

**Bridges to Housing Stability, Inc.**  
**Strategic Plan**



Every Family  
Should Have a Home

**2017 – 2020**

## The Organization

Bridges to Housing Stability, Inc. (“Bridges”) is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit corporation serving Howard County, Maryland (the “County”). Bridges believes that housing is the key to a household’s stability. Whether resolving the issue of homelessness or preventing a household from becoming homeless, our goal goes beyond crisis intervention – our approach and mission focuses on long term housing stability for our target populations.

The organization has three program areas: housing stability, Bridges Alliance and advocacy, which work in coordination to drive impact. As a partner in Howard County’s Coordinated System of Homeless Services (CSHS), our housing advocates serve as case managers, coaching and supporting homeless and near-homeless households on their journey to stable housing. Through the CSHS, Bridges serves County residents with annual incomes under 50% of the County’s median household income. Bridges is not a crisis intervention agency. The organization works with households on long-term housing solutions. Bridges also provides financial assistance, administrative and system coordination for CSHS.

Bridges Alliance is an affordable housing program that provides income-based rental housing to low-wage working households with annual incomes primarily between 30 to 60% of Howard County’s median income. Bridges Alliance is the only affordable housing program of its kind in the County.

In partnership with others, Bridges is a leading voice in the community call to resolve the shortage of affordable housing needed in order for low-wage workers to live in Howard County. Bridges believes that affordable housing is essential to the goal of ending homelessness in Howard County.

Within the last program year, Bridges helped 132 households (i.e. 333 clients) find, or remain in, stable housing. The organization supports approximately 300 families/individuals per year with a staff of 15 and a budget of approximately \$1.8 million (FY2018).

## Community Impact Statement

A major struggle in Howard County for individuals and families is a lack of affordable housing. Eighty percent of households served by Bridges in the fiscal year ending June 30, 2016, identified as literally homeless, were employed but not earning enough of a livable wage to afford housing within the County.

Affordable housing is important, not only to people but to the economic vitality of a community, by attracting and retaining employees to live where they work. Two national trends largely responsible for the rise in homelessness over the past 20-25 years are a growing shortage of affordable rental housing and a simultaneous increase in poverty.

On average across the years 2010-2014, 24% of Howard County households (25,956) had an annual income of less than \$60,000, which was 54% of the County’s \$110,133 median income. About 10,500 of these households had annual incomes of less than \$30,000 (27% of median income) and 6,000

households had annual incomes of less than \$20,000 (18% of median income).<sup>1</sup>

The Howard County Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) has reported that 9,900 renter households (33% of all Howard County renter households) have incomes below \$50,000. As noted in Table A, there are only 3,247 units in the County with rents affordable to that population, leaving a shortage of 6,653 affordable housing units.<sup>2</sup> The greatest shortage of rental units is for renters earning 30- 60% of median income.<sup>3</sup>

<b>Renter Households Making &lt; \$50,000</b>	<b>9,900</b>
<b>*33% of all renter households</b>	
<b>Rental Units with affordable rents</b>	<b>3,247</b>
<b>Affordable Units Needed</b>	<b>6,653</b>

In addition, between 2014-15 and 2015-16, the number of Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) students identified as homeless increased 11 percent, from 470 to 522.

Howard County’s response to homelessness is the CSHS, which was launched to serve as the single point of access to resources for Howard County citizens who are or are about to be homeless. CSHS Households in need of housing are first assessed by the County’s only emergency shelter program, a 33 bed shelter, which is at capacity at least 8 months out of the year with a standing waiting list. In addition, in June 2016, there were (1) 285 households on the CSHS waiting list for needed rehousing and/or homeless prevention services, and (2) 171 households receiving case management.

**2016 -2017 PROGRAM TRENDS**

- 30% increase in homeless single person households;
- 50% increase in number of adults over the age of 55 that were homeless or need of prevention services and
- 54% increase to total number of households in need of homelessness prevention services.

**BRIDGES’ SUCCESS RATES:**

- 93% of rehoused households remain housed after 12 months;
- 88% of households successfully avoid eviction; and
- 72% of households are successful rehoused.

Despite the current efforts in Howard County to address the affordable housing crisis and growth in poverty, the demand for help still outweighs the supply of resources. Bridges has been addressing the issue of homelessness in Howard County for over 25 years by taking the lead in the effective provision of case management and affordable housing programs and services.

We will continue to champion the end and prevention of homelessness in Howard County via strategic and effective partnerships and leveraged relationships.

<sup>1</sup> ACS 2016 Self-Sufficiency Indicators Report

<sup>2</sup> Source: Real Property Research Group, 2014 Howard County Rental Survey Summary of Findings

<sup>3</sup> ACS 2016 Self-Sufficiency Indicators Report

## Mission

To provide a path to self-sufficiency to prevent and end homelessness through affordable housing solutions and advocacy in Howard County, Maryland.

## Vision

To champion the eradication of homelessness in Howard County, Maryland.

## Guiding Principles

*We welcome clients, tenants, staff and volunteers from all cultures and backgrounds regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion affiliation or sexual orientation. Together, we model our values in support of our mission and vision. We believe in:*

Treating all people with respect.

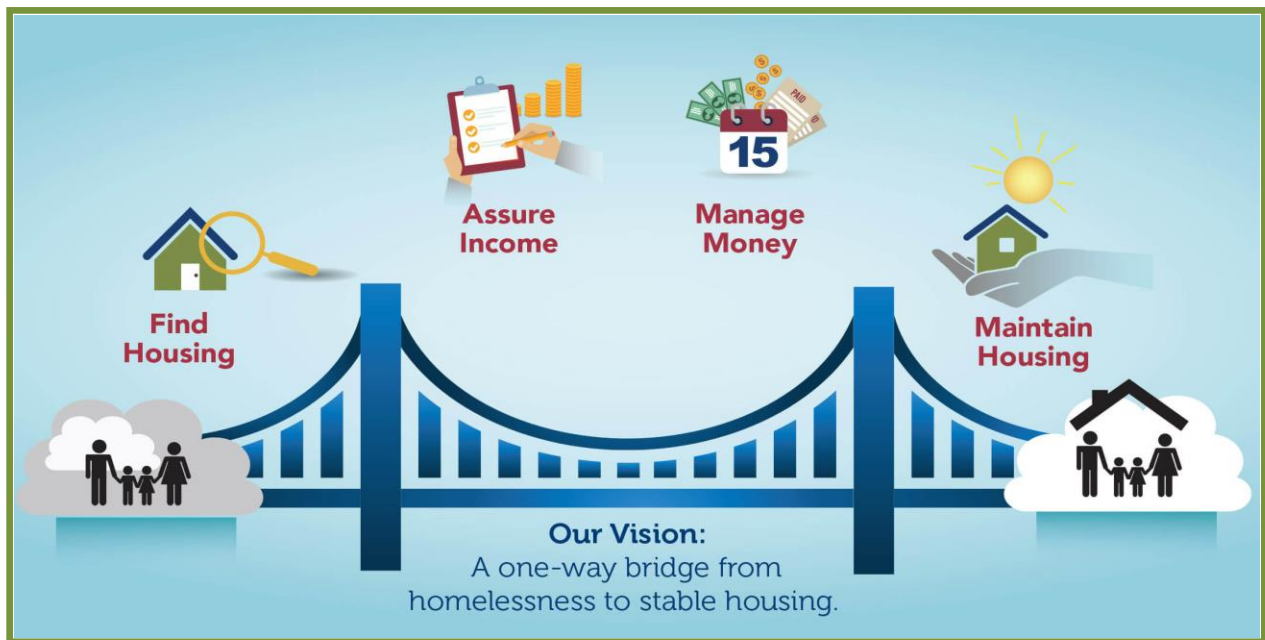
Providing opportunities for everyone to live in a home.

Delivering excellent service and advocacy to empower clients.

Recognizing the strengths and uniqueness of each individual and family when providing services.

Working collaboratively with partners.

Exhibiting professionalism, innovation, accountability, transparency and a dedication to quality in all that we do.



## Strategic Planning Process

The board decided in late summer of 2016 to undertake a strategic planning process that would involve the entire organization and include representation from key stakeholders. In sum, the planning process entailed:

- Online surveys conducted with key stakeholders including 11 staff members and 8 board members
- Personal interviews with four selected key stakeholders including County agencies, congregation leaders and community advocates
- Three strategic planning committee meetings to identify strategic priorities, evaluate stakeholder feedback, and clarify organizational objectives and strategies
- A board and management team retreat in February 2017
- Further discussions with the executive director, board chair and consultant to discuss development of the objectives, strategies and format of the strategic plan
- Publication of the plan for board review in early May 2017, with approval in June 2017.

Through this robust process, four thematic priority areas emerged. The strategic priorities that will guide Bridges' work over the next three years include:

- **Advocacy** – Bridges recognizes that a clearly articulated advocacy position is necessary to help the organization move from a provider of services to an organization that can guide policy.
- **Howard County Plan to End Homelessness** – Bridges has the opportunity to lead important initiatives in the Howard County Homelessness Plan as it initiates the planning and implementation of the next phase of the plan and experiences considerable turnover in many leadership positions in the county.
- **Bridges Alliance Program** – The Alliance Program is a unique offering in the market and Bridges is excited to continue to make the necessary investments to take this program to the next level.
- **Creating a Workplace of Choice** - Bridges understands the challenges of recruiting, training and retaining a highly qualified, dedicated team and will work to clearly articulate career paths for its management team to develop and engage team members.

# **Bridges to Housing Stability Strategic Plan Framework**

## **Strategic Priority - Advocacy**

### **Goals:**

1. Engage in meaningful advocacy to reduce homelessness and increase the availability of affordable housing to low-income households in the County;
2. Establish Bridges as a leading affordable housing advocate in the County; and
3. Create a sustainable network of potential allies.

### **Objectives:**

(1) Identify advocacy issue(s) and build narrative for each using, where applicable, data compiled from Bridges' programs that reflects the effectiveness of Bridges programs and services;(2) Identify priorities and strategy for advocacy efforts (including determining whether membership in other organizations would benefit Bridges' advocacy efforts and how much effort to spend advocating at the County, State and Federal level); (3) Build advocacy capacity and increase the circle of influence of existing staff, board members and volunteers; and (4) Launch the initial leadership forum within the County focused on affordable housing and supportive services .

**Background:** Bridges is solidly positioned as a strong, creative, collaborative organization working to prevent homelessness. The organization recognizes that a clearly articulated advocacy position is necessary to help the organization move from a provider of services to an organization that can guide policy. This shift is important because the County needs the leadership and expertise that Bridges brings to preventing homelessness. A strong advocacy platform will position Bridges as a go-to-resource for the prevention of homelessness.

### **Strategies:**

1. Develop an advocacy platform for affordable housing for households making less than 60% of Howard County's Area Median Income (HC AMI).
2. Develop an advocacy platform that includes the supportive services that prevent homelessness.
3. Establish relationships with Howard County leaders, specifically the Howard County Housing Commission ("Housing Commission") and County Executive, to build awareness and knowledge about Bridges' work and services.
4. Create robust partnerships and collaborations with other organizations that share the goals and vision of Bridges to prevent homelessness.
5. Ensure that the board of directors has the data and tools to accept ownership of Bridges' positions, extend the reach of the organization, and advocate effectively on behalf of Bridges.
6. Draft an annual advocacy plan to steer the EPP Committee's work with concrete actions and a timeline.

**Measures of Success:** Number of partners that give feedback about programs & Services, types of feedback from partners about programs and services, number of mutually beneficially partnerships, robust data and research around advocacy issues, increased presence in County legislature.

### **Strategic Priority - Howard County Plan to End Homelessness**

**Goal:**

1. Make homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring in Howard County using a Housing First approach.

**Objectives:** (1) Partner with County to update HMIS for accurate collection, maintenance and monitoring of meaningful data; (2) Establish measures of success, specific to Howard County, which emphasizes type of housing and appropriate level of services as the goal for ending homelessness amongst Howard County's CSHS clients; (3) Compile data that measures the effectiveness of Bridges approach; and (4) use data to continuously improve approach and present measures of success and create buy-in for the support of aforementioned measures of success.

**Background:** Howard County agencies and departments view Bridges as an effective provider of housing and case management services to prevent homelessness. As the Howard County Plan to End Homelessness shifts into planning and implementation of the next phase of the plan, Bridges has the opportunity to lead important initiatives in that plan. Not only does Bridges have unique expertise in preventing homelessness, there has been considerable turnover in many leadership positions in the County. Transition of leadership at the County and homeless service provider level provides an opportunity for Bridges to pause and reset its role and influence. The coordinated care system provides an opportunity for Bridges to carve out a distinct role and value.

**Strategies – Housing Leadership:**

1. Work with Continuum of Care leadership to identify target populations to eliminate homelessness in Howard County through Housing First.
2. Serve as a go-to resource for diverse inventory of affordable housing.
3. Ensure that Howard County's Plan to End Homelessness is fully integrated with case management and other support services to better serve families, prevent homelessness and save the County money.
4. Develop a compelling case for support to raise additional funds for Bridges and to increase its affordable housing stock.

### **Strategies - Case Management Leadership:**

1. Build an evidence-based case that supports the premise that case management facilitates outcomes for families and prevents homelessness.
2. Measure, collect and share data to assess Bridges' impact and tell the stories of the families we serve, using new tools and approaches, i.e., website, media, increased visibility in the community, on committees and in advocacy circles.
3. Take a data-driven approach to learning the best practices in case management within and outside the County.
4. Work with the County to identify resources to help share the expense of staff training and credentialing to ensure a high quality of staff capability.
5. Leverage and cultivate partnerships to bring to the housing problem in Howard County to benefit the County and focus on the prevention of homelessness.

**Measures of Success:** Availability of data that shows success rate of Bridges approach, creation of a formal plan that highlights type of housing and appropriate level of services needed as the goal for ending homelessness among Howard County's CSHS clients, positive commitment/level of local leaders' commitment that buy into Bridges plan,

### **Strategic Priority - Bridges Alliance Program**

#### **Goals:**

1. Expand the supply of affordable housing in the County to meet the needs of low- and moderate-income households while working toward the financial stability of the program;
2. Establish management, fundraising and program processes to support operational and tenant stability;
3. Build a financial model that creates the appropriate level of replacement reserves to protect the organization's assets and mitigate financial risk for Bridges.

**Objectives:** (1) At least 95% of households have <40% housing burden (2) At least 75% of households have 10% lowered rent burden on entry (3) program pays for all direct costs and pays an additional 20% of the program's indirect costs each year until the program is entirely self-sustaining. (4) Meet or exceed budget targets for income and expenses (5) Maintain 95% occupancy rate (6) Increase by 10% annually the number of households with 100% on-time payments (7) Reduce by 10% annually the number of households on payment plans (8) 90% of households have no outstanding balance (9) 100% of households have Housing Stability Plan (10) 50% of households make progress on planned goals (11) At least 20% of households have income growth annually (12) At least 85% of tenants remain in program 18 months after entry (13) Create replacement reserve and maintain at least 10-15% of total replacement costs.



**Background:** The Alliance Program is a unique offering in the market, and Bridges is excited to continue to make the necessary investments to take this program to the next level. Bridges is very aware of the need to have a mix of income levels among the families in the Alliance Program. The organization will need to be creative and flexible in order to add to its housing inventory because housing inventory diversification is critical for success. Bridges will continue to invest in adding expertise in housing and property management to its staff and board of directors while cultivating relationships with real estate and developer partners. Adding expertise and capacity to the staff and board, as well as increasing the inventory of affordable housing, are critical to successfully scale and grow the Alliance Program.

**Strategies:**

1. Develop a housing inventory diversification strategy that incorporates a mix of housing types, locations and financing options to ensure financial sustainability.
2. Identify new opportunities for affordable housing acquisition.
3. Improve Bridges' process for evaluation of families for the Alliance Program to ensure that candidates are the best fit for this type of program.
4. Develop programs for families to provide education, planning and a network of resources to ensure success and support.
5. Create replacement reserve for Alliance program.
6. Invest in professional development for the staff to continue the learning process necessary for the Alliance Program to be successful.
7. Develop and maintain effective property management processes.
8. Grow non-grant income.
9. Reduce repair and maintenance costs.
10. Reduce risks to program continuity.

**Measures of Success:** Number of total affordable housing units, number of affordable housing units for 60 to 80% HC AMI, relative to the target, increase in the number of tenants that have zero balance on rental payments, number of staff members, total amount reserved for replacement needs.

**Strategic Priority - Creating a workplace of Choice**

**Goals:**

1. Launch comprehensive employee programs that promote engagement, professional development, and career progression; and
2. Create a market-rate compensation plan for all staff.

**Objectives:** (1) In accordance with nonprofit best practices, maintain a turnover rate of less than 15%; and (2) Foster a culture of recognition and reward that supports and rewards efforts to achieve our mission.

**Background:** Bridges understands the challenges of recruiting, training and retaining a highly qualified, dedicated team. Overall, working at Bridges is a positive experience. Staff feels respected and feels that the entire organization lives authentically by the organizational values. Staff is happy at work, has a healthy work-life balance and would refer others to work at Bridges. The Bridges staff receives good recognition and believes leadership takes their feedback seriously and that they receive helpful feedback. Bridges will work to clearly articulate career paths for its management team and an evaluation process that helps to develop and engage team members.

**Strategies:**

1. Evaluate factors such as compensation and other employee benefits to ensure they are comparable to other nonprofits and attractive to recruit and retain employees.
2. Evaluate how Bridges is mentoring and managing employees to ensure there are ample and clear opportunities for growth and recognition.
3. Create an employee engagement team which will develop activities and initiatives to recognize employee performance and contributions.

**Measures of Success:** Number of opportunities for growth and development provided through mentoring, cross training and career ladders, type and quality of offered compensation, number of positive staff satisfaction surveys, increase in the proportion of staff indicating their satisfaction with the quality of mentoring and management and rate of staff retention.