

Bucks County Opportunity Council Strategic Plan 2016-2018



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Bucks County Opportunity Council

Mission Statement

Our mission is to reduce poverty and partner with our community to promote economic self-sufficiency.

Vision

Our vision is to:

- Elevate the awareness of the level of poverty.
- Create and lead partnerships to make our community a “Bridges Out of Poverty” community.
- Be a model for seamless case management.
- Influence our community to make reducing poverty one of its priorities.

Differentiators

- The BCOC team – highly trained, caring, agile, responsive, results-oriented, and effective.
- Our programs are effective and deliver meaningful results with high impact on peoples’ lives.
- We establish and maintain strong relationships with our clients.
- We maintain fiscal discipline.
- We meet our commitments.
- We are positioned as a leader among non-profits in Bucks County, with coverage across the County.

BCOC Strategic Plan: Overview

For over 50 years, the Bucks County Opportunity Council (BCOC) has been connecting low income individuals and families in Bucks County to the resources they need in order 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 \$96,000 for a family of three. 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 32,000 of its citizens are living below the federal poverty line. BCOC intends to expand its impact over the next three 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 in Bucks County.

In order to meet the challenges of a '21st Century War on Poverty', our new Mission Statement states that our goal is "to reduce poverty and partner with our community to promote economic self-sufficiency". By embracing the principles and methods contained in "Bridges Out of Poverty", BCOC's sees a real opportunity to create a community where people in poverty can build a brighter future. To do this we must fully engage the community and bring people from all economic levels to the table. The Staff and Board of the BCOC have developed this three-year Strategic Plan to help guide the organization at this pivotal point in its history. The plan includes five strategic priorities that, when combined, will help ensure that poverty is reduced and that more people are contributing in a meaningful way to our community.

The biggest risks to the aforementioned goals include funding constraints and uncertainty, low community engagement and staff turnover. The continued inability of the Pennsylvania's governing body to pass a budget on time every few years significantly inhibits BCOC's ability to effectively serve those in poverty. This funding uncertainty also makes it extremely challenging to implement creative and impactful programming and manage growth. Securing a reliable source of funding is critical to successfully accomplishing our mission. Community engagement is also vital to the success of this Strategic Plan, particularly as we embrace the concepts of "Bridges Out of Poverty" and use them to pool our collective manpower and financial resources toward implementing long term strategies aimed toward reducing poverty. Finally, BCOC's success in carrying out its mission greatly depends on the ability to maintain a stable, effective and experienced workforce. Frequent staff turnover threatens our ability to serve those in poverty and the Agency's core relationships, partnerships, and intellectual property that are so valued in the Community and by BCOC's Staff and Board. Maintaining a high quality and impactful staff is also a critical component to securing new and larger sources of public and private funding.

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 you “get by” or help you “get ahead.”

“Bridges” strives to assist people in poverty to solve their own 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 (2016-2018)

1) Expand Partnerships and transform Bucks County into a “Bridges™ Community”.

Create impactful partnerships with local agencies; county, state and federal governments; and local and regional businesses to more effectively and efficiently leverage our collective resources toward reducing poverty. The intention of becoming a “Bridges™ Community” is to develop a common language to address poverty in a comprehensive way to achieve community sustainability.

- a. **Implementation of ‘Bridges’**
- b. **Improve outcomes of people in poverty**
- c. **Teach and lead the community in “Bridges Out of Poverty” language, constructs and strategies**
- d. **Create a coalition of agencies to address four areas of poverty research.**

2) Expand the reach and impact of BCOC’s Core Client Programs.

Identify ways to expand the reach and impact of BCOC’s Core Programs (ES, Food, Energy/Weatherization, Emergency Assistance and Tax Preparation). Activities include addressing infrastructure needs to enhance efficiency and effectiveness, cross training all program staff, prioritizing programs, expand partnerships, etc.

- a. **Implement Seamless Service Model.**
- b. **Develop car donation/purchase program in partnership with BCCC.**
- c. **Expand enrollment in ES Program and increase number of participants who receive bundled services.**
- d. **Evaluate and address Infrastructure needs (staffing, facilities, technology, and IT).**

3) Develop, attract and retain high quality Staff, Board and Volunteers.

BCOC’s high quality Staff, Board and Volunteers, and its organizational focus are key drivers of BCOC’s success. Over the next 3 years we will improve our human resource practices to further increase our impact and ensure that we continue to attract and retain high quality staff and volunteers and build future leadership. We will also improve our Board development and recruiting practices to attract and retain high quality Board Members and build future leadership. Finally, one of BCOC’s strengths is that graduates of our ES program serve on our Board. Moving forward, we will enhance our Board training and development efforts to ensure that we are bringing our clients voice into BCOC’s decision making process.

- a. **Strengthen Staff by implementing HR Best Practices (objectives, training, evaluations and compensation).**
- b. **Strengthen Board Development (recruitment, training, structure, communication, coordination).**
- c. **Strengthen Board/Staff Coordination and Alignment**

BCOC Strategic Priorities (2016-2018) - continued

4) Grow, Diversify and Solidify Funding Sources.

In order for BCOC to drive a reduction in poverty in Bucks County, the organization needs to grow, diversify and solidify its sources of funding, including government and private channels.

- a. **Branding - one voice, one logo**
- b. **Funding - develop new partnerships, individual donor base, and private funding opportunities**
- c. **Partner with Doyle Development to identify new sources of unrestricted funds**

5) Identify, evaluate and implement new programs.

Poverty is relative. There is no one path to self-sufficiency and the issues that low income families and individuals face varies from household to household. BCOC strives to offer creative solutions to help people living in poverty move past the crisis, stabilize, and on to self-sufficiency. BCOC needs to work proactively to identify new opportunities, evaluate the viability and probability of success, and implement new innovative strategies and interventions.

- a. **Identify new opportunities and complete a strategic analysis of proposed programs**
- b. **Evaluate the viability and probability of success within the Program committee function**
- c. **Secure funding source(s)**
- c. **Implement new innovative strategies and interventions.**