Bucks County Opportunity Council

Strategic Plan

2019 - 2023

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Bucks County Opportunity Council

Vision:

We envision communities where all people can achieve economic security and have opportunities to create their future story.

Mission Statement:

Reduce poverty and partner with the community to promote economic self-sufficiency.

Three Community-Action National Goals:

1. Individuals and Families with Low Income are stable and achieve economic security.
2. Communities where people with low incomes live are healthy and offer economic opportunity.
3. People with low incomes are engaged and active in building opportunities in communities.

BCOC's Competitive Advantages:

- We are part of a <u>national</u> network of <u>1,000</u> organizations working to combat poverty across the United States
- One-stop shop, physical presence in whole county – upper, central, lower county
- Staff retention/longevity
- Results driven – Clients to Success database for more than 20 years
- Relationships with stakeholders – local government, providers, constituents, funders
- Innovative, long-term solutions to problem solve with stakeholders
- Holistic approach – asking what is needed, not a prescribed CM model
- See clients as problem-solvers with a seat at the decision table
- Variety/Diversity of funds
- Our reputation in the community as people who get things done with impact
- Programs feed the mission
- State & National reputation earned through ES program's success

BCOC Strategic Plan: Overview

For over 54 years, the Bucks County Opportunity Council (BCOC) has been connecting low-income individuals and families in Bucks County to the resources they need to alleviate the effects of poverty touching tens of thousands of people in its history. The BCOC's mission is unique in that it also focuses on helping people build the resources they need to leave poverty permanently through the Economic Self-Sufficiency (ES) program. In addition to the ES program, BCOC helps tackle the issues that prevent low-income individuals and families from meeting their most basic needs of food, shelter, transportation, energy, child care and employment.

Poverty is relative, and in Bucks County it is mostly hidden. Bucks County is a suburb of Philadelphia with a median income of nearly $83,000, ranking us as the third-wealthiest county in Pennsylvania. This is 35% higher than the median income in Pennsylvania and 43% higher than the national average. The level of wealth in the County tends to obscure the large number of people living in poverty as evidenced by the fact that 40,818 (6.6%) of its citizens are living below the federal poverty line. BCOC intends to expand its impact in Bucks County over the next five years by executing a comprehensive strategy that will include collaborations with other agencies, businesses, educational institutions and government to provide an increased level of successful interventions and solutions for reducing poverty for the whole family.

In November 2018, the BCOC Board of Directors created a new vision statement to better communicate our vision for the county but to also state our intention to expand beyond the county lines. The vision statement is: *"We envision communities where all people can achieve economic security and have opportunities to create their future story."* With this charge, the Board created five Vision Benchmarks intended to be visionary goals that BCOC would strive to achieve in partnership with the entire community.

BCOC's Vision Benchmarks:

1. Decrease individuals and families living in poverty by 10%
2. Eliminate hunger in Bucks County
3. Eliminate homelessness in Bucks County
4. Grow and diversify funding sources to be 50% privately funded
5. Recognition as the lead social services agency in Bucks County

To achieve these benchmarks and the national goals, we must fully engage the community and bring people from all economic levels to the table. We must also evaluate our brand awareness through key metrics. The BCOC staff and Board have developed this five-year Strategic Plan to help guide the organization at this pivotal point in its history as we move from entirely a direct-service organization to one that is a catalyst for community change. This pushes BCOC to expand our boundaries and stretch out of our comfort zone to build a better community for all residents.

Why "Bridges Out of Poverty"

'Bridges' provides new information that brings about a paradigm shift. A shift that defines poverty as "the extent to which an individual, organization, or community does without resources." (Payne, 1996)

Poverty is about more than finances – it is about resources. Resources can be intentionally developed at any time in one's life. Resources do one of two things; they either maintain people in poverty or they assist to help people make the transition out of poverty. Resources either help one "get by" or help one "get ahead."

"Bridges" strives to assist people in poverty to solve their problems by building their resources, especially "Getting Ahead" resources. "Getting Ahead" resources are driven by power and intention, encouraging individuals to take charge and build their own resources. The success of this model rests on the individual. "Bridges" Model views everyone as a problem-solver and a potential innovator. "Getting Ahead" resources support people to transition out of poverty. The more resources a person has, the easier it is to make changes and live well.

'Bridges' methodology is based on these principles:

- Everyone is a problem-solver who may eventually become a creator/innovator.
- People come to "Bridges" through attraction, not coercion.
- People take ownership of the concepts and apply them in their organization or community.
- People share the results and their stories so that other institutions and communities can benefit.
- Everyone participates in the learning community.

"Bridges" communities intentionally do these four things:

1. Bring people together from poverty, middle class and wealth.
2. Engage all sectors and disciplines.
3. Encourage private/public partnerships.
4. Attract people from all political persuasions.

"Bridges" can be applied in almost any community or organization because it is not a program. It is local and relevant. Our solutions have to be local so they can take into account the knowledge and best practices of the particular discipline, history and conditions of the community and its leaders.

BCOC Strategic Priorities (2019 – 2023)

These strategic priorities focus on achieving BCOC's vision benchmarks:

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1. **Create a coalition of multiple sectors who seek to reduce poverty in our region.**
   Create impactful partnerships with local not-for-profits; county, state and federal governments; educational institutions; and local and regional businesses to more effectively and efficiently leverage our collective resources toward reducing poverty. This strategic priority addresses vision benchmarks 1, 2, and 3.

   a. **Teach and lead the community in "Bridges Out of Poverty" language, constructs and strategies.**
   b. **Create a coalition of people to address social determinants of health, Opportunity Exchange.**
   c. **Develop community-wide goals to reduce poverty – "Hand Up" campaign.**
   d. **Advocacy – events – poverty simulations, poverty forum, etc.**
   e. **Evaluate brand awareness through key metric analysis.**

2. **Acknowledge milestone achievements on the path to economic stability.**
   Self-sufficiency looks different for everyone, and BCOC needs to acknowledge each path. That means applying what we have learned through coaching people to graduation to everyone we serve. While still pursuing the gold standard of self-sufficiency set in 1996, with its low rate of recidivism, BCOC programs help to stabilize people and advance their progress along a continuum that won't always move them to that level of self-sufficiency. However, through all its programs and interventions, BCOC is committed to helping all its clients move as far along the crisis to thriving continuum as they can. This strategic priority addresses vision benchmarks 1, 2, 3 and 4.

   a. **Report outcomes rather than outputs.**
   b. **Redesign BCOC's client tracking software, Clients to Success (CTS).**
   c. **Prioritize follow-up case management to assess if and how BCOC's range of programs and intervention can help individuals and families progress further along the continuum.**
   d. **Measure participant outcomes all along continuum- Crisis, vulnerable, stable, secure, thriving .**

3. **Expand and Grow the Economic Self-Sufficiency program.**
   Since 1997, BCOC has graduated 330 families from the Economic Self-Sufficiency program. This represents a small percentage of people currently living in poverty in Bucks County, less than 3%. The program is individualized and costly, but the permanent impact for each family is significant for both the family and the community. Research shows that sooner the interventions occur for children, the greater the potential for long-term impact. Therefore,

BCOC Strategic Priorities (2019-2023) – continued

BCOC will make changes to address generational poverty to break the cycle for more families in the region by intentionally focusing on both the children and adults. This strategic priority addresses vision benchmarks 1 and 5.

   a. Train coaches to adopt the motto, "*Self-Sufficiency starts at intake.*"
   b. Develop a BCOC Consulting and Training division.
   c. Increase funding to support additional staff and participants.
   d. Expand the mindset of the community and funders to include not only changing individual lives, but also creating systemic change that reduces the poverty rate in Bucks County.
   e. Apply a 2Gen approach to all programming.

4. **Grow, diversify and solidify funding sources.**
   For the BCOC to drive a reduction in poverty in the region, the organization needs to grow, diversify and solidify sources of funding, including government and private sources. BCOC will need to increase private funding significantly to achieve a 50% privately funded threshold. This strategic priority addresses vision benchmarks 4 and 5.

   a. Invest in the Development department structure.
   b. Segment fundraising opportunities by program area.
   c. Design fundraising opportunities – events, campaign, endowment.
   d. Target fundraising to find funding sources that will enable us to pursue specific objectives.
   e. Marketing and Recruiting – concentrate efforts on brand awareness.

5. **Leverage the success of the ES model for greater recognition.**
   The ES model was created in 1997 and has successfully graduated 330 families. These households have permanently left poverty through education, employment and improved social capital. While BCOC is proud of this effort, we recognize that we need to leverage this success, share our knowledge and develop a stronger local, statewide, and national reputation. If we concentrate our efforts for 4-5 years, people are less likely to need our support again. Relationship and time are the keys to our success. This strategic priority addresses vision benchmarks 1, 4 and 5.

   a. BCOC ES brand = We have demonstrated how a successful transition out of poverty can be achieved.
   b. Engage with PA State Department of Human Services Parent Pathways model to scale ES.
   c. Define and brand the ES model in a way that changes public and funder mindset to reconsider how their funds are invested.
   d. Use ES model to become a thought leader encouraging funders to recognize how long it takes to escape poverty, and to develop and fund programs accordingly.
   e. Present ES program model at local, state, and national conferences, forums, and trainings