

Strategic Plan *for* HOPE, Inc.

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Strategic Planning for HOPE, Inc.

In 2007 Mountain Shelter, Inc. and HOPE, Inc. merged in order to better serve the needs of the community and their clients. One of the first acts of the newly merged Board of Directors of HOPE, Inc. was to undertake a community needs assessment of the human service needs of Wythe and Bland Counties. HOPE applied for, and received, a grant from the Wythe-Bland Community Foundation to fund the needs assessment and contracted with faculty from Virginia Tech to conduct the assessment. That report was issued in 2008.

The second step in this process was to develop a strategic plan (see Appendix A for a brief overview of the strategic planning process) to guide the new organization. With a newly affirmed mission statement and input from peer agencies and donors, members of the board of directors, the executive director and staff met with facilitators for a day long effort to identify strengths and weaknesses in the organization, opportunities and threats in the broader community, and to establish major goals and objectives for the organization. This report is the culmination of that effort.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats Analysis (SWOT)

Before an organization can set goals for itself, it must understand its own capabilities and limits, and consider the environment in which it must operate, both currently and for the near future. The HOPE, Inc. strategic planning group did this by performing a Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities & Threats (SWOT) analysis.

“Strengths” and “Weaknesses” encompass issues including mission, board of directors, staff, facilities and client issues. “Opportunities” and “Threats” include issues relating to local, state and national conditions that help or deter HOPE from achieving its goals.

The chart on the following page shows the results of this effort.

SWOT Matrix	
Strengths	Weaknesses
Care about clients	We don't always communicate our purposes clearly
Deliver good services	Agency is still very new
Strong staff leadership	Limited financial resources/no reserves
Concrete services	Guilty of mission creep --opportunistic
Demonstrated value of services delivered	Limited staff
Desire to have a positive impact on community	"HOPE" brand is confusing to clients
Staff independence encouraged	Can't serve all potential clients due to resources
Diverse board	Facility is inadequate/too many agencies
Innovative	Board sensitivity to client concerns
Purposeful, intentional	Getting "client" board members to participate on the board—client voice
Creative	Effective strategies for working with Community Foundation
Merger strengthen both organizations	Our specified service area may be too large
Administration supports risk-taking	
Strong community partnerships/collaborations	
Broad knowledge/experience in staff	
Well managed fiscally	
Opportunities	Threats
Community Foundation	Community unclear of our mission
Influx of newcomers—increasing diversity	Sustainability of funding sources
Strategies of economic development present	Clients show up too late—in serious crisis
Economic bailout may be opportunity	A bad economy
Opportunity to draw in new support from people who don't know us—articulating our mission and a positive vision	Employment practices hurt our clients
Businesses/banks more willing to work with clients	Va. government support for human services is poor
Increased opportunities to collaborate—our good reputation	Local government support for human services is poor
"Achieving Excellence" national initiative for housing programs-info exchange	Band-aid approach instead of comprehensive approach to poverty/human need
New, vital organization	Hard to be proactive—too busy with day-to-day
Broad geographic coverage	Low education levels for clients
Strong faith community to draw on	General demographics - aging population, exodus of young adults, levels of substance abuse
Strong public social service agencies	Limited, stretched public services
	Disparity between haves/have-nots
	NIMBY affecting housing goals
	External pressure to mission creep

Goals and Objectives

The strategic planning group next turned its attention to the development of 5 year goals for HOPE, Inc. In selecting those goals the group first considered the mission statement developed as a result of the merger of HOPE and Mountain Shelter:

Mission of HOPE, Inc.

HOPE is a human services organization facilitating initiatives and coordinating services aimed at improving the overall well-being of individuals and families by providing tools to increase self-sufficiency promote healthy lifestyles and enhance quality of life.

With the mission in mind the group considered where they would like to see the organization positioned five years from now. The five goals reflect their concerns about the organization in its entirety, including its service to clients, its internal capabilities, and its role among other service providers and the broader community.

The objectives for each goal allow the organization to set measurable and time-limited steps towards meeting those goals. Setting measurable and time-limited goals gives HOPE, Inc. a means by which to operationalize this strategic plan and to help the organization's leadership monitor progress towards the goals they have set.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Goal 1: Ensure the efficient, timely and effective delivery of counseling services throughout our service delivery area.

Objective 1: Assure all clients receive intake and assessment services and on-line-real-time HCIS referrals within five working days of initial contact with HOPE staff by April of 2009.

Objective 2: Identify emergency needs clients and provide or arrange appropriate assistance within 1 day of contact by mid-2009.

Objective 3: Develop and implement an effective emergency assessment tool by March 1, 2009.

Objective 4: Provide ongoing continuing education to community agencies and coordinate technical assistance to link human service providers through HOPE Community Information System, with twice annual trainings/refreshers, beginning February 2009.

Objective 5: Provide leadership, innovation and coordination of services among human service providers within our service delivery area.

Goal 2: Persons near or below the poverty level will be empowered to transition to self sufficiency and financial security.
Objective 1: 80% of clients requesting services will be required to participate in an introductory budgeting session, with classes offered at least three times per week; to be implemented by February 2, 2009.
Objective 2: Determine a measurement of financial "self-sufficiency" by April 1, 2009, and routinely apply it to clients as a measurement of outcome evaluation via semi-annual evaluation of closed client files.
Objective 3: All clients will be assessed for their interest in purchasing affordable housing, and 10% will be enrolled annually in a mid/long term credit/budget counseling, savings account pipeline by mid 2010.
Goal 3: Ensure the appropriate staff, board of directors, facilities and financial self-sufficiency to pursue its goals.
Objective 1: Create a business model for sustainability by June 30, 2009 identifying select financial ratios for quarterly board reports.
Objective 2: Develop a plan to enhance existing and access new sources of revenue and resources by June 30, 2009.
Objective 3: Assess facility needs by June, 2009; set plan of action on acquisition/expansion by August, 2009.
Objective 4: Assess board competencies and structure, develop recommendations if needed and enact those recommendations by June, 2009.
Objective 5: Conduct annual evaluations of staff and executive tied to identified outcomes from Strategic Plan and annual review of work plan beginning with the next cycle of annual evaluations
Objective 6: Adopt and adhere to annual 4-quarter cycle of performance for board including budget, planning, governance and program evaluation beginning in July of 2009.

Goal 4: Effect change in the community's understanding of sustainable life styles and quality of life within our service area.
Objective 1: Increase participation in the Volunteer Services Program by 25% annually over the next three years through a new strategic, regional partnership to be developed by the end of 2010.
Objective 2: Increase the community understanding of poverty issues in the region as measured by an annual assessment of community attitudes on poverty and sustainability beginning in 2011.
Objective 3: Provide leadership on housing and community development in the region through sponsorship and participation in two annual promotional activities beginning in 2011.
Objective 4: Develop a public information program that increases the public's understanding of the 'triple bottom line' approach to HOPE's mission, including the 3 Es (economy, environment and equity) or 3 Ps (people, planet and profit) by the end of 2010.
Goal 5: Ensure access to successful ownership of quality affordable housing for all residents in our service delivery area
Objective 1: All clients will be assessed for their interest in purchasing affordable housing and 10% enrolled annually in mid/long term budget counseling pipeline by mid-2010.
Objective 2: Residents/participants in income-based subsidized housing will be recruited for entry into home ownership pipeline, with five families successfully making this transition annually by the end of 2010.
Objective 3: Contact and provide services for 10% of the service area's first time homeowners (as identified through annual survey of building permits for single family homes) and provide individualized services as needed to help assure successful home ownership starting in 2011.
Objective 4: Publicize brand of HOPE Housing through web, realtor advertising, & partnerships with private and public financing by the end of 2010.

Next Steps

Once the Board of Directors has adopted the strategic plan, they should adopt some formal processes by which to monitor the agency's progress towards its goals. Depending on the specific goal or objective this would likely include appointing responsible subsets of the board (e.g. an executive or strategic planning subcommittee, or a nominations committee for board recruitment) and assigning some of the goals and objectives to the Executive Director. There should be a regular and periodic process for reporting on progress on objectives and movement towards goals.

HOPE, Inc. should also be mindful that a strategic plan is a "living" document. As objectives and goals are met, new ones should be developed. As new opportunities present themselves, or as community needs change, the strategic plan should be amended to allow the organization to respond within the aegis of its mission. While this may well take place as circumstances dictate, it would also be advisable to formally look at the strategic plan once a year and make changes as appropriate.

Appendix A: Overview of the Strategic Planning Process

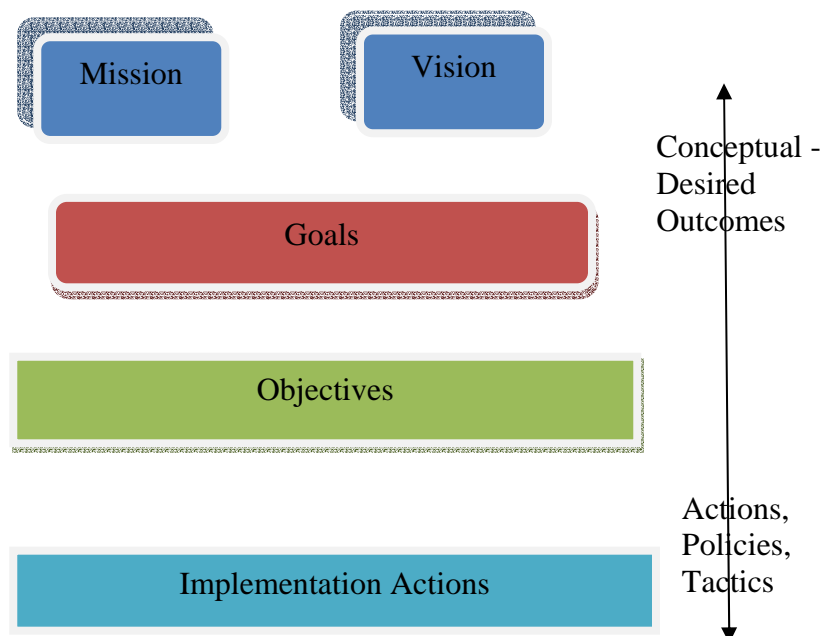
Strategic Planning and Its Role

Elements of Strategic Planning for Nonprofit Social Service Agencies

Most successful nonprofit social service organizations engage in some form of strategic planning; where strategic planning is a process that moves the organization through identification of its mission and vision for the future to specification of particular objectives and actions required to sustain its mission and achieve the vision. Strategic planning process will vary depending on type of organization (profit/nonprofit, e.g.), cycle of the organization (new, existing, etc.), past performance, participants in the process (staff, board members, leadership, etc) new leadership within the organization, organizational culture and a host of other factors. Although the process must be attuned to these nuances, a structured process of moving from desired state to action is fundamental.

Figure 1 illustrates the interdependent stages commonly associated with strategic planning. Organizations should begin the process with either a mission or vision statement or both. Mission statements indicate the purpose of the organization in terms of clients and desired outcomes. Vision statements are focused on the future, usually for a five year horizon, and define the inspiration that would guide the organization. Typically new organizations start with a vision statement while more established ones start with either a new mission statement or a clarification of an existing one.

Figure 1



Goals are statements of desired outcomes for the specified planning horizon, again typically five years. Goals represent outcomes required to achieve the organization's mission. The goals should be congruent, that is, they fit together to help form a unified way to achieve the mission. Goals should also represent organizational challenges as they should force the organization to stretch to achieve them. Goals that simply reflect current performance are not effective for moving organizations forward. An example of a goal for a nonprofit social service agency might be:

Goal: Ensure that residents have the necessary job skills to be competitive in the changing labor market in the region.

Objectives are derived from goals, and typically each goal may have several objectives. Goal attainment is assumed to be achieved if all objectives are met satisfactorily. As such, objectives should have metrics that permit evaluation of success within a specified time framework. As with goals, objectives should be congruent and not conflicting. Objectives are of equal importance with respect to an organization's priorities as reflected in the plan. The rush to achieve all objectives within each goal quickly can lead to frustration. Time and care must be given to setting objective priorities.

Some criteria to be used in setting objective priorities include:

1. Urgency - is this something that must be done soon to be achieved
2. Resources Opportunity - if the objective requires new resources, when could they be available and are there time frames to be met in applications, for example?
3. Sequence - does one objective need to be met before another can be successfully undertaken?
4. Staff time - how much time can be allocated to achieving an objective and will this overload existing staff?

To use our goal for job skills, a typically goal/objective sequence could be:

Goal: Ensure that residents have the necessary job skills to be competitive in the changing labor market in the region.

Objective 1: Increase the percentage of residents ages 18-30 achieving a high school education by 20 percent by the year 2012

Organizations achieve objectives through specific actions. These may be policies, restructuring within an organization, new program efforts, refocusing existing programs, or other types of actions that will enable them to achieve an objective. Any objective may require several actions to ensure successful attainment, and again these actions need to be prioritized using the criteria outlined above. Action strategies should include reference to:

1. What is to be done?
2. What time frame is appropriate, i.e., is it a continuous action or is an end date anticipated?
3. How do you determine the success of the action?
4. What resources are required, time and financial?
5. Who is to be responsible for the different aspects of the action?
6. Possible unanticipated effects?

To use our previous example:

Goal: *Ensure that residents have the necessary job skills to be competitive in the changing labor market in the region.*

Objective 1: Increase the percentage of residents ages 18-30 achieving a high school education by 20 percent by the year 2012

Action 1: Increase annual support for the regional GED program by working directly with the region's legislative delegate to change the current funding formula to weight poverty level more heavily. The director of the agency in conjunction with selected board members will work with other poverty agencies around the state to coordinate legislative lobbying.

Action 2: Secure supplementary funding for pre-school literacy programs from businesses in the region to help children in poverty obtain necessary reading and writing skills prior to entrance into the public school system. Board chair will identify appropriate members to begin a campaign for annual contributions to support the pre-school effort in the region.

Strategic Success

A strategic plan does not ensure success of a social service organization. What then separates the success or lack thereof is not the plan itself, but whether the organization uses it effectively. Certainly in some instances lack of success even with the adoption of a strategic plan can be traced to external conditions that arose unexpectedly. However, organizational failure is more typically associated with either constructing a strategic plan that does not fit the organization or failure to use the strategic plan as a means of guiding the organization as it navigates confusing or difficult external environments.

What are the critical elements of achieving success for a nonprofit with a well constructed plan?

1. Take care in construction of the plan
2. Adhere to the goals and objectives as the roadmap for the organization

3. Recognize that the leadership and responsibilities for achieving success are shared between staff and board members
4. Be certain you have the correct structure both at the board level and within the organization to execute the plan
5. Be deliberative and don't try to accomplish a five year plan in one year
6. Act decisively
7. Evaluate performance based on the plan regularly, at least on an annual basis
8. Review goals and objectives periodically to be sure they are consistent with the current environment. External conditions can change between year one and year five.
9. Periodically do a Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) exercise on specific goals to assess conditions for the plan.
10. Use the plan to mobilize and energize the organization along a path that will achieve success

Appendix B: Peer Agency & Donor Survey

A number of peer agencies and several key donors were contacted prior to the strategic planning session, to solicit their input about the organization and its services. This is a summary of their feedback.

HOPE Donor Survey Results

How would you rate the services of HOPE, Inc. overall?

Category	Responses	%
5 - Excellent	1	50%
4 - Very Good	2	50%
3 - Good	0	--
2 - Not Very Good	0	--
1 - Poor	0	--

Is your rating based upon: (check all that apply)

Category	Responses	%
Client feedback	1	50%
Personal observation/interaction with HOPE	3	100%
Word of mouth among agencies	0	--
Other	1	50%

Why have you decided to donate to HOPE, Inc in the past (check all that apply)

Category	Responses	%
Addresses critical community needs	3	100%
Well managed	1	50%
Its clientele are a group I especially care about	0	--
Contacts I have had with its staff and/or BOD	3	100%
Contacts I have had with its services	1	50%
Other	1	50%

Do you plan on giving to HOPE, Inc again in the future?

Category	Responses	%
5 - Definitely	0	--
4 - Most Likely	2	50%
3 - Likely	0	--
2 - Not Sure	1	50%
1 - Definitely Not	0	--

HOPE Donor Survey Results Cont.

What, if anything, should HOPE do to encourage public contributions?	Where would you like to see an expansion of HOPE services in the next 5 yrs?	Any other comments, thoughts or ideas?
Advertise in targeted markets where services will be needed, value recognized.		
More new articles in mainstream papers, get your name out there more.	My concern is for affordable safe housing. Whether it is through shelters or renting or home ownership programs.	With the transition of the joining of the 2 non-profit organizations behind you, great services and ideas are in your future.
Ask seniors		Group housing with nursing care for able-bodied seniors

HOPE Agency Survey Results

How would you rate the services of HOPE, Inc overall?

Category	Responses	%
5 - Excellent	2	14%
4 - Very Good	7	50%
3 - Good	2	14%
2 - Not Very Good	1	7%
1 - Poor	0	--

Is your rating based upon (check all that apply)

Category	Responses	%
Client feedback	9	64%
Personal observation/interaction with HOPE	12	86%
Word of mouth among agencies	4	29%
Other	1	7%
other:	1	7%

How good is HOPE, Inc., at coordinating services with other agencies?

Category	Responses	%
5 - Excellent	2	14%
4 - Very Good	5	36%
3 - Good	4	29%
2 - Not Very Good	1	7%
1 - Poor	0	--
No Answer	2	14%

Please give some examples of your experiences working with HOPE in a collaborative manner	Where would you like to see an expansion of HOPE services in the next 5 years?	Any other comments, thoughts or ideas you would like to share as we plan for the next 5 years?
Our agency refers clients to HOPE for payment of electric bills, heating, housing, etc.	Would like to see an office in Bland at least one day a week.	Our clients have a problem with transportation.
Hope does a lot of our screening for use with our ministerial discretionary, we appreciate the help.		
	Reinstate the Disability Benefit Assistance Program - Develop housing (non-shelter) for clients awaiting disability determination - Program to assist clients with felony backgrounds	There is a big need for "rooming" type housing for singles (especially men). This would need to be very inexpensive. The individual would rent the bedroom and then have access to shared living space. It would have to accept felons - they are most in need of affordable housing that is not available to them via regular public housing.
(inability to coordinate) not particularly HOPE's responsibility or fault, the efforts are not always met with cooperation. Disability Assistance Program has been enormously helpful to clients. Personally I'm on the Board of HOPE and FRC has a contract with HOPE for transitional housing services.	More transitional housing to give clients time to transition to permanent housing in a supportive environment.	Service Gap: clients with felonies can't find housing. Our services are limited for this population. If we could lease or won property to us as TH, we would be able to transition more people that are moving from shelter to shelter or not able to maintain or even get housing.
Shared costs for home modifications, medical diagnostics, disability advocacy.		
I attended the meeting with the Homelessness Council and use the information provided to assist veterans.	Additional shelter for homeless personnel	HOPE is an important commodity in these times of economic turnaround and the programs need to be funded and expanded to help more people.

Please give some examples of your experiences working with HOPE in a collaborative manner	Where would you like to see an expansion of HOPE services in the next 5 years?	Any other comments, thoughts or ideas you would like to share as we plan for the next 5 years?
Setting appointments with our clients at our location - Sharing of resources between DSS/HOPE - Communicate often and report on client's status/progress.	Like to see more assistance with mortgage and rent rather than utilities. Disability advocate program has been very helpful. Could suggest more attention to "call backs", at least we would know if we need to seek other resources quicker.	Let us know if we can help support any plans you have or grants you may be seeking. I would suggest a "regular" meeting between agencies be held each six months or so to update each other on what we have available or what is changing.
Will not return our calls		Mt. Shelter/HOPE has been notoriously difficult to get in touch with. However, once a client is able to get a foot in the door, they report "all or nothing" results. They either can not help at all, or they take care of everything.
HOPE has assisted persons applying for both SSA disability and Medicaid and HOPE has assisted person with shelter bills when they are our food stamp applicants/recipients.		Glad to see the mobile home sales as not everyone can afford a house nor has the land to build/buy. Mobile homes are affordable, well-built housing and all that some single persons/couples need
	I might be better equipped to answer this question if I have more information to my response below.	I would like to have a better understanding of HOPE's work and purpose.
		I can not rate the services of HOPE because I have never worked with them.
Working with supplies from warehouse.	Warehouse expansion.	Warehouse expansion is needed. This serves a great area of need and really helps families.
		With all the cut backs in funding for services for the elderly, and as an advocate for the elderly, I along with all of District Three Senior Services would like to see more help for the elderly in our area. Less help for the young and able to work and fend for themselves.
We have had mutual clients that have been helped by HOPE to find transitional housing and to maintain their current housing. Now that HOPE doesn't have the funds to continue assisting SS disability applicants those individuals are being referred to us for representation	I'd like to see them continue to create transitional and permanent housing opportunities, continue to provide emergency financial assistance for housing (rent, mortgage, utilities), continue housing rehab	