

# **COTS 2010 Strategic Plan**

## **COTS Mission and Values**

COTS provides emergency shelter, services, and housing for people who are without homes or who are marginally housed.

We believe:

in the value and dignity of every human life;

that emergency shelter is not the answer to homelessness;

that housing is a fundamental human right.

COTS Vision is a time and place when no one is homeless.

## **Strategic Plan Overview**

This plan contains three strategic directions that were identified during COTS staff and board retreat in November 2009. In January 2010, COTS board appointed a planning workgroup to create specific objectives within each direction that would establish the framework and initial goals for our plan. In developing these objectives, the committee reviewed demographic and economic trends for Vermont and nationally.

Throughout these discussions, one key theme emerged that is now woven through this plan as an underlying premise to support all of our goals: We must strengthen COTS capacities to identify, implement, and rigorously evaluate our approaches to homelessness to ensure effectiveness and efficiency. As Vermont's largest agency serving those without homes, it is imperative that COTS develop the capacity to analyze, plan and invest strategically for the long term. This requires that we become focused on results at every organizational level; which means establishing baseline data, setting up systems to measure progress, and assessing both our failures and achievements. In this way, we will cultivate a new level of accountability to the community and to those we serve. Equally important, we will also encourage a learning environment by applying the lessons forward of our continual review of quality and efficacy.

This shift in our focus will require us to develop strong capacities in evaluation, planning, and resource management to ensure we are incorporating best practices and investing in the programs and services that have the highest benefits to those we serve. This new focus on quality and effectively also means that we must be

able to recruit, hire and retain the best professionals in our field.

### **Use and implementation of plan**

This plan will serve as the broad framework from which annual work plans for each program and every employee will be developed each year. The expectation is that each board committee and all staff groups within COTS will review this document annually to begin developing their workplan and goals for the year. Ultimately, all departments, managers and staff will have performance evaluations that are based, in part, on how well they progressed or achieved the goals identified in their annual workplan that are linked to the broader strategic directions outlined in this document. Focusing on specific goals (clearly linked to the strategic plan) during performance reviews will further instill the importance of focusing on results and continual improvement in our quality, effectiveness and efficiency.

### **Strategic Directions**

This plan is composed of three strategic directions that focus on key areas: 1) internal operations and capacity, 2) reducing pressures on those we serve; and 3) building for the future. Because everything we endeavor to build depends on the strength of our foundation, the first strategic direction focuses on shoring up our internal operations and capacity.

#### **I. Strengthen the Core**

**This strategic direction is focused internally. It ensures that our capacity is not overridden by our desire to serve. The overarching purpose of this goal is to ensure that COTS has the systems and resources available to effectively carry out our mission.**

**Objective 1:** In order to ensure that COTS is providing the highest quality services with the most effective outcomes, we will undertake performance reviews of programs, development, and operations.

**Program Outcome:** Establish a program evaluation framework by 2011 that draws upon national benchmarks and evidence-based best practices. This framework will include a quarterly review of process and performance outcomes and an annual program evaluation that summarizes the quarterly findings and flags significant trends and opportunities for quality improvement.

**Operations Outcome:** By 2013, COTS will secure the tools and implement the processes and procedures necessary to increase efficiency and

effectiveness of our programs including the creation of a technology plan, procedure manual, and protocol or storing and archiving data.

**Development Outcome:** Establish a process by 2011 for conducting an annual development audit to assess our performance against long-range development goals. These include targets for increasing gifts from major donors, corporations and the community.

**Objective 2:** Within the next year, COTS will build an opportunity matrix that provides assessment criteria for determining what programs COTS should pursue, maintain, and/or bring to an end.

**Outcome:** Establish clear framework by 2011 for decision-making and organization monitoring that ensures our resources are deployed in the most strategic way to leverage the greatest benefit for those we serve.

**Outcome:** COTS will use this matrix annually, along with data from program reviews, to evaluate investment and results of our existing services and to determine opportunities for improvement and/or new initiatives. This will help to ensure that we are being meaningfully proactive.

**Objective 3:** By 2012, COTS will have a comprehensive strategy to attract, retain, develop and reward highly qualified staff, board, and volunteers who demonstrate excellence, innovation and quality.

**Staffing Outcome:** Develop comprehensive staff engagement process addressing annual agency needs, onboarding, communication, development and retention.

**Board Recruitment Outcome:** A well-documented system for identifying and recruiting prospective board members to ensure COTS has the expertise at the leadership level to strengthen the organization.

**Board Development Outcome:** A comprehensive plan that provides a thorough orientation, on-going support, and timely education to ensure maximum contribution at the governance level.

**Objective 4:** Over the next 5 years, COTS will implement new procedures that increase our accountability, improve financial planning, and significantly enhance our ability to steward our assets over the long term.

**Outcome:** Institute a more collaborative annual budgeting process, whereby

annual planning includes and incorporates input from all programs

- Program goals
- Facilities master plan
- Operational needs
- Human Capital plan
- Fundraising/ development plan

**Outcome:** Develop and implement a comprehensive investment policy

## **II. Reduce the Pressure**

**This strategic direction is focused on the clients we serve. The purpose of this strategic goal is to streamline the access to resources and engage our community partners in strengthening the system of care.**

**Objective 1:** By 2012 COTS will focus our advocacy on eliminating duplicative intake and application processes.

**Outcome:** Reduce the time that clients and case management staff spend on navigating multiple forms and waiting lists for affordable housing in this region.

**Outcome:** COTS will work with our continuum partners to create a single intake process, within HIPPA restrictions, that allows our clients easy single application process.

**Objective 2:** To ensure a coordinated response to homelessness, convene an annual issue forum of continuum partners and a broad and diverse group community members (colleges, businesses, state and service sector) to solve a challenge or remove a barrier within our system of care.

**Outcome:** By 2012 an annual community process will be in place for launching concerted initiatives to address specific barriers or opportunities that directly impact the homeless.

## **III. Build for the Future**

**This goal is to bring COTS closer to our vision of a time and a place when no one is homeless. We will pursue this goal by working to expand prevention resources, housing opportunities, and creating new and innovative models for addressing homelessness.**

**Objective 1:** Over the next five years COTS will help to expand housing opportunities for homeless families.

**Outcome:** COTS will work with one or more community partners to create transitional housing for 10 families.

**Objective 2:** Increase homeless prevention resources for those facing evictions or foreclosures.

**Outcome:** Increase resources available for mortgage/rental arrears over 5 years.

**Outcome:** Increase by each year the number of households who retain their housing through grants and/or support from COTS.

**Objective 4:** Create diversified funding sources that creates an endowment and capital reserve.

**Outcome:** Sustainable funding that allows COTS to continue experimenting with new models and approaches for alleviating homelessness.

**Objective 4:** Leverage the scale and resources of Vermont to create national innovative models for moving beyond shelter.

**Outcome:** Over the next 5 years COTS will experiment with two new approaches to our current emergency shelter model.

**Outcome:** Expand our role as a fulcrum for bringing together unlikely resources and partners.

**Objective 5:** By 2014 increase public awareness about COTS work by developing a sophisticated communication strategy that will increase advocacy, opportunities and resources.

**Outcome:** Engage the full range of community creativity and innovation and generosity to address the complex needs of homelessness.

**Summary: All of these efforts hinge upon our success in increasing our capital and operating reserves.**