

step forward's

# strategic implementation plan 2024 - 2026

revised 4/9/24



As the state's designated anti-poverty agency for Cuyahoga County, Step Forward is tasked and trusted to lead the fight on the ground against poverty in our community. The nonprofit organization helps low-income individuals and families address immediate needs and build long-term skills to transform their lives through early childhood education programs, adult skills training, and other support.

## ► our mission

Step Forward propels educational attainment and economic self-sufficiency for multiple generations throughout Cuyahoga County.

## ► our vision

Step Forward helps people find hope, believe in their future and take steps to make it a reality.

## ► core values + guiding principles

As we work to provide integrated, inter-generational pathways to success, we are committed to:



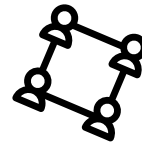
### **Excellence:**

Providing the highest quality programs and services based on data-driven innovative practices and continuous improvement



### **Accessibility:**

Connecting qualified clients to integrated services in multiple locations



### **Collaboration:**

Shaping coordinated multi-sector solutions as trusted and Respected partners



### **Inclusion:**

Educating and empowering culturally competent and diverse staff, board and clients in service delivery and governance



### **Advocacy:**

Bringing compassion and first-hand experience voices to community conversations and policy makers



### **Strong Stewardship:**

Managing all resources with transparency and accountability for efficient service delivery, client outcomes and Organizational results



# stepforward

## goals

1

Strengthen Step Forward's advocacy work for positive change in Cuyahoga County

2

Strengthen educational attainment and economic self-sufficiency

3

Build and leverage collaborative partnerships to best meet client needs

4

Model operational excellence

5

Ensure financial strength and sustainability

# 1

Strengthen  
Step Forward's  
advocacy work  
for positive  
change in  
Cuyahoga  
County

# Strategic Priority

**Raise awareness of Step Forward's value proposition**

## Action Steps

Meet with elected officials and their key staff to inform them about Step Forward's positive impact on our clients' lives

Advocate for continued funding of Step Forward programs

Identify, develop and enhance value added relationships with community partners

# Strategic Priority

Solicit and convey what's most important to Step Forward's "customers"

## Action Steps

Establish survey mechanisms to solicit and convey customer feedback

Continue to highlight client testimonials and success stories

# 2

Strengthen  
educational  
attainment  
and economic  
self-sufficiency

# Strategic Priority

To increase educational attainment and economic self-sufficiency, provide and promote cross-use of programs and services that include a focus on clients' holistic health, mental health, emotional well-being, and healthy lifestyles

## Action Steps

Create clinical service model to increase the number of individuals served through coordinated expanded services

Conduct comprehensive assessment of space and technology usage to maximize customer access

Launch online registration system for Neighborhood Opportunity Center (NOC) training

Review existing, and/or develop new pre- and post-tests for use in evaluating program efficacy

# Strategic Priority

**Provide clients with a strong foundation of financial management**

## Action Steps

Launch a virtual “Orientation to Percent of Income Payment Plan (PIPP)” as a registered course offering through the NOCs to increase client understanding of the PIPP utilities budgeting plan. Teach clients the ramifications of missing payments and/or the importance of being current with all payments on their program anniversary date and how to re-verify income annually as required for continued enrollment in the program

Distribute financial foundations information by orienting Head Start Family Service Workers to benefits of PIPP program and sharing links to training information through Child Plus application



# Strategic Priority

Follow-up on students to learn and report on outcomes and to deepen understanding of their current and future needs

## Action Steps

Expand Community Needs Assessment Report to include a survey about students (adult learners/Head Start families) served and their current and future needs

Review existing, and/or develop new pre- and post-tests for use in evaluating program efficacy

Continue to highlight client testimonials and success stories

# 3

Build and  
leverage  
collaborative  
partnerships  
to best meet  
client needs

# Strategic Priority

Develop Step Forward's key strategic partnerships by sector

## Action Steps

Develop a partner alignment tool that identifies the alignment criteria

Use alignment tool to evaluate existing community partners and brainstorm with key stakeholders to identify additional partners

# Strategic Priority

Using the partner alignment tool results, determine which needs Step Forward best directly serves and which are better served by partners

## Action Steps

Determine what we do best and should continue, what we should add, or what we should stop doing by outsourcing

Determine which client needs Step Forward best serves and identify which needs are better served by others

# Strategic Priority

Utilize effective systems for referral and follow up

## Action Steps

For Community Services, automate existing internal referral practices such that each referral has a close date and related performance measures are possible to monitor and ensure follow-up

Develop internal and external partner list and train staff to make appropriate internal and external referrals

# 4

Model  
operational  
excellence

# Strategic Priority

## Be an employer of choice

### Action Steps

Apply for the designation of “Best Places to Work in Northeast Ohio” with Crain’s Business Publication

Develop action plan based on scorecard report from Crain’s

Implement Head Start enrollment reduction without funding and redirect dollars to staffing compensation to meet recruitment and retention goals

Implement Leadership Academy

# Strategic Priority

Be the provider of choice

## Action Steps

After collecting email addresses from program applicants, implement a “You May Also Qualify” email campaign that triggers with each household income reverification in any program. The campaign would list all Step Forward services that match the household income eligibility and household characteristics

Review and implement effective call management practices to improve customer satisfaction

Expand deployment of general customer service training programs to all customer facing team members and develop customized options for HEAP team members

# Strategic Priority

Expand deployment of general customer service training programs to all customer facing team members and develop customized options for HEAP team members.

## Action Steps

Continue executing Performance, Measurement, and Management initiative

Develop and maintain a KPI dashboard to track and monitor progress and results including board self-assessment

Integrate C.A.R.F survey readiness into existing Performance, Measurement, and Management initiative



# 5

Ensure  
financial  
strength  
and  
sustainability

# Strategic Priority

Establish fund development function

## Action Steps

Review and update the development plan that includes the case for private support

Apply for grants to support a development officer position during startup phase

Hire the Development officer

# Strategic Priority

Attract multiple streams of revenue including unrestricted funding

## Action Steps

Implement the development plan

Expand CSBG program income revenue by setting productivity goals for licensed social workers employed through CSBG funding

# Strategic Priority

Remain excellent stewards of funds entrusted to Step Forward

## Action Steps

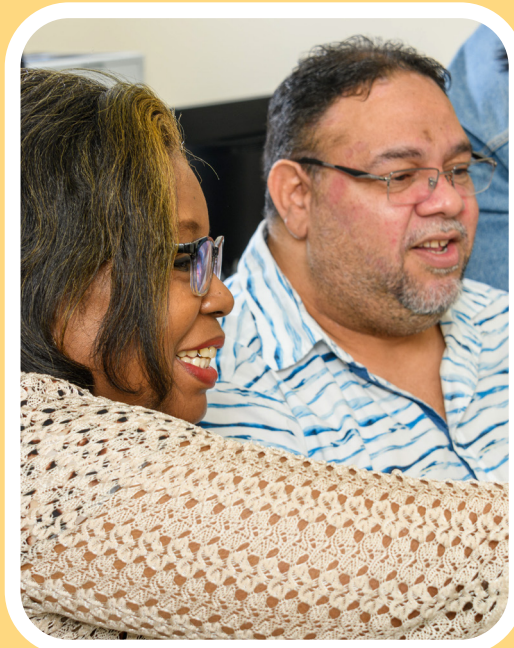
Continue to forecast and monitor agency-wide budgets regularly

Consistently communicate and enforce financial policies and procedures agency-wide

Ensure a clean financial audit with the board and share financial results with the community

# The Strategic Planning Process

Throughout 2023, Step Forward embarked on a comprehensive strategic planning process to chart our course through 2026. This involved gathering internal feedback and data, as well as collaborating with The Center for Community Solutions to conduct surveys of Step Forward clients, Cuyahoga County community members, and key stakeholders via online platforms. These valuable insights informed the development of our strategic goals and objectives, providing a clear roadmap for the agency's direction over the next three years. Guiding our efforts to become the premier Community Action Agency, dedicated to empowering individuals and families through education and economic self-sufficiency, our plan outlines strategic goals and objectives for our journey ahead.



**2023  
March**

**What we did**

**2024  
May**

**Formed the  
committee**

**Conducted  
focus  
groups &  
surveys**

**Analyzed  
data**

**Developed  
Strategic  
Plan**

**Created specific  
action plans and  
key performance  
indicators**

**Adopted and  
published the  
Strategic Plan**

## What we learned

### Our strengths:

- Clients are hopeful for the future
- Community leaders view Step Forward favorably
- Stakeholders are familiar with key services
- High staff satisfaction rate
- Strong community partner and successful collaborator

### Our opportunities for growth:

- Increase community awareness of Step Forward
- Improve customer service ratings
- Expand education, mental health, housing programs while avoiding overextension in program areas
- Strengthen upstream policy and advocacy
- Share success stories with stakeholders



stepforwardtoday.org   stepfwrtdtoday

