basis
- Seek staff feedback through annual survey as well as on-going, regular feedback

**Strategic Priority #5 - STRENGTHEN GOVERNANCE and BOARD ENGAGEMENT**

Create a strong, engaged and diverse Board of Directors that will support and help the organization meet its Goals

- Collect Board Member feedback on best way to increase engagement as well as gap(s) in skill set and areas of expertise – completed
- Roll-out board recruitment efforts

- Identify 5 potential new Board Members by Q4 2020
  - Complete recruitment and on-boarding of 3 new Board members by Q1 2021
- Create annual Board development and engagement goals
  - Share marketing materials and talking points with Board Members – annual
  - Deliver continuing education presentations at each Board meeting to strengthen knowledge base of board members – quarterly
  - Update, share and collect “Board annual commitment forms” – annual
- Accomplish 100% financial contribution levels from Board members - annual