Community Action Plan

Goal Areas

Prepared February 2015

This Community Action Plan presents an overview of the future direction for antipoverty programs supporting low income families & individuals in Baxter, Boone, Marion, Newton, Searcy, and Van Buren counties in Northwest Arkansas.
I. Executive Summary:

Ozark Opportunities, Inc., a Community Action Agency, has been working in Northwest Arkansas for over 47 years, and has had a tremendous impact on individuals, families, and communities. This plan is an ongoing “road map” to assist the agency to focus our resources on projects and programs to impact the conditions of poverty in our rural area.

We will continue to strive to be more efficient, more impactful, and more engaging as we work harder and smarter to defeat an enemy that does not rest...poverty.

We will continue the journey by combating the crisis situation that many of our families face on a regular basis; and assist them to stabilize their situation. Once a family is stabilized, we will support those that are ready with opportunities to improve their situation through education, engagement and empowerment.

We are excited, energized, and ready to take steps to meet our mission and vision. We invite you to join us.

II. Agency Mission & Vision:

The current statement of purpose and strategy (i.e. mission) of Ozark Opportunities, Inc. is:

*To partner with organizations, families, and individuals to provide services and empowerment opportunities for those with limited means to improve their quality of life.*

Ozark Opportunities, Inc. (“OOI”) is dedicated to being a catalyst for change in our communities and assisting low income families and individuals to improve the quality of life in their communities. We live in a time of high unemployment, elevated prices, increased budget cuts, tax policies, and military spending that slash away at the supports people need just to get by. Fulfilling our mission during the next three years will be a challenge. However, OOI will continue to address the basic needs of our participants as well as provide new and engaging empowerment opportunities. We will work with them to educate our community about their plight, as well as support them to become leaders in their community to advocate for their needs.

We believe that poverty is not inevitable or necessary. We believe in the possibility of an inclusive social and economic system that allows everyone to achieve their full potential.

Ozark Opportunities, Inc. has a **Vision Statement** for the three categories of impact our Community Action Agency has on our region. These statements identify the ultimate view of what we would like to see in each of the following areas in the distant future:

- **Family (& Individual):** Individuals and Families are healthy, well-adjusted, financially secure, educated, community minded and engaged.

- **Community:** Resources are available and readily accessible; there is adequate information available, and people and organizations work together to provide necessary support to those in need.
• *Agency*: Agency will be able to adjust and evolve over time to meet the needs of the population as it changes. Technology will be prominent, user friendly, easily interfaced, and staff will be approachable and access will be convenient to those in need.

III. **ROMA Goals:**

Our Strategic Plan follows the CSBG (Community Service Block Grant) Agency-Wide ROMA (Results Oriented Management and Accountability) Goals that were designed by Community Action professionals; they were implemented in 2001, and have evolved over time capture the impacts of programs and strategies on our stakeholders.

The *6 ROMA Goals* include:

Goal 1. Low-income people become more self-sufficient. *(Family)*  
Goal 2. The conditions in which low-income people live are improved. *(Community)*  
Goal 3. Low-income people own a stake in their community. *(Community)*  
Goal 4. Partnerships among supporters and providers of services to low-income people are achieved. *(Agency)*  
Goal 5. Agencies increase their capacity to achieve results. *(Agency)*  
Goal 6. Low-income people, especially vulnerable populations, achieve their potential by strengthening family and other supportive systems. *(Family)*

We will utilize the “National Performance Indicators” or “NPI’s” to track impact on identified outcomes, and will report our results to the Board of Directors and public (via agency website) quarterly.

IV. **Conditions of Poverty:**

Much like *Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs*, the Community Action Network has identified 6 Conditions of Poverty in the CSBG Legislation that help to focus our efforts on the primary barriers for families and communities working to escape impoverished conditions; the “plus 3” are additional conditions that have been recognized since that impact families in need and must be listed as well.

The *6 Conditions of Poverty* include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Unemployment</th>
<th>The “+3”:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Inadequate Housing</td>
<td>1. Inadequate Transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Inadequate Education</td>
<td>2. Inadequate Childcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Inadequate Nutrition</td>
<td>3. Inadequate Healthcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(F &amp; Food)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Inadequate Income</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Unmet Emergencies</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
V. The Planning Process:

The Ozark Opportunities, Inc. Strategic Plan is based on a Comprehensive Community Assessment process begun in 2011, and continually updated as new data was found or obtained. To begin, the agency focused on external needs; such as demographics, felt needs, and trends affecting the six counties gathered from staff, Ozark Opportunities, Inc. Board Members, Community Partners, and Low Income Families (Citizens) as well as secondary data collected from various legitimate sources. A concerted effort was made to get “below the surface” and achieve a better understanding of the needs of the communities covered by the agency. This can be seen in the phrasing of the survey questions and focus group data gathered at 12 focus groups throughout the 6 counties.

To analyze the data, results from the survey, focus groups, and census were presented to a Strategic Planning Committee (composed of staff, Board, and Community Members of limited means) to be studied to help uncover the underlying “themes” of the data. The results were then compiled to create a “Master List” of community needs. Once the Master List was compiled, program staff and Directors began to discuss with regional and local partners to see what specific needs and resources exist and further refined the list to four central “Needs Areas”:

- Employment
- Education
- Housing
- Healthy Families

Each group met and discussed identified Needs under each topic, and then what Resources are readily available. Each member was then assigned several of the Needs and was asked to further research the resources already available in the region, to insure that the agency would not be duplicating services, and to identify gaps in services for low income families.

The teams then met again to begin the strategic planning process. They were tasked with reviewing the data gathered and comparing with resources available to identify potential opportunities for partnerships and/or additional services that could be added.

Finally, all of the teams met at a final “Planning Summit” to share their findings and vet their strategies to insure they meshed well with the mission and vision statements they had created early in the process.
VI. **Strategic Commitments:**

The result of this year-long process is a re-aligning of agency efforts, and a “roadmap” to the future of agency antipoverty efforts to assist the families and communities in our service area.

Prior to the process, the agency essentially had 3 divisions based on funding source; Head Start, Weatherization, and Community Services. Though these programs are still in operation, we are actively working to decrease the walls between the programs by insuring that all participants in agency programs are entered into one database, and tracked across programs (and beyond.)

The planning team identified two central Goals or “Strategic Commitments” through the process. Unlike past attempts at a plan that identified specific programs or areas of need; this plan looks at the struggles of the poor to better their lives; and shapes the supports our agency will give around the current need.

**Strategic Commitments (i.e. Central Goals):**

1. **Family Stabilization** is an overarching approach to working with individuals and families to get them “stabilized” or out of crisis. Family Stabilization is the crucial first step to getting people of limited means to a mindset that will allow them to begin focusing on future goals versus the crisis of the moment.

2. **Empowerment** includes efforts of families, individuals, and communities that want to improve. It is hard work to break out of the cycle of poverty and begin to take responsibility and steps toward greater self-reliance and levels of healthy interdependence.
VII. Theory of Change

The OOI Theory of Change explains the thought processes used to arrive at the goals and strategies outlined below; it should be noted that this is a “living document” and is subject to change through the ongoing assessment and evaluation process...
VIII. Needs Prioritization Spreadsheet:

The main outcome of the Strategic Planning process is the development of central goals and related outcomes that can be used by the organization to gauge whether the agency is accomplishing its mission. The goals of Ozark Opportunities, Inc. for 2013-2016 are contained in the “National Performance Indicators”; we will utilize the “NPI Outcomes Catalogue” to track impact on identified outcomes, and will report our results to the Board of Directors and public (via agency website) quarterly.

The areas with an “x” in the first column are areas that we will initiate or start up new action; they include:

1. Shortage of affordable before/after school and summer programs
2. Extended education opportunities difficult to access (internet and transportation)
3. Entrepreneurial Enterprises (for and non-profit) need support
4. Families don’t have enough income to meet basic needs
5. Low Income don’t have access to leadership skills training
6. Lack of reliable transportation is a barrier
7. Inadequate available safe & affordable housing
8. Homes need modification or renovation to make them safe, accessible, and/or energy efficient.
9. There is not currently a "Housing Coalition" working to create a unified Housing Plan for the region (ACCESS Startup).

It must be noted that even though other areas are not identified as “Initiate or Startup,” significant resources may still be allocated for those activities; for example, Head Start has a key focus of “School Readiness”- this is not a new area of effort (as it falls under “Maintain”); however, it is the primary role of the $2.6 million program, and therefore is a primary focus area for the agency.

A review of the OOI Needs Prioritization Spreadsheets show not only the action the agency will take on each “Actionable Need”, but also the current (or future) OOI program area and other Community Resources (additional partners/resources will be added as identified.)
# Strategic Plan Matrix - Feb. 2015

## A. Stabilization:

### (Family, Community, Agency)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Stabilization:</th>
<th>1= Initiate/Startup, 2= Maintain, 3= Advocate/Educate/Research, 4= Partner</th>
<th>OOI Program</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Community Resource</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Shortage of affordable before &amp; after-school and summer programs for low income children.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Head Start</td>
<td>Head Start Restoration grant included extension of class time up to 3:15 pm., first step toward meeting needs of families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Accessibility to basic, affordable healthcare services are needed; i.e. dental, vision, doctor visits, etc.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>SUCCESS (CSBG &amp; A-16), Head Start</td>
<td>ACA increased coverage; assistance provided as funds are available. DENTAL SERVICES beyond extraction are needed; completing updating of Needs Assessment in this area. Providing dental coverage to all staff as of 1-2015. Added to CSBG Special Funds grant as “client service”. Also see #8 below.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Hunger is a problem for many people and they are unable to obtain healthy foods. (Elderly, Disabled, Children, and Families.)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>SUCCESS (CSBG &amp; A-16), TEFAP, Head Start</td>
<td>Refer those in need to local resources; partnering with NW Ar. Food Bank to do Senior/Disabled project in Baxter Co. &quot;Keyhole Gardens&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Substance &amp; Drug Abuse result in broken homes and neglected children.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Research; cannot address with current resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>People with Mental Health needs are unable to get their medication or attend appointments.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Research; cannot address with current resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Individuals and Families have emergencies and need assistance.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>SUCCESS (CSBG &amp; A-16), LIHEAP, TEFAP, Head Start</td>
<td>Maintaining current offerings, added to CSBG Special Funds grant, and researching additional opportunities to provide services (ESG???)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Families don’t have enough income to meet basic needs.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>SUCCESS (CSBG &amp; A-16), LIHEAP, TEFAP, Head Start</td>
<td>VITA/EITC program primary goal in new year; additional research into other programs needed. NEED STRATEGIC COORDINATOR &amp; OR VISTA VOLUNTEER FROM CNCS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Lack of reliable transportation is a barrier for low income people.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>SUCCESS (CSBG &amp; A-16), Head Start</td>
<td>Have garnered one time resources to create a Vehicle Repair/Maintenance Loan Program ($10,000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Unemployment results in families not being able to make ends meet.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>SUCCESS (CSBG &amp; A-16), LIHEAP, TEFAP, Head Start</td>
<td>Planning on integrating job readiness into future offerings of HS/SUCCESS Collaboration. Re-establishing involvement in ACCESS Project in Mtn. Home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Inadequate available housing - there is a shortage of safe and affordable housing.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Outreach &amp; CO</td>
<td>Outreach &amp; CO components</td>
<td>Partner with providers in area to provide referrals. Working with Project Surge (Delta Hills Continuum of Care) &amp; soon the Boone, Baxter, Marion, Newton Counties CoC to assist with gaining ESG Funds from OCS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Homes need modification or renovation to make them safe, accessible, and/or energy efficient.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Outreach &amp; CO</td>
<td>Outreach &amp; CO components</td>
<td>Partner with providers in area to provide referrals (BRAD CAA for WX). Provide A16 case mgmt. and trainings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>There is no &quot;blueprint&quot; or &quot;Master Plan&quot; of service delivery in communities which leads to duplication of services and gaps that keep families from improving their situation.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>N/A; NEW</td>
<td>Newly identified during Strategic Planning Session. Have begun discussions in Baxter and Boone Counties to begin the &quot;MASTER PLAN&quot;; begins with a comprehensive list of needs and resources for each area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Individuals, Families, and Communities don’t know what services are available from providers (not just OOI).</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>N/A; NEW</td>
<td>Newly identified during Strategic Planning Session. Looking at additional ways to spread information to communities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### A. Stabilization (continued):

**Organizational Capacity (Agency):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Primary goal for capacity building= prepare core databank for grantwriting. Already have several staff preparing small grants for project-specific support. Looking for ways to expand into fee-for-service and fundraising events (external funds). Adding &quot;Strategic Coordinator&quot; position to assist with needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Technology Plan Phase 1 (central office updates) &amp; Phase 2 complete. Technology Plan updated; and data collection system in Beta-testing stage- converting to web-based empowOR software in April 2015. Adding 8 laptops to outreach locations: with 5 identified to serve as kiosks for clients to use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Keeping CSST Tracking Software; converting to &quot;EmpowOR&quot;; H.S. transitioned to Teaching Strategies Gold, which (when paired with ChildPlus) will allow &quot;dis-aggregation&quot; of data. ALL customers are input into central data system for tracking and reporting on a point-in-time basis. System designed to meet needs of stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ongoing; Partner &amp; Client Surveys completed for current year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Rounds 1 &amp; 2 Completed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ongoing process; Holding Strategic Plan update meeting Feb. 2015.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Updated Agency Self Assessment done in 2015; HS Self Assessment underway. Need to integrate an actual &quot;Risk Assessment&quot; for the agency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ongoing; adding new partners as new initiatives gain steam; invited partners to Strategic Planning session on 7-31-14 and plan to add additional members for next session in Sept. 2014.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Need is on hold until resources are garnered/staff hired.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**B** Bold Text= High Priority and/or changes have occurred.

* Need must have additional research

* Needs action
## Ozark Opportunities, Inc.

### Strategic Plan Matrix - Feb. 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B. Empowerment/Development (Family, Community, Agency)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>OOI Program</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Community Resource</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low income people (youth and adults) don’t have access to leadership skills training.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SUCCESS (CSBG &amp; A-16), Head Start. NEED Strategic Coordinator or VISTA Volunteer from CNCS</td>
<td>Policy Council &amp; Board training underway. Working on trying to implement “Getting Ahead in a Just Getting By World”, and “Step Up to Leadership”.</td>
<td>Getting Ahead, WIA, Poverty Simulation, FBLA/FFA, 4-H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited Life-Skills training is available (Includes Nutrition, Healthy Interactions, Parenting &amp; Financial Literacy)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>SUCCESS (CSBG &amp; A-16), Head Start.</td>
<td>Parenting and Financial Literacy= two primary areas; Nutrition and others as-identified by families are delivered as requested. Have integrated Financial Literacy Pre-K Curriculum with children, and plans to offer classes to adults.</td>
<td>Univ. Extension, Library, Internet, College/Vo-tech schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Readiness (up to 3rd grade) is needed to insure children can succeed later in school.</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Head Start</td>
<td>Head Start Program addresses this need directly; need to research other options/ i.e. project to continue working with HS families after children go on to public school (aspect of SUCCESS?)</td>
<td>ABC, 3rd Grade Reading Initiative, Early Head Start</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early child care is limited and expensive (0-3 years old.)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A.</td>
<td>Plans to convert HS Slots to EHS in 2016-17 year.</td>
<td>Newton County S.S. Early Head Start, others by location (private pay or voucher.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families have Inadequate Education and Literacy levels.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>SUCCESS (CSBG &amp; A-16), Head Start. NEED Family Development Worker to manage/ provide services.</td>
<td>Maintaining current offerings; OOI HS Staff serving on Imagination Library in Boone Co. (Harrison) and hosting FB page. Have &quot;Lending Libraries&quot; in HS Centers. Need to research other areas and ways to assist.</td>
<td>Local Literacy Councils, ABE/GED, Extension, Library, Internet, College/Vo-tech schools, Career Pathways, TRIO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurial enterprises (both for- and non-profit) need support to grow and prosper.</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Community Services, as needed.</td>
<td>Agency staff are members of and attend Chamber of Commerce Meetings. Partner with providers and refer those interested.</td>
<td>VISTA, Local Chambers of Commerce, SCORE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Readiness Skills are lacking/ People can't get jobs due to not having proper training or education level. (i.e. formal training)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>SUCCESS (CSBG &amp; A-16)</td>
<td>Maintaining current offerings; needs additional research.</td>
<td>Workforce Services, ACCESS, US Dropout Prevention, Local Literacy Councils, ABE/GED, Extension, Library, Internet, College/Vo-tech schools, Career Pathways, TRIO, Getting Ahead, VISTA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### B. Organizational Capacity (Agency):

| 1 | X | X | Professional Development Plans on all staff; updated yearly. Have added additional support for post-secondary education (i.e. college credit) for select number of staff (as funds allow.) |
| 2 | X |   | NEED 2 VISTA Volunteers; currently utilizing volunteers when available for all programs. Have volunteer component in Head Start- track hours and use for Nonfederal Match. |
| 3 | X | X | Agency engaged w/ partners to assist customers; Technology (internet, website, & FB) used to help share Information. |
| 4 | X | X | CUSTOMER= Ongoing, COMMUNITY: Planning for coming year; agency staff will be more involved with Community Partners and affairs. |
| 5 | X |   | Currently have limited engagement with state and federal Legislators- area of Improvement for coming year. Social Media (and website) gaining popularity. Marketing & Communication Plans need update and expansion. Agency E.D. needs Board assistance in creation of a plan to engage Legislators and Communities in coming months. |

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1= Initiate/Startup, 2= Maintain, 3= Advocate/Educate/Research, 4= Partner

1= Improve/Upgrade/Do, 2= Review, 3= Maintain

* Bold Text = High Priority and/or changes have occurred.

* Needs action
IX. Goals, Outcomes, and Targets:

The CSBG Work Plan lists all of the goals, targets, and efforts toward the outcomes identified in the Agency Logic Models, and can be used to evaluate how the agency is doing in accomplishing the central goals identified in the planning process. It is the method by which we track progress, and shows the Board of Directors and Public how we are doing in accomplishing the goals we have set in the plan.

It is updated yearly, and gives a detailed account of the specific outcomes and targets for agency activities that are reported to the government for the Community Service Block Grant funding source.

X. Current Environment:

In addition to the uncertainties that have inevitably come along with our own internal changes, we are operating in a larger context that is both unsettled and unsettling. The future of Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) and other major funding sources at the federal level remains uncertain. We anticipate cuts in federal funding, and state funding is difficult to maintain, much less increase.

The struggles of the people we serve are becoming more complex, as the impact of the Great Recession lingers. Long-term planning in this context is challenging, if not impossible. During this long-term planning process it was questionable if the agency should follow the “old-school” strategic planning model and generate a new list of “things to do” over the next three to five years. We simply do not have the resources to take on new projects without new funding and greater organizational capacity.

More important, the atmosphere at the federal level is such that even proven programs (Weatherization, CSBG, etc.) are under the knife and at great jeopardy. Competition is the buzz word of the day, and funders are implementing standards and compliance requirements that have become exceedingly difficult and designed to allow programs to be lost (or taken) for trivial matters. Competition for funding from private funders has become much more difficult with more organizations having to turn to any and all sources of revenue (resulting in Mission Drift) just to keep their programs afloat. Donors are bombarded with competing requests for help at home and abroad, and the cost of virtually everything is rising, making it extremely hard to balance budgets; add in the impact of the “Sequester”, and agencies receiving public funds are in a constant state of flux and contraction.

Things are moving too fast for a “Needs Assessment” completed every three years to be a solid foundation for planning. We have chosen to focus on the “strategy” part of “strategic planning, “ as strategy is what connects the mission to goals. To develop a strong strategic position, we need a framework of articulated values, priorities, and guidance that can be applied in the unpredictable future, and a way to review that framework regularly to make sure that it is keeping pace with the rest of the world. We need to build the capacity of the organization to adapt to change quickly while still staying true to its mission.
XI. Funding Strategy

Ozark Opportunities, Inc. manages over $5 million of federal, state, local, and private funding annually and has a level of expertise in fiscal oversight of multiple funding streams and sub-contracts that enables us to continue to attract large grants. Being connected with Community Action brings its component programs economies of scale and sophistication in fiscal oversight. Approximately 92% of Ozark Opportunities, Inc. total revenues support client services. In 2013, about 82% of funding is from federal sources; with the other funding from state (6%) and local sources; such as United Way and other partners (12%).

The agency’s dependence on government funding is partially due to its geographic location. Agencies that operate in rural areas have very few large businesses they can call upon for corporate support. There are few private foundations that focus on rural areas, and those that do tend not to give large grants. The local donor base is small, and there is relatively less wealth than in urban areas.

The majority of the Agency’s contracts are “cost reimbursement.” We bill the state after services are rendered and receive a dollar-for-dollar reimbursement. Cost-reimbursement contracts tend to be restrictive in what they will pay for and do not allow an agency to generate any surplus. Many contracts are multi-year and are level-funded throughout the life of the contract, regardless of increases in the costs of doing business. Some contracts require the agency to raise matching funds to receive the core funding. All of these factors make the business more complex, and put even greater pressure on the financial aspect to understand not only proper financial concepts and protocol, but also meet funder requirements for reporting and management.

Employees are the lifeblood of service-related businesses, and Ozark Opportunities, Inc. is no exception. Most funding sources have not funded salaries and fringe benefits to keep pace with increases in the costs of living. Cuts to pay from budget issues at the national level limit the level of experience and qualifications of staff and can lead to staff turnover, which is time-consuming and expensive, not to mention damaging to morale and overall stability of the workforce.

We must be realistic in our approach to funding; we are a private nonprofit that relies almost exclusively on federal funding- this will not change in the near future. We will; however, research additional funding streams that can support the specific approaches and needs identified in the Strategic Plan, and show how their investment in the agency and population we serve will result in a Return on Investment of either decreased reliance on government assistance and/or social return that is quantifiable and real.

It should also be stated that since OOI does not have a large balance of “rainy day” funds to fall back on, as well as being forced to restructure and decrease services over recent years, we expect to be extremely conservative when deciding whether or not to take on new initiatives. To this end we have created the “OOI Funding Guidance” document found in Appendix D.; It will assist in assessing the viability of current and future funding sources and programs to insure the agency can continue or add strategies without negative impacts on operations.

As a matter of federal statute, all Community Action Agencies receive funding through the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG). CSBG is extremely flexible and can be used to fill in gaps left when state and federal contracts do not allow for adequate funding of either direct services or administrative functions. It also enables the agency to direct funding toward emergent needs that funders may not yet have recognized, or to respond creatively to local needs in which funders with an urban bias have no interest.
At OOI, we have used our CSBG grant mostly to fund our “Community Services” Department; supporting programs and administrative capacity in strategic ways based on community need and on our priorities for increasing agency capacity relative to the needs of programs. CSBG grant has been critical to our ability to serve as “the place to go” in our communities when low income people need help, as well as fund additional services that are added as needs are identified; i.e. Community & Family Development Specialists and their affiliated projects/programs (SUCCESS, A16, Nonprofit Tech. Support, etc.)

On the more administrative side, our CSBG grant has played a key role in positioning ourselves well with funders by being able to document what we have accomplished with increasingly more sophisticated data management systems and in mobilizing various groups within our community to collectively solve problems. We will use our core competencies to insure we are able to continue our work, and will maintain strong internal controls across the agency and programs that will insure compliance with financial and program regulations. A culture of risk management prevails, and involvement of senior, front-line staff and Board Members in the discussion of risks will insure the agency does not ignore important issues that can damage the agency and disrupt our valuable work.

XII. The Role of the Board of Directors and Senior Mgmt.

As stated earlier, during the planning process, the Board and Senior Management (i.e. Directors) were involved in the Strategic Planning Committee’s activities. Within any nonprofit organization, the Board and Senior Management work together to ensure the agency’s “Adaptive Capacity” — “the capacity for learning, leading, managing, or creating change, being proactive and relating to the outside world. While Organizational Capacity serves the purposes of stability and order, Adaptive Capacity involves the complementary and often destabilizing quest for change in pursuit of improved performance, relevance, and impact.”

During the planning period, the Board of Directors and Senior Staff were actively engaged in strengthening the agency’s adaptive capacity by providing direction for- and directly participating in- the planning process as changes occur to funding levels, sources, and opportunities. Their role in the coming years will be to help insure regulations are met (compliance), proper financial oversight is performed, and the goals are being tracked and reported to insure that the Strategic Plan remains a dynamic, evolving document as the needs change and our role in our communities and lives of people with low income changes.

XIII. Conclusion

Ozark Opportunities, Inc. has been in business for more than 47 years, and we plan to be around at least that many more. By setting a direction and having a road map, we will be more likely to arrive at our destination than simply wandering through the wilderness.

The road will not be easy, and we will need consistent engagement with low income individuals and families, Board of Directors, Community Partners, and all levels of staff to get there.

We have faith. We know that if we all work together our families and communities will not only improve but thrive!

The OOI Team
Strategic Plan 2015- Snapshot of Strategies

Strategic Commitment #1: Stabilization (Basic Needs) = “Services”

A. Emergency Services
   • LIHEAP- underway.
   • Special; underway with “CSBG Special Funds” grant

B. Non-Emergency Services
   • LIHEAP- underway.

C. New Projects (Family & Community)
   • Vehicle Repair Loan Program- Underway
   • Earned Income Tax Credit Project- Pending
   • Dental Assistance- Researching.
   • Community Specific (ex: Project Surge- handicap ramps= underway, Keyhole Gardens- pending, Back-to-School Searcy Co.- pending)

D. Other

Strategic Commitment #2: Development & Empowerment = “Supports”*

*i.e. Learning & Skills Development

We will utilize four (4) central Strategies to develop/empower those we serve: (1.) Learning Opportunities, (2.) SUCCESS Life Coaching (Case Mgmt.) (3.) Leadership Development & (4.) Asset Development.

A. Learning Opportunities (Adult & Child) (Phase 1)
   • Early Childhood Education
     o Head Start
       ▪ Integration of Financial Literacy (Earning and Saving $) Curriculum into Head Start Program; completed.
     o Early Head Start- adding in 2016-17 school year at select locations.
   • Lifeskills Workshops (single topic); pending.
   • Directed Workshops- series (New Parenting Approaches, Financial Literacy, etc.); with certification if available; in process- scheduling soon.
   • Special Topics- as identified (CPR Training, etc.)- as needed.

B. SUCCESS Life Coaching/Family Development (Adult) (Phase 2)
   • Short Term Goal Coaching (1 to 4 sessions); pending.
   • Longer Term Goal Coaching (More intensive support and Family Development- ongoing); pending.
C. Leadership Development (Adult) (Phase 3)
   • Policy Council- underway.
   • Board of Directors- underway.
   • Getting Ahead in a Just Getting by World (curriculum); pending.
   • Step Up to Leadership (curriculum); pending.

D. Asset Development (Adult) (Phase 3)
   • Individual Development Accounts (IDA’s); pending.

❖ NOTE: All participants will receive follow-up (how extensive depends on depth of involvement).

Strategic Commitment #3: Agency Health = “Capacity”

A. External funds are needed to insure organizational health
   1. Core databank for grantwriting- In process.
   2. Fee-for-service and fundraising events; Trainings pending.
   3. Adding "Strategic Coordinator" position; Must re-advertise position.

B. Infrastructure Development/Maintenance needed
   1. Technology Plan- complete; Update as needed.
   2. Data Collection system- operational; Will convert to cloud-based in April 2015.
   3. Adding 5 laptops to outreach locations to serve as kiosks for clients to use; Pending.

C. Data Collection
   1. Keeping CSST Tracking Software; Converting to "EmpowOR" web-based (beta-testing row.)
   2. H.S. transitioned to Teaching Strategies Gold, which will allow "dis-aggregation" of data; In use.
   3. ALL customers are input into central data system for tracking and reporting on a point-in-time; Ongoing.

D. Problem (Needs) Assessment.
   o Qualitative Data Collection- Partner & Client Surveys; Completed for current year & Focus Groups held on regular basis.
   o Quantitative Data Collection- CCNA generated as needed; other data gathered from multiple sources; ongoing.

E. Internal Policy/Procedure Assessment.
   1. Partner & Client Surveys; Completed for current year
   2. Updated “Stakeholder” Satisfaction surveys; Pending
      • Partners, Staff & Clients

F. Strategy Development (Ex & Goal Setting).
   o Sessions held at least yearly; include Board, staff, and when able, low income clients; Ongoing.

G. Risk Assessment
   1. Agency Self-Assessment; Done in 2015
   2. H.S. Annual Self-Assessment; Underway.
   3. Need to integrate an actual "Risk Assessment" for the agency; Pending.