

CONNECTIONS FOR THE HOMELESS

Strategic Plan: 2021 - 2023

Mission

We serve and catalyze our community to end homelessness, one person at a time

Core Values

Equity and Inclusion

- We acknowledge that privilege exists and intentionally promote equitable access to resources and representation in leadership and decision making.
- We design solutions with humility and intentionally include voices that have been historically and structurally excluded.

Community

- We are more effective in community than in isolation.
- We build partnerships through authentic relationships.
- We value the expertise of all and use empathy and collaboration to fulfill our mission.

Transparency

- We operate with integrity by being forthright, honest and open with participants, staff, volunteers, supporters and our community.
- We invite feedback in all relationships, commit to self-reflection and strive for continuous improvement.

Generosity of Spirit

- We create spaces that are kind, non-judgmental and affirming of the entirety of every individual's experience.
- We believe that hope, growth and healing take place in a safe, welcoming and respectful environment.

Resilience

- We honor the courage, perseverance and grit of those who deliver, receive and support our services.
- We believe individuals are defined by their strengths and they are experts in their own lives.
- We persevere through challenges and view setbacks as opportunities to redefine and refocus our work.

Strategic Vision

Connections for the Homeless is a trusted, bold, agile leader on the prevention of and solutions to homelessness. Guided by our core values and acting as an anti-racist organization, we combat systemic inequities, strengthen our exceptional workforce, and build innovative programs and partnerships that create a thriving community.

Overview of the 2020 Strategic Planning Process

The leadership of Connections for the Homeless wanted to ensure that a new strategic plan would be in place when the 2018 – 2020 plan concluded. The process to create this initial plan had included creating a new mission statement for the agency and core values. These, along with the strategic vision accompanying the plan, were embraced by all – staff and volunteer leaders. The energy derived from that first planning process prompted a reworked board committee structure that propelled implementation. The 2020 planning process would begin from a position of organizational strength.

Amy Wishnick, principal of Wishnick & Associates, was engaged again to facilitate the planning process. Much was familiar: the strong, fearless leadership and the deeply committed board of directors. Much more was different as the project launched and played out during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic and peaceful protests in response to the murder of George Floyd turned a spotlight on racism and inequity. Connections' massive response to homelessness and the increased dangers due to COVID-19 was breathtaking. The community response – through financial support and partnerships – served to enable Connections to meet the intense need as well as grow organizationally. And, as Connections had adapted and responded to the crisis, the 2020 planning process was adapted to meet the realities of the pandemic.

The project kicked off in May 2020 with a virtual meeting of the strategic planning working group. The group made project related decisions, identified internal and external stakeholders to engage as part of the assessment phase of the planning process. Amy Wishnick conducted three group interviews with staff (including senior management, managers, and direct service), a group interview with 14 board members (including the executive director), and 14 individual telephone interviews with external stakeholders (including municipal officials, community partners, and donors/volunteers). The findings reports captured the input and highlighted the themes and trends from the stakeholder engagement activities. An exciting aspect of the external stakeholder engagement piece was that Connections had made substantial strides in key areas related to mission and community understanding of what the agency does through the efforts outlined in the prior strategic plan. This further positioned Connections to plan based on success.

An early decision was to frame the 2021 – 2023 strategic plan around the same strategic areas as the prior plan, noted below. Because the board had created a committee structure aligned to these strategic areas, implementation and monitoring progress was already an established organization-wide process.

1. Program and Services
2. Visibility and Communication
3. Financial Sustainability
4. Operations and Management
5. Governance and Leadership
6. Community Engagement

A significant change in the 2020 planning process was the inability to gather in person for a planning retreat because of COVID-19 restrictions. Instead, the board of directors and senior management team met via Zoom on three consecutive Saturday mornings, October 31, 2020, November 7, 2020, and November 14, 2020 for a series of workshops that effectively unbundled the activities of an in-person retreat. A huge thank you goes to Connections for putting together and delivering a special box to each participant. The boxes contained all the collateral materials – agendas, reports, handouts – needed for each workshop as well as snacks and swag. The first workshop, on October 31, 2020, focused on a presentation and dialogue about the highlights of the stakeholder engagement findings. The members of the strategic planning working group assumed the roles of “content area experts” and gave their reports. In addition, Connections' executive director presented on the

status of the soon-ending strategic plan highlighting remaining items and decision points. Robust conversation ensued also touching on the agency's COVID-19 response and how all this could inform the new strategic vision and goals.

At the second workshop, on November 7, 2020, board members and leadership staff worked together in small groups and then all together to create a compelling strategic vision – what the agency wants to say is true at the end of implementing the three-year strategic plan. During the full group discussion two areas of importance emerged: the agency's agility and how it was transformed by the crisis and the imperative to move racial equity from initiatives to instinct.

At the final workshop on November 14, 2020, the board and senior management staff further discussed the strategic vision statement agreeing to continue refining it. Again they worked in small groups to develop goals within each of the strategic areas noted above. Each work group brainstormed and presented its sets of goals. The full group then reviewed and discussed them thus ensuring that everyone had an opportunity to comment on each strategic area. To recreate the activity where retreat participants would generate ideas for executable strategies and actions items to achieve the goals, everyone received in their boxes a set of index cards and a stamped envelope to mail their input to Amy Wishnick to use to flesh out the plan.

Following the workshops, work continued on the strategic vision with Jim Pepa, the board chair, distributing the final version. Amy Wishnick drafted the plan based on all of the input. She and executive director Betty Bogg refined the draft. Notable in the strategic plan is the addition of a goal devoted to ensuring that anti-racism is embedded in all areas of the agency.

This is the resulting Connections for the Homeless strategic plan for 2021 – 2023.

The Strategic Plan: Goals and Strategies

Strategic Area: EQUITY AND ANTI-RACISM

Goal 1: Anti-Racism is incorporated into the fibers of the agency model: how Connections conducts itself with clients, staff, volunteers, and partners

- 1.1. Anti-racist practices are embedded in agency policies, procedures, and practices
- 1.2. All staff and board members embrace anti-racism as part of their work with Connections
- 1.3. Representation in leadership underscores Connections' commitment to anti-racism and equity
- 1.4. Connections ensures equitable outcomes
- 1.5. The strategic plan anti-racist goal and strategies are evergreen

Strategic Area: PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Goal 2: Connections' bold, innovative programs and partnerships ensure the agency's leadership in the prevention of and solutions to homelessness

- 2.1. Prevention efforts are decisive and meaningful
- 2.2. Connections is a leader in ensuring that there is sufficient emergency shelter in the community
- 2.3. Housing programs for individuals and families are robust
- 2.4. Youth housing programs are robust
- 2.5. Partnerships and collaborations advance Connections' vision and increase capacity to serve more people

Strategic Area: PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Goal 3: Programs and services maximize wellness through housing, mental/physical health supports, jobs where appropriate, and connections to other resources

- 3.1. Participants are well supported through the continuum of care
- 3.2. All programs and services for all participants (individuals, families, youth) are grounded in an equitable response framework

Strategic Area: VISIBILITY AND COMMUNICATION

Goal 4: Sophisticated, cohesive communication emphasizes advocacy, storytelling, and interactive public education

- 4.1. Tailored messaging reaches diverse stakeholders
- 4.2. Communication channels are strategic, innovative, consistent, and effective
- 4.3. Participants are empowered to tell their stories when they are comfortable to do so

Strategic Area: FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Goal 5: Connections has the financial wherewithal to achieve its vision of ending homelessness one person at a time.

- 5.1. Budget growth matches program requirements
- 5.2. Connections takes advantage of all sources of funding to meet growth and need and develop a mid- and long-term strategy for sustainable funding
- 5.3. Sophisticated internal financial practices are efficient and contribute to agency agility
- 5.4. Key areas of development grow and lead to the ideal donor program for Connections

Strategic Area: OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT

Goal 6: Connection has the necessary systems, facilities, and staff to support agency growth

- 6.1. Connections' physical space/facilities align with administrative and program needs
- 6.2. Connections has adequate infrastructure to support programmatic functions at a high and sophisticated level
- 6.3. Connections is an employer of choice

Strategic Area: OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT

Goal 7: Engaged, effective leadership drives the agency guided by the core values and acting as an anti-racist organization

- 7.1. Strong staff management reflects Connections' commitment to developing leaders
- 7.2. Connections' HR functions support agency goals and objectives
- 7.3. Connections' leadership/management team is diverse

Strategic Area: GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

Goal 8: Engaged, strategic, and reflective of the community served, the board of directors embraces leading an anti-racist organization

- 8.1. The board of directors leads boldly and with foresight
- 8.2. Board practices reflect high level attention to governance

Strategic Area: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Goal 9: Connections actively educates the community on systems that perpetuate homelessness and is a thought leader on providing solutions to prevent homelessness in our community

- 9.1. Advocacy and education about homelessness and affordable housing are strategic tools for Connections to use with the community (C.f., Goal 4)

Strategic Area: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Goal 10: Advocacy is an active growth area, is effective, and Connections is viewed as a leader because of this work

- 10.1. Staff and volunteers understand Connections' advocacy programs and participate in advocacy activities
- 10.2. Connections has fully fleshed out curricula and toolkits for community engagement and education
- 10.3. Connections has relationships at all levels of government
- 10.4. Joining Forces has diverse membership that reflects the composition of the community and includes leaders of color
- 10.5. Board committee structure reflects the agency's advocacy priorities

Strategic Area: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Goal 11: Community supporters and volunteers see themselves as active partners in Connections' mission and financially support the agency

- 11.1. Volunteers are engaged in ways that speak to them personally
- 11.2. Connections capitalizes on the energy of volunteers that results in their financial support

Strategic Area: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Goal 12: Connections has an intentional and creative approach to organizational partnerships and collaborations

- 12.1. Partnerships align with Connections' goals and attention to eliminating homelessness one person at a time
- 12.2. Connections and landlords have a mutually beneficial relationship that supports the mission, mitigates risk, and broadens our reach