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**community**  
**Action**<sup>®</sup>

C O U N C I L

2024—2026

**Strategic Plan**

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**Washington County Community Action Council, Inc.**

**117 Summit Avenue ~ Hagerstown MD 21740**

**p: 301-797-4161    f: 301-791-9032**

**website: [www.wccac.org](http://www.wccac.org)**

## The Promise of Community Action

Community Action changes people's lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities, and makes America a better place to live. We care about the entire community, and we are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other.

### Mission

Washington County Community Action Council, Inc., assists people in economic need in our community to achieve and maintain self-sufficiency while respecting their diversity.

### Core Values

Washington County Community Action Council, Inc. (CAC), founded in 1965, is dedicated to improving the quality of life for the citizens of Washington County. Treating everyone with dignity and compassion, CAC's combination of services assists clients with basic life needs. CAC's honest and trustworthy staff incorporates our core values into every case we handle. Each person who walks through our doors is treated with respect because, as we all know, it is not easy to ask for a helping hand. Every client has their own unique circumstances, whether it is the need for heating assistance to get through an exceptionally tough winter or food to feed their family after an unexpected loss of income. Our clients must be responsible and accountable in order for CAC to assist them. Regardless of the situation, CAC is consistent and non-judgmental in our efforts to alleviate the immediate crisis and provide the resources to eliminate the need for services in the future.

## Strategic Plan - Purpose & Process

*As the designated community action agency serving Washington County, Maryland, the Washington County Community Action Council, Inc. derives its central operational tenants from 42 USC Ch. 106 Sec. 9901. PURPOSE AND GOALS: “to provide assistance ... for the reduction of poverty, the revitalization of low-income communities, and the empowerment of low-income families and individuals in rural and urban areas to become fully self-sufficient [excerpted].”*

The 2024—2026 Washington County Community Action Council, Inc. (CAC) Strategic Plan is a “living tool” which was developed to help guide and assist our agency’s anti-poverty programming over the next three years. It provides CAC with a blueprint of supports, services, and organizational development. The goals, objectives, and strategies presented in this plan focus on improving the agency’s overall effectiveness and efficiency toward serving Washington County MD and its at risk families, individuals, and youth and is based upon the Community Needs Assessment completed in 2023.

**The following are the core principles of good practice for strategic planning which the agency followed to develop the strategic plan:**

- ⇒ Ensure leadership guides the process
- ⇒ Base decisions on data
- ⇒ Engage stakeholders
- ⇒ Learn from experience
- ⇒ Make hard choices
- ⇒ Get staff ownership
- ⇒ Be innovative

⇒ Keep it simple

The strategic planning process is not an easy one...it is systematic and participatory...it is proactive not reactive. The process is about developing and implementing a plan and then tracking its progress and evaluating its results.

Strategic planning in a community action agency differs greatly from a regular, single-focus, non-profits' strategic planning process. CAA's, like CAC, typically include a wide range of populations...from birth to the elderly and the agencies administer complex systems of literally dozens of various programs and services. CAA's are usually the "hub" of the anti-poverty efforts in their communities.

The 2024—2026 Strategic Plan will not only allow CAC to have a more enhanced impact on the Washington County community but also maintain exceptional service during this fluctuating and unpredictable economic, social, and political period. It is a long-range plan focused on the single



The 1994 Amendment to the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Act required eligible entities, such as the Washington County Community Action Council to provide outcome measures to monitor success in three areas: promoting self-sufficiency, family stability, and community revitalization. We are part of a national network of over 1,000 high-performing Community Action Agencies, State Associations, State offices, and Federal partners supported by the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) to mobilize communities to fight poverty.

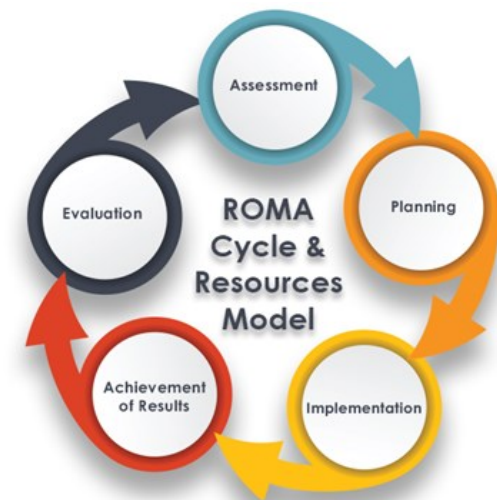
**The three national goals that provide framework for our CAC are as follows:**

Goal 1: Individuals and families with low incomes are stable and achieve economic security

Goal 2: Communities where people with low incomes live are healthy and offer economic opportunity

Goal 3: People with low incomes are engaged and active in building opportunities in communities

**Results Oriented Management & Accountability (ROMA)** is a management approach to the business of providing social services. Its goal is to increase CAC’s capacity to serve as a catalyst for self-sufficiency in your community.



CAC utilized this **ROMA** tool for evaluating the community assessment, strategic planning, programmatic decision-making and funding. This process informs how we serve Washington County and interact with clients to enhance your processes and outcomes. Furthermore, this process informs our ability to meet the three national goals stated above. As noted in the graph the cycle of evaluation, planning, implementation, and assessment and achievement of results are continuous and ongoing and impact each level of our agency.

**During the Strategic planning process we considered the following questions:**

- ◆ What do we believe about poverty and the conditions of poverty in our community?
- ◆ What do we believe about our mission as it is related to self-sufficiency?
- ◆ What are we supposed to do or to accomplish?
- ◆ What will happen (change) because of our efforts for the people we serve?
- ◆ What is our measurable impact?
- ◆ What is unique about the structure of our network and Washington County?
- ◆ How does this change happen?

As the team worked through each phase of the above process and then considered measurable goals for each applicable area assigning targets connected to the National Performance Indicators (NPIs). The NPIs required the Senior Staff to think about the context in which we are providing services in order to determine the various outcomes we expect. These outcomes are reflected in the areas of Community (CNPIs), Individual and Family (FNPIs) and targets for the Service Counts

for each area known as SRVs.

Our Strategic plan is strongly connected to the **National Community Action Network Theory of Change (TOC)**. We have utilized the **Community Needs Assessment** results and have identified the causes and conditions of poverty in Washington County. This has enabled us to connect our findings to the National Goals and develop our Strategic priorities using the ROMA process and Theory of Change.

**As each year of our plan is completed and outcomes observed, the TOC will help guide the analysis. We will be able to ask questions such as:**

- ◆ Did the services do what was expected?
- ◆ Did the outcomes achieved validate the original assumptions behind the selection of the services and strategies?
- ◆ Is there community change?
- ◆ How effective is the performance of our team?
- ◆ This analysis will then lead into the re-assessment and next planning process and as such, our Strategic Plan will be a living document impacting the lives of the community we serve.



# The National Community Action Network Theory of Change

## Community Action Goals

**Goal 1:** Individuals and families with low incomes are stable and achieve economic security.

**Goal 2:** Communities where people with low incomes live are healthy and offer economic opportunity.

**Goal 3:** People with low incomes are engaged and active in building opportunities in communities.



## Services and Strategies

Employment



Education & Cognitive Development

Income, Infrastructure & Asset Building



Housing

Health/Social Behavioral Development



Civic Engagement & Community Involvement

### Core Principles

- Recognize the complexity of the issues of poverty
- Build local solutions specific to local needs
- Support family stability as a foundation for economic security
- Advocate for systemic change
- Pursue positive individual, family, and community level change
- Maximize involvement of people with low incomes
- Engage local community partners and citizens in solutions
- Leverage state, federal, and community resources

### Performance Management

How well does the network operate?

What difference does the network make?

- Local Organizational Standards
- State and Federal Accountability Measures
- Results Oriented Management and Accountability System

- Individual and Family National Performance Indicators
- Community National Performance Indicators

***A national network of over 1,000 high performing Community Action Agencies, State Associations, State offices, and Federal partners supported by the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) to mobilize communities to fight poverty.***

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## SWOT Analysis

**SWOT** analysis is the method the agency used in the strategic planning process to assess the environment of the organization for its health, vitality, and sustainability. This method gives recognition to the **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities and **T**hreats of the agency. **SWOT** is a framework for identifying and analyzing the internal and external factors which can have an impact on the viability of a project, product, place or person.

This SWOT analysis helped CAC build towards the identification of the strategic issues which served as the basis for developing the strategic plan.

		Helpful	Harmful
		To achieving the objective	To achieving the objective
Internal	Attributes of the organization	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>STRENGTHS</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Government Funding &amp; Relationships</li> <li>2. Staff Dedication</li> <li>3. Programs - Service Credibility</li> <li>4. Leadership Team</li> <li>5. Procedures &amp; Policies</li> <li>6. Financial / Budget Management</li> <li>7. Community Outreach</li> <li>8. Longevity</li> <li>9. Ability to Pivot</li> <li>10. Providing Services</li> </ol>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>WEAKNESSES</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Going Outside of Mission</li> <li>2. Turnover</li> <li>3. Onboarding &amp; Training</li> <li>4. SOP—Consistency</li> <li>5. Employee Appreciation</li> <li>6. Back Up Plans</li> <li>7. New Funding Streams (Gov't &amp; Other)</li> <li>8. Board Engagement</li> <li>9. Partnerships / Relationships</li> <li>10. Reliance on Government Funding</li> <li>11. Risk Management Plan</li> </ol>
		External	Attributes of the environment

## Strategic Priorities

Strategic planning is determining where the agency is currently, and from that assessment, determine where the agency wants to be in three years as it connects to the Community Needs Assessment.

The strategic priorities will help define the strategic plan's goals . With that being said, only the issues which have the most impact on achieving the agency's three year vision should be considered. When developing the strategic priorities the agency considered the following criteria: value, appropriateness, feasibility, acceptability, cost-benefit, and timing.

As a result of this process, the agency identified the top three strategic priorities as outlined below:

<b>TOP 3 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES</b>
<b>1. Reducing Food Insecurity</b>
<b>2. Reducing Housing Instability</b>
<b>3. Broadening Transportation Services</b>

## Developing Goals and Objectives

**SMART** is an acronym, which stands for **Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-Bound**. This sets the criteria for setting goals and objectives and also provides a framework for measuring success.

SMART goals are used in strategic planning to develop concrete agency goals geared towards execution in a defined period.

SMART goals should be:

- ♦ **Specific** – Provides a clear description of what needs to be accomplished.
- ♦ **Measurable** – Provides a metric, or number, that identifies when the objective has been achieved.
- ♦ **Attainable** – The objective must be achievable, within the timeframe and resources allocated.
- ♦ **Relevant** – Meaningful, significant, and aligned with corporate priorities.



## Strategic Priority: #1 - Reducing Food Insecurity

Objectives	Targets
<b>1. Secure additional funding to purchase food</b>	<b>\$75,000 - \$100,000</b>
<b>2. Partnering with Grocery Stores to Receive Food Donations</b>	<b>5 Stores</b>
<b>3. Establish Food Donation Opportunities</b>	<b>\$25,000</b>
<b>4. Wider Food Distribution Throughout Washington County</b>	<b>5 New Geographic Locations</b>
<b>5. Utilize Zip Code Tracking for Pantry Distribution</b>	<b>1 Process</b>

### NATIONAL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS for Reducing Food Insecurity (year 1)

CAP Services: SRV5jj - Food Distribution (Food Bags / Boxes, Food Share Program, Bags of Groceries) / Target: 5,000 bags /year (3,800 from 117 Summit, 1,200 from Mobile Services) \$150,000 lbs. of food (Bag = 30 lbs.)

## Strategic Priority: #2 - Reducing Housing Instability

Objectives	Targets
<b>1. Secure Additional Housing Funding</b>	<b>2 New Sources of Funding</b>
<b>2. Contact Landlords to Identify More Available Properties / Bolster Landlord Relationships</b>	<b>List of 5 Additional “go-to” Landlords</b>
<b>3. Train and Certify All Case Managers to Enhance Housing Assistance Skills</b>	<b>All Current Case Managers</b>
<b>4. Utilize a Mechanism to Track Client Change &amp; Outcomes</b>	
<b>5. Develop Comprehensive List of Community Resources</b>	<b>1 List</b>
<b>6. Increase Number of Safe Affordable Housing Units</b>	<b>2 New Units</b>

## Strategic Priority: #2 - Reducing Housing Instability (Cont.)

Objectives	Targets
<b>7. Effectively Utilize an Informed Assessment of a Household's Needs</b>	<b>1 Assessment</b>
<b>8. Connect Clients to Appropriate Financial Assistance for Rental and Utility Benefits</b>	
<b>9. Strengthen Community Partnerships to ensure Households Are Provided With Eligible Services</b>	<b>Meet with 15 Community Partners</b>

### NATIONAL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS for Reducing Housing Instability

CAP Community National Performance Indicators: CNPI 4a - Number of safe and affordable housing units developed in the identified community (e.g. built or set aside units for people with low incomes) / Target: 2 new units

CAP Family National Performance Indicators: FNPI 3a - The number of individuals who achieved and maintained capacity to meet basic needs for 90 days / Target: 35 individuals

CAP Family National Performance Indicators: FNPI 3h - The number of individuals engaged with the Community Action Agency who report improved financial well-being / Target: 35 individuals

## NATIONAL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS for Reducing Housing Instability (Cont.)

CAP Family National Performance Indicators: FNPI 4b - The number of households who obtained safe and affordable housing / Target: 35 individuals

CAP Family National Performance Indicators: FNPI 4c - The number of households who maintained safe and affordable housing for 90 days / Target: 35 individuals

CAP Family National Performance Indicators: FNPI 4g - The number of households who avoided eviction. / Target: 20 individuals

CAP Services: SRV 3a - Financial Capability Skills Training / Target: 35 individuals

CAP Services: SRV 4a - Financial Capability Skill Training / Target: 35 individuals

CAP Services: SRV 4c - Rent Payments (includes emergency rent payments) / Target: 35 individuals

CAP Services: SRV 4i - Utility Payments (LIHEAP - includes Emergency Utility Payments) / Target: 5,500 households

CAP Services: SRV 4o - Permanent Placements / Target: 35 individuals



## Strategic Priority: #3 - Broadening Transportation Services

Objectives	Targets
<b>1. Expand Medical Transportation</b>	<b>1,000 trips</b>
<b>2. Expand Employment Transportation</b>	<b>5,000 trips</b>
<b>3. Obtain Additional Funding to Provide Medical Transportation</b>	<b>\$100,000</b>
<b>Obtain Funding for Employment Transportation via Employers</b>	<b>Funding From 3 New Employers</b>

### NATIONAL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS for Broadening Transportation Services

CAP Community National Performance Indicators: CNPI 3g - Percent increase of transportation services in the identified community / Target: 12% increase

CAP Services: SRV 7d - Transportation Services (e.g. bus passes, bus transport, support for auto purchase or repair; including emergency services / Target: 45,000 trips

## Strategic Plan Implementation

The Strategic Plan is a working document intended to reflect current needs and conditions of CAC and the community of Washington County. In order to reasonably fulfill the goals and objectives outlined in the strategic plan, it will be actively used as a management tool. Actively using the strategic plan as part of regular senior staff and board meetings will aid in providing long-term strategic direction and real-time decision making.

CAC will be sure the effort put forth in the planning process results in using the document as a tool for management and oversight by board and staff:

- ⇒ **The strategic plan will be incorporated into everyday management** - The agency will formalize the use of the plan in the day-to-day activities of the agency. All ideas for program changes or additions will need to directly address how they support the organization's mission
- ⇒ **Work will be organized in the context of the strategic plan** - Program level work plans will be developed and tie directly to the strategic plan.
- ⇒ **A system will be implemented for controlling the process of evaluation and reporting of the strategic plan.**
  - The plan will be reviewed regularly by senior staff and the President/CEO and quarterly by the Board of Directors for relevancy.
    - Revisions to the strategic plan will be made as needed to reflect current needs and conditions.
  - Senior staff and the President/CEO will evaluate and record progress made toward implementation of the strategic plan regularly.
    - Progress reports will be provided to the Board of Directors, agency staff, and the local community

## Conditions of Poverty

12% of the population for whom poverty status is determined in Washington County, MD (17.1k out of 142k people) live below the poverty line. The largest demographic living in poverty are Females 25 - 34, followed by Females 45 - 54 and then Females 18 - 24. The most common racial or ethnic group living below the poverty line in Washington County, MD is White, followed by Black and Two Or More. In 2022, 16.9% of the children was living in poverty in Washington County, MD. From 2014 to 2022, the indicator declined 3.4%.

There are severe affordable housing problems. Median household income in Washington County, MD is \$63,510 with the median price for a home of \$349,000 and the average rent for a two bedroom apartment of \$1,506. In 2022, 14.2% of the population was living with severe housing problems in Washington County, MD. According to the Maryland 2023 Self-Sufficiency Standard a family of three would need to earn \$87,986 to survive.

In 2022, the number of reported violent crimes offenses per 100,000 population was 312 in Washington County, MD. From 2014 to 2022, the indicator grew 20.8 per 100,000 population. The prevalence of food insecurity was 14.1% in Washington County.

## Causes of Poverty

While there are many reasons for poverty in America, five of the major researched causes are #1 Poor Economy. #2 Lack of Affordable Housing. #3 Substance Abuse. #4 Lack of Education. #5 Medical Expenses.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought employment shifts, health struggles, and school/business closures in 2021, it also spurred unprecedented public assistance through pandemic relief measures. In 2019, 23,295 households in Washington County were below the ALICE Threshold; by 2021 that number had changed to 23,556. The cost of basics for a household survival budget out paces wages in such areas as housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, a smartphone plan, and taxes.

## Acknowledgements

The creation of the Washington County Community Action Council's 2024 - 2026 Strategic Plan would not have been possible without the crucial input and tireless effort of the agency's key stakeholders; CAC clients, partners, volunteers, dedicated staff and Board of Directors.

Thank you also to the individuals, donors, foundations, local, State, and Federal government entities, businesses, and organizations who have supported CAC in its 58 years of assisting the residents of Washington County MD who come to us for assistance. You are appreciated!

### SENIOR STAFF MEMBERS

**President / CEO** - Timothy Fisher

**CFO / Deputy Director** - Erik Nichols

**Director of Case Management** - Theresa Searcy

**Director of Development & Circles Wash. Co., MD** - Kimberly Buchanan

**Director of Energy Programs** - Sherva Joseph

**Director of Grants Management** - Dr. Mark Sewell

**Director of Transportation** - Jackie Crabtree

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