OFFICE of FAMILY EMPOWERMENT

MOVING FAMILIES FORWARD

2025-2030 STRATEGIC PLAN

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A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

I'm beyond proud to share the Office of Family Empowerment's 2025-2030 Strategic Plan.

This plan isn't just a document; it's a labor of love, representing many months of dedication poured in by every single one of us at OFE. What makes this plan truly special is that it's our first, truly collective creation. We shaped it with our own voices, ideas, vision, and unwavering passion. It's an outcome-focused roadmap for the next five years that we wholeheartedly believe in and are deeply committed to bringing to life.

Our previous strategic plan, crafted during the uncertain days of the pandemic, was a reflection of that chaotic yet hopeful era. While we saw possibilities, the path ahead was often unclear, making long-term planning challenging. A shift in mayoral administration also brought new priorities that sometimes diverged from our initial framework. Still, through immense hard work and unwavering commitment, we persevered, achieving many of our outcomes despite the odds.

The last five years have encompassed an unprecedented season of growth and change for OFE. Change has been our constant, simultaneously grounding us and motivating us to push forward. We've learned so much about ourselves during this period – as an agency, as a cohesive team, as resilient leaders, and as dedicated advocates. We've emerged stronger, more in sync, and more committed than ever to changing lives in Hamilton County. With our incredible network of partners and a clear direction forward, we're now prepared to step into what I've named our "Excellence Era."

OFE has long been driven by a shared pursuit of excellence. Throughout my tenure here, my vision has been for OFE to be the most shining example of excellence — not just in Tennessee, but nationwide. In 2025, we proudly celebrated our recognition as a Bronze Tier of Excellence agency under the National Community Action Partnership's Pathways to Excellence program, becoming the very first agency in Tennessee to achieve this. We are now poised to become the first in Tennessee to reach Silver Tier of Excellence status as soon as 2026. This is just the beginning of OFE's journey toward unparalleled excellence, and I am honored to support this outstanding team as they show the world, day in and day out, what it truly means to live our mission.

What the Next Five Years Will Look Like for Hamilton County
This Strategic Plan is our bold commitment to Hamilton County. Over the next five years, you will see OFE's impact grow as we:

- **Lead the charge against poverty** by expanding access to essential resources and building clear pathways to economic independence for thousands of families.
- **Strengthen our collaborative network**, uniting with more partners than ever before to deliver holistic, person-centered support that addresses complex challenges.
- **Innovate and adapt** our services based on the evolving needs of our community, ensuring our programs remain effective and responsive to new opportunities.
- **Empower individuals and families** to achieve lasting well-being, gain vital skills, and build resilient futures, creating a stronger, more vibrant Hamilton County for everyone.

I hope you will join us in our Excellence Era as we continue to move families forward.

In partnership,
Rachel Howard
Executive Director

OFE: WHO WE ARE AND WHY WE EXIST

OUR STORY, OUR RESILIENCE

For over 40 years, the Office of Family Empowerment (OFE) has been a constant source of support for families in Hamilton County. Our early years of Community Action work included assisting low-income families with employment, job training, and home energy assistance through neighborhood centers and later the Westside location. In 1990, we were incorporated under the City of Chattanooga as the Chattanooga Human Services Department, a name that later evolved to the Social Services Division.

The last five years have encompassed an unprecedented season of growth and change, beginning with our full rebranding as the Office of Family Empowerment in 2018. This was followed by a seismic shift in 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic created an overwhelming volume of requests for assistance. Despite lockdowns and remote work, OFE rose to the occasion, continuing to deliver critical assistance and transformative programming to an entirely new population of individuals and families who suddenly needed our help. We emerged from that period stronger, more resilient, and more committed than ever to our mission.

OUR FOUNDATIONAL PURPOSE

OFE is the designated public Community Action Agency (CAA) for Chattanooga and Hamilton County, part of a distinguished national network of 1,000-plus CAAs. As a CAA, our work is rooted in three unique, powerful principles that differentiate us from other institutions:

- **Local Agency Governance:** We are advised by a 9-member advisory board with representation from the public sector (elected officials and low-income community members) and the private sector (business, education, health care, and civic organizations).
- **Community Assessment and Planning:** We use data and community feedback to drive our strategic and operational decisions.
- **Resource Coordination for Maximal Impact:** We are uniquely positioned to manage and coordinate a broad range of resources and partnerships.

This structure allows us to lead our community in the pursuit of well-being and economic resilience. We manage the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) and the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), two distinct funding streams that support our services and strategies.

Our commitment to these principles has not gone unnoticed. In December 2024, OFE received recognition as a Bronze Tier of Excellence agency through the National Community Action Partnership's Pathways to Excellence program. This was a landmark achievement, making OFE the first agency in all of Tennessee to achieve this prestigious award. It serves as a powerful external validation of our team's dedication and the effectiveness of our model in serving the Hamilton County community.

OUR IMPACT IN ACTION

With a staff of approximately 16 employees and an annual budget of over $4.5 million, OFE provides support to nearly 8,700 individuals living in poverty every year. We are the trusted source of support families turn to when they need a helping hand.

We provide a full suite of services designed to move individuals and families from crisis to self-sufficiency:

- **Family Support:** Holistic case management that helps individuals and families build essential skills and knowledge to achieve their goals.
- **Energy Services**: LIHEAP to help families reduce their energy burden and avoid utility service disconnection.
- **Outreach and Navigation**: Information and referral services that provide Hamilton County residents with program intake and application assistance.

In Fiscal Year 2024, OFE's programs and services created significant opportunities for families across Hamilton County. We delivered over $2.8 million in energy assistance, helping more than 4,000 families keep their homes warm and the lights on. Our coaching and holistic support programs helped 93 families move toward increased economic security and household stability. We also assisted 76 individuals in navigating the job market and obtaining new employment. Through our collaborative efforts with landlords, tenants, and court partners, we successfully prevented over 60 evictions, ensuring families could remain safely in their homes.

OUR PROMISE TO HAMILTON COUNTY'S FUTURE

Communities play an enormous role in the success of individuals and families. OFE's activities in the community, along with those of our partners, create conditions in areas like education, employment, housing, and health care that build the well-being of individuals throughout all phases of life. As we look ahead, we are committed to continuing our legacy of resilience and partnership to ensure every resident has the opportunity to thrive.

THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS: BUILDING A FRAMEWORK FOR THE FUTURE

As a designated Community Action Agency (CAA), OFE is required by the Tennessee Department of Human Services to assess local community conditions and develop a multi-year strategic plan that responds to the unique assets and challenges of the community we serve.

Our prior strategic plan was completed during the challenging and unpredictable period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the last five years, our agency has navigated a continuous season of rapid change, including a city government restructuring under a new administration and a physical office relocation after our historic building was severely damaged by a storm. Throughout this period, our staff remained resilient and committed to our work, culminating in the formation of OFE's first stand-alone advisory board in October 2022. The lessons learned during this time have been invaluable in shaping our direction forward.

The process used to develop this 2025-2030 Strategic Plan was purposefully designed to be comprehensive, inclusive, and forward-looking. Our intent was to build a strong foundation of commitment and a well-rounded view of OFE's direction. The planning process was stakeholder-driven, involving:

- OFE staff at all levels.
- Members of the OFE Advisory Board.
- Administration from the Department of Community Development.
- Internal and external partners and community group representatives.
- The voices of OFE customers.

Additionally, this plan is grounded in a thorough analysis of trended data from OFE's programs, services, demographics, and impact, as well as information gathered during our most recent Community Needs Assessment in June 2023.

The work completed in our five strategic planning sessions, held from March to July 2025, resulted in the identification of key priorities and effective strategies for implementation. The focus of each session was as follows:

- Session 1: Review of mission, vision, and prior strategic plan.
- Session 2: Gathering input from internal and external stakeholders.
- Session 3: Understanding best practices and lessons learned over the last five years.
- Session 4: Prioritizing strategic goals and objectives.
- Session 5: Evaluating our capacity, resources, and implementation.

This plan represents our proactive approach to navigating an uncertain future. As we were in the past, OFE is operating under the shadow of potential funding uncertainty. This plan is not a static document but an adaptive framework that provides a vehicle for being intentional and responsive to community needs as OFE learns and conditions evolve. It is a strategic commitment to test new approaches, pursue learning, and build capacity for our team, ensuring OFE continues to help the families and communities of Hamilton County to thrive.

II. OUR CORE FOUNDATION: MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

OUR MISSION

The mission of the Office of Family Empowerment is to change lives and build pathways out of poverty for Hamilton County residents by partnering to empower individuals and families toward lasting well-being and economic resilience.

OUR VISION

All families in Hamilton County are empowered to live the lives they want.

OUR CORE VALUES

The beliefs and concepts below will underlie and inform our attitudes, decisions, and actions.

- **Self-Determination and Human Capacity:** We believe that from time to time people need supports that reduce material hardship, improve conditions, and help them fulfill their potential. We believe such supports should be provided through high-quality integrated services that are accessible and empowering and that recognize people's humanity, individual capacities, and challenges. We believe in providing these supports with dignity and respect and in a manner that increases people's sense of control over the trajectory of their lives.

- **Belonging for All:** We believe all people are welcome and have the right to belong in society. Belonging includes treating all people with dignity, and that people are seen and valued in the community. This philosophy rejects dehumanizing forms of marginalization and discrimination that treat people as "other." Belonging means everyone has a voice. We believe the voices of all community members, especially those of our most marginalized members, should be heard, raised up, and used to guide our service delivery, our efforts to improve, and the results we are trying to achieve.

- **Accountability and Transparency:** We believe that it is our responsibility to be accountable and honest with the community we serve. We believe that this means that we are transparent in our work, sharing not only our goals and outcomes but the steps we intend to take to accomplish them. We believe that by providing transparency about our work, we build trust with the community.

- **Partnership and Collaboration:** We believe that the Office of Family Empowerment presents a unique opportunity for City government and agencies and organizations in Chattanooga to work in partnership to achieve our common goal of reducing chronic, systemic poverty. Our diverse team of community partners, financial institutions, social services agencies, and the faith-based community demonstrates an across-the-board commitment on the part of Chattanoogans as a whole to work together to eliminate the barriers that sustain poverty in our community.

- **Support, Not Instruction:** The Family Support approach relies not only on case management, but also on mentorship and community support to help families reach their goals. We believe that the family's self-determination is critical to its success, and rather than defining goals and objectives for participants, our goal is to facilitate the conversations that help families determine not only what success looks like for them, but how they will achieve that success.

- **Changing The Narrative:** We seek to change the narrative about poverty in our community. We believe that families are capable of success despite their circumstances, and we believe that by empowering families and working alongside them, we can dramatically alter the outcomes that our community has accepted as standard for those living in poverty.

- **Transformations, Not Transactions:** We believe that by focusing on what a family can achieve and providing them the means to do so - through education, training, and access to resources - families will be successful. The most critical component of the interactions we have with families is that they are not transactions; they are transformations. We believe that every family with whom we come into contact each day should leave feeling transformed.

- **Community Reinvestment:** We believe that families who are successful in achieving economic independence and well-being will reinvest their success in their community by mentoring others in their community and becoming engaged members of their community, participating in advocacy groups, serving on nonprofit boards, and participating in local government. We seek not to remove people from impoverished communities and relocate them to thriving ones, but instead to transform the communities themselves into thriving, vibrant parts of our city.

We believe in leadership, advocacy, and engagement.

OUR OVER-ARCHING THEORY OF CHANGE

If OFE designs and delivers an empowering poverty reduction model that honors individual dignity, listens deeply to lived experiences, and provides integrated resources in collaboration with our diverse partners, then people will build the financial capacity, personal agency, and community connections required to achieve their desired well-being and economic independence.

III. UNDERSTANDING OUR LANDSCAPE: DATA, INSIGHTS, AND CAPACITY

HAMILTON COUNTY'S REALITY: COMMUNITY NEEDS & INSIGHTS

In the summer of 2023, the Office of Family Empowerment (OFE) completed a comprehensive Community Needs Assessment (CNA) to understand the challenges facing Hamilton County residents. Data was gathered through a variety of sources, including a web-based survey, community meetings, OFE client data, and U.S. Census Bureau data. The purpose was to define population demographics, identify critical service needs, and determine the role OFE should play in addressing them.

THE ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE OF HAMILTON COUNTY

Analysis of the data paints a clear picture of the environment in which our families live and work:

- **Poverty:** The poverty rate in Hamilton County stands at 13.3%, which is higher than the national rate of 11.9%. The vast majority of families served by OFE (an average of 95%) are at or below this poverty level, with only 5% of customers exceeding 125% of the federal poverty guidelines.
- **Employment & Income:** While Hamilton County's unemployment rate is relatively low at 3.10% (slightly below the national average of 3.4%), the majority of OFE's customers are not part of the employed population. On average, only 13% of customers report having full-time or part-time employment. The median household income is $56,606.
- **Demographics:** The poverty in our community disproportionately impacts specific populations:
  - Households headed by females (52.7%) are significantly more likely to be in poverty than those headed by single males (9.6%) or married couples (37.7%).
  - Our data shows that 28.5% of OFE's customers are single female heads of household.
  - Of those living in poverty, African Americans represent 24.87%, Hispanics represent 29.58%, and Caucasians represent 8.87%. OFE's customer base reflects this, with 74.6% of families served being African-American, 20.5% Caucasian, and 2% Hispanic.

THE HOUSING AFFORDABILITY CRISIS

The CNA and external data from the National Low-Income Housing Coalition's "Out of Reach" study highlight that a lack of safe, affordable housing has reached a crisis point in Hamilton County.

- **Cost Burden:** Over a quarter of all Hamilton County households (24.27%) are "cost burdened," paying more than 30% of their income for housing. For renters, this burden is even more pronounced, with 58% of cost-burdened households being renters. More than half of those (63.63%) are "severely cost burdened," paying over 50% of their income for housing.
- **The Housing Wage:** The "Out of Reach" study found that the wage needed to afford a two-bedroom apartment at fair market rent is $16.98 per hour—more than double the minimum wage. A full-time minimum wage worker would need to work over 94 hours per week to afford this.
- **Lack of Options:** The study concludes that apartments that meet a low-income family's needs are "virtually nonexistent in Hamilton County," leaving residents at risk for serious financial hardship and ongoing poverty.

CORE INSIGHTS FROM THE COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The data and feedback collected from the CNA revealed a critical insight that will guide our new strategic plan:

- Emergency assistance remains a top priority for residents.
- Self-sufficiency programming was rated as a much lower priority than in the past. This suggests that the current conditions of poverty are so severe that residents are focused on immediate, emergency needs and not on longer-term planning.
- Customer feedback on OFE's staff was overwhelmingly positive, with respondents commending the high level of kindness and service shown to them.

These findings validate the dual nature of our strategic focus. They affirm the critical need for OFE to continue providing crisis stabilization while simultaneously strengthening our efforts to build long-term pathways out of poverty for our community.

OUR NETWORK: THE PARTNERSHIP LANDSCAPE

OFE's ability to serve families in Hamilton County is profoundly amplified by our robust network of partners. We are fortunate to collaborate with a wide range of active non-profit and faith-based organizations who share our unwavering goal: to empower families toward long-term stability and economic resilience. Many of our strongest, most enduring partnerships have flourished for over a decade. These alliances are built on mutual appreciation, a shared purpose, and a proven commitment to strategically leveraging supports that enhance our collective efforts and maximize impact for our community.

Chattanooga stands out for its robust philanthropic spirit, exemplified by United Way giving per capita in the nation's top 7%. Our community boasts a vast network of private foundations, community-based agencies, and faith-based organizations that consistently collaborate to address the needs of Hamilton County's most vulnerable residents. Here, leaders across government, private business, and philanthropy frequently unite, driving continuous improvement for all.

OFE is so thankful for our strong network of partners. Below are just a few of the many organizations that help us move Hamilton County families forward!

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Work Ready
A program of SIGNAL CENTERS

United Way
United Way of Greater Chattanooga

Northside Neighborhood House

Family Justice Center
Chattanooga • Hamilton County
Pathways to Hope and Safety

the Samaritan center

Hamilton County Health Department

Chattanooga Housing Authority 1938

Chattanooga Gas

Moving Forward Chattanooga

Chattanooga Area Food Bank

OFE'S PERFORMANCE: STRENGTHS & OPPORTUNITIES

OUR ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTHS

Over the last five years, OFE has been an agile and resilient organization, strategically evolving to meet the needs of the Hamilton County community. Our commitment to operational excellence has resulted in significant agency-wide improvements. We have actively worked toward increased **data transparency,** creating systems to track and communicate our impact with greater clarity and precision. This commitment has also led to more effective and expeditious provision of services and benefits, ensuring families receive critical support with greater efficiency.

Ultimately, our greatest strength is our team. We have placed a strong emphasis on the importance of the mission, and staff have consistently reported that a deeper understanding of their role in achieving it has provided greater meaning to their work. This mission-centered culture, combined with a commitment to **ongoing professional development** and a focus on **staff well-being**, has created a team that is not only highly effective but also deeply connected to its purpose.

AREAS FOR GROWTH AND IMPROVEMENT

Building on our strengths, we have identified key opportunities to enhance our impact and reach. This strategic plan will serve as our framework for addressing these areas.

- **Elevating Our Brand and Visibility:** While our direct service model is highly effective, our broader community recognition remains an opportunity. We must work to expand community awareness of OFE's comprehensive services and vital impact, directly linking our agency to critical support programs like LIHEAP so that our community understands who we are and what we do.
- **Strengthening Our Partnerships:** Our network of partners is invaluable, but our collaboration can be strengthened. We have an opportunity to formalize more of our key partnerships with Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) and other agreements. This will allow us to leverage our shared resources more effectively, provide truly seamless wraparound supports for families, and prevent duplication of services across Hamilton County.
- **Sustaining Our Proactive Framework:** Our recent shift from crisis stabilization to a more proactive, growth-focused model is a major step forward. We have an opportunity to build on this by refining our systems and processes, ensuring that our data-driven insights continuously inform our work. This will cement our ability to empower families toward lasting economic independence, not just immediate relief.

IV. OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTION: GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR 2030

These goals represent OFE's ambitious yet achievable roadmap for the next five years, designed to deepen our impact and empower more families across Hamilton County. Developed through intensive, collaborative work sessions involving our dedicated staff, engaged Board members, invaluable clients, and essential community partners, these goals are firmly rooted in our most recent Community Needs Assessment data and rich qualitative insights gathered directly from those on the front lines.

They reflect a strategic focus on **enhancing client self-sufficiency, strengthening partnerships, and ensuring operational excellence**. Each goal outlined below is a testament to our shared vision for a thriving Hamilton County, meticulously crafted to guide our efforts and measure our progress as we move toward 2030.

You will find each goal detailed with its specific objectives, actionable strategies, and clear metrics for success – providing a transparent look at how we will work, what we aim to achieve, and how we will hold ourselves accountable to the community we serve.

GOAL ONE

CULTIVATE A STAFF CULTURE THAT CHAMPIONS SELF-DETERMINATION, RECOGNIZES HUMAN CAPACITY, AND FOSTERS BELONGING FOR ALL, STRENGTHENING OUR ABILITY TO DRIVE MEANINGFUL RESULTS FOR EVERY INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY.

Objective 1.1: Enhance Staff Well-being and Retention.

- Metric: Achieve an average staff job satisfaction score of 85% on annual surveys by 2030.
- Metric: Maintain annual voluntary staff turnover rate at or below 15% by 2030.

Objective 1.2: Fully Integrate Trauma-Informed Practices.

- Metric: Ensure 100% of direct service staff complete trauma-informed training by Q4 FY2026.
- Metric: Achieve a 50% increase in staff self-reported confidence in applying trauma-informed practices by close of FY27.

Objective 1.3: Strengthen Core Competencies for Client Empowerment.

- Metric: Ensure 100% of relevant staff complete training in Family-Centered Coaching and Motivational Interviewing by Q4 FY26.
- Metric: Achieve an average of 30 hours of professional development per employee annually.

Objective 1.4: Foster Transparent Communication and Empowered Staff Voice.

- Metric: Achieve an average score of 85% for 'communication effectiveness' and 'feeling heard' on annual staff surveys by close of FY28.
- Metric: Increase staff participation in cross-departmental workgroups or idea-sharing initiatives by 20% by 2030.

Objective 1.5: Enhance Recognition and Appreciation for Staff Contributions.

- Metric: Implement a formalized, agency-wide staff recognition program by October 2026.
- Metric: Achieve a 10% increase in staff self-reporting feeling valued and appreciated on annual surveys by 2030.

STRATEGIES

For Objective 1.1: Enhance Staff Well-being and Retention.

- Conduct annual comprehensive staff satisfaction and well-being surveys to gather actionable insights.
- Provide ongoing feedback to City of Chattanooga Human Resources on salaries and benefits to remain competitive in the Hamilton County market.
- Implement and expand flexible work arrangements where feasible and beneficial to both staff and service delivery.
- Develop and promote internal wellness programs and access to mental health resources for staff.
- Establish clear career pathways and professional growth opportunities within OFE, including mentorship and leadership development.

For Objective 1.2: Fully Integrate Trauma-Informed Practices.

- Develop an agency-wide Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) policy and implementation plan.
- Provide mandatory foundational TIC training for all staff, followed by ongoing advanced and specialized training.
- Incorporate TIC principles into supervision models, team meetings, and performance reviews.
- Regularly assess the physical and emotional safety of OFE's environment for both staff and clients.
- Provide staff with practical tools and resources for self-care and vicarious trauma mitigation.

For Objective 1.3: Strengthen Core Competencies for Client Empowerment.

- Curate and deliver specialized training programs in Family-Centered Coaching, Motivational Interviewing, and other relevant client empowerment methodologies.
- Establish peer learning networks, case consultations, and communities of practice for ongoing skill development and sharing.
- Allocate dedicated budget and protected time for continuous professional development opportunities, including conferences and external workshops.
- Develop internal coaching and mentoring programs to reinforce new skills and support staff in applying new competencies.

For Objective 1.4: Foster Transparent Communication and Empowered Staff Voice.

- Implement regular, structured all-staff town halls or Q&A sessions with leadership.
- Establish clear, accessible, and anonymous channels for staff feedback (e.g., digital suggestion box, dedicated email, regular check-ins with managers).
- Form cross-departmental project teams or committees to solicit diverse perspectives and involve staff in key agency initiatives.
- Regularly share agency-wide progress, challenges, and decisions with staff, demonstrating how feedback is considered and acted upon.

For Objective 1.5: Enhance Recognition and Appreciation for Staff Contributions.

- Develop and launch a multi-tiered staff recognition program (e.g., peer-to-peer, length of service, performance-based awards, informal shout-outs).
- Encourage and facilitate informal acts of appreciation and positive feedback among staff and supervisors.
- Implement regular celebrations of individual and team milestones and achievements, both small and large.
- Ensure supervisors are trained in effective recognition and appreciation practices.
- Actively solicit staff input on preferred methods of recognition and appreciation to ensure initiatives are meaningful.

GOAL TWO

DEVELOP AN INTEGRATED NETWORK OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS TO PROVIDE SEAMLESS, WRAPAROUND SUPPORTS THAT ELIMINATE SERVICE DUPLICATION AND EMPOWER FAMILIES TOWARD ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE.

Objective 2.1: Formalize Strategic Partnerships.

- Metric: Execute MOUs with at least 5 key strategic partners by Q4 FY28.
- Metric: Establish informal written partnership agreements, outlining mutual expectations and outcomes, with 100% of active partners by Q4 FY30.

Objective 2.2: Enhance Agency-Wide Knowledge of Partner Resources.

- Metric: Conduct at least 4 internal "Partner Spotlight" training sessions annually for all relevant staff by Q4 FY26.
- Metric: Achieve an average staff score of 80% on annual assessments of partner knowledge by FY2028.

Objective 2.3: Cultivate High Partner Satisfaction and Engagement.

- Metric: Achieve an average partner satisfaction score of 85% on annual partner surveys by Q4 FY27.
- Metric: Maintain an annual partner retention rate of 80% (percentage of partners remaining active year-over-year).

Objective 2.4: Optimize Collaborative Service Delivery and Duplication Avoidance.

- Metric: Implement quarterly roundtable meetings with at least 2 key partners by Q3 FY26.
- Metric: Achieve a 20% reduction in instances of reported service duplication (from client or partner feedback) by Q4 FY27.

Objective 2.5: Systematize Partnership Impact and Mutual Benefit Evaluation.

- Metric: Conduct annual impact reviews for 100% of formalized strategic partnerships by Q4 FY28.
- Metric: Develop and utilize a tool to track mutually beneficial outcomes achieved through key partnerships by Q2 FY27.

Objective 2.6: Leverage Community Center Resource Hubs for Economic Empowerment Education.

- Metric: Deliver a minimum of 4 unique workshops/information sessions annually at Chattanooga Community Center Resource Hubs on topics such as financial literacy, housing rights, homeownership, and OFE's comprehensive programs, by FY27.

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For Objective 2.1: Formalize Strategic Partnerships.

- Develop standardized MOU templates and informal written agreement templates.
- Prioritize outreach to high-impact existing partners for formalization.
- Establish a clear internal process for MOU development, review, and execution.
- Assign dedicated staff leads for managing MOU negotiations and ongoing relationships.

For Objective 2.2: Enhance Agency-Wide Knowledge of Partner Resources.

- Develop and maintain a comprehensive, searchable digital resource directory for internal use.
- Regularly invite partner agencies to present their services and referral processes to OFE staff meetings.
- Conduct inter-agency site visits or shadow days for key staff members to build direct understanding and relationships.
- Incorporate partner knowledge into new employee onboarding and ongoing training.

For Objective 2.3: Cultivate High Partner Satisfaction and Engagement.

- Administer annual partner satisfaction surveys and share results/action plans.
- Host regular "Partner Appreciation" events or recognition initiatives.
- Establish clear points of contact for partner inquiries and feedback.
- Facilitate regular, informal check-ins with key partner representatives.

For Objective 2.4: Optimize Collaborative Service Delivery and Duplication Avoidance.

- Pilot shared client consent forms (where legally and ethically appropriate) to facilitate coordinated information sharing.
- Establish multi-agency workgroups or task forces to address specific, complex client needs or service gaps.
- Implement common referral pathways and tracking mechanisms with core partners.
- Promote joint staff trainings and cross-agency understanding of service scopes.

For Objective 2.5: Systematize Partnership Impact and Mutual Benefit Evaluation.

- Develop a consistent framework and metrics for assessing partner contributions to OFE's strategic goals and client outcomes.
- Schedule regular joint review meetings with formalized partners to discuss progress, challenges, and shared impact.
- Incorporate mutual benefit assessments into partner agreements and annual reviews.
- Collect and analyze qualitative success stories that highlight effective collaboration and client impact.

For Objective 2.6: Leverage Community Center Resource Hubs for Economic Empowerment Education.

- Collaborate with Chattanooga Community Center leadership and resource hub coordinators to identify high-demand topics and optimal scheduling for workshops/info sessions.
- Develop standardized, engaging curriculum and materials for educational sessions covering financial literacy, housing rights, homeownership, and comprehensive OFE programs and services.
- Train and equip a core group of OFE staff (or identify expert partners) to confidently deliver these educational sessions.
- Develop a robust promotional plan to advertise sessions through Community Centers, OFE channels, and other local networks to maximize attendance.
- Implement a system for collecting participant feedback and measuring knowledge gain from each session to ensure continuous improvement of educational offerings.
- Establish clear pathways for participants to be referred from these sessions into OFE's Family Support Program or other relevant partner services.

GOAL THREE

DEVELOP AN OUTCOME-DRIVEN POVERTY REDUCTION FRAMEWORK FOCUSED ON EMPOWERING FAMILIES FOR LASTING ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE, INTENTIONALLY SHIFTING EMPHASIS FROM CRISIS STABILIZATION TO SUSTAINED GROWTH.

Objective 3.1: Design and Implement a Comprehensive Poverty Reduction Framework.

- Metric: Complete and adopt a new, outcome-driven poverty reduction framework by Q4 FY26.
- Metric: Ensure 100% of Family Support Program staff are trained and applying the new framework principles by Q2 FY27.

Objective 3.2: Increase Client Progress Towards Economic Independence Milestones.

- Metric: Achieve a 35% increase in the percentage of clients reaching pre-defined economic independence milestones (e.g., sustained employment above self-sufficiency standard, asset accumulation, debt reduction, post-secondary completion) by FY28.
- Metric: Increase the average length of client engagement in Family Support Program beyond crisis resolution to 3 months by Q4 FY30.

Objective 3.3: Optimize Partner Referrals for Long-Term Economic Mobility.

- Metric: Increase the percentage of clients successfully referred to and engaging with partner agencies for workforce development, postsecondary education, and advanced financial literacy programs by 45% by Q2 FY30.
- Metric: Track the successful completion rate of clients in partner economic mobility programs at 40% by Q4 FY27.

Objective 3.4: Cultivate a Growth Mindset and Self-Efficacy Among Clients.

- Metric: Achieve an average client self-efficacy score of 55 on post-program surveys by Q4 FY28.
- Metric: Increase the percentage of clients actively developing and pursuing Individualized Self-Sufficiency Plans by 60% by Q4 FY30.

STRATEGIES

For Objective 3.1: Design and Implement a Comprehensive Poverty Reduction Framework.

- Research and integrate best practices in poverty reduction models (e.g., Bridges Out of Poverty, poverty simulation models, asset-based community development).
- Develop and pilot a new framework that clearly outlines client progression stages from crisis stabilization to sustained economic independence.
- Train all Family Support Program staff on the new framework, including new assessment tools and long-term goal-setting methodologies.
- Integrate Motivational Interviewing, Family-Centered Coaching, and Trauma-Informed Practices as foundational elements within the new framework.

For Objective 3.2: Increase Client Progress Towards Economic Independence Milestones.

- Develop and implement standardized metrics for tracking client progress beyond crisis, focusing on indicators of economic independence.
- Adjust case management protocols to support longer-term client engagement focused on goal achievement rather than just immediate crisis resolution.
- Implement regular check-ins and celebration points for clients achieving mid-range and long-term milestones.
- Develop "booster" sessions or alumni networks for clients who have achieved initial stability to reinforce ongoing growth.

For Objective 3.3: Optimize Partner Referrals for Long-Term Economic Mobility.

- Conduct a comprehensive mapping of all Hamilton County resources related to job search/placement, postsecondary education, advanced financial literacy, and entrepreneurship.
- Establish formal referral agreements and seamless pathways with key workforce development agencies, educational institutions, and financial empowerment programs.
- Regularly update staff on partner services, eligibility criteria, and successful referral processes through internal training and shared directories.
- Co-host joint workshops or information sessions with partners to introduce clients directly to long-term economic opportunity resources.

For Objective 3.4: Cultivate a Growth Mindset and Self-Efficacy Among Clients.

- Incorporate specific coaching techniques focused on building client self-efficacy, resilience, and goal-setting within case management.
- Develop and implement workshops or group sessions on topics like personal goal setting, overcoming setbacks, and financial envisioning.
- Utilize storytelling and peer success examples to inspire and motivate clients on their journey.
- Implement client feedback mechanisms that specifically assess changes in attitude towards challenges and future aspirations.

GOAL FOUR

REFINE OUR INTAKE, PROCESSING, AND DATA COLLECTION FOR GREATER EFFICIENCY AND TRANSPARENCY, ENSURING PROGRAM OUTCOMES ARE CLEAR AND FEEDBACK FROM INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL CUSTOMERS SYSTEMATICALLY DRIVES OUR RESPONSIVENESS.

Objective 4.1: Optimize Intake and Processing for Enhanced Efficiency.

- Metric: Create a process map for client intake, identify points for improvement, and implement changes by Q2 FY27.
- Metric: Digitize 80% of key client-facing and internal processing workflows (e.g., applications, consent forms, internal approvals) by Q4 FY27.

Objective 4.2: Maximize Transparency and Accessibility of Program Data and Outcomes.

- Metric: Launch a comprehensive, agency-wide data dashboard viewable by all staff and Board members by Q4 FY26.
- Metric: Achieve 70% monthly active users on the agency dashboard among staff and Board members by Q4 FY28.

Objective 4.3: Implement a Systematic Process for Integrating Customer Feedback.

- Metric: Establish and regularly utilize at least 3 new structured channels for collecting internal and external customer feedback by Q4 FY27.
- Metric: Increase the percentage of identified "pain points" (from customer feedback) that are addressed/resolved within 4 weeks by Q4 FY27.

STRATEGIES

For Objective 4.1: Optimize Intake and Processing for Enhanced Efficiency.

- Implement online application forms and digital document submission capabilities for clients.
- Transition current paper files to secure, accessible digital formats.
- Integrate modern communication tools such as secure texting and MyChattConnect app to streamline interactions and information exchange.
- Map and re-engineer current manual intake and processing workflows to identify and eliminate bottlenecks.
- Provide comprehensive training to all staff on new digital systems and streamlined processes.

For Objective 4.2: Maximize Transparency and Accessibility of Program Data and Outcomes.

- Design and develop an interactive, user-friendly agency dashboard that aggregates key metrics and program outcomes.
- Establish clear data governance policies to ensure data accuracy, privacy, and responsible sharing.
- Provide mandatory training for all staff and Board members on how to access, interpret, and utilize the new dashboard effectively.
- Implement a regular schedule for updating dashboard data (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly) to ensure real-time insights.
- Conduct annual surveys or feedback sessions with staff and Board members to assess the dashboard's usefulness and identify areas for improvement.

For Objective 4.3: Implement a Systematic Process for Integrating Customer Feedback.

- Develop and launch diverse channels for formal and informal feedback collection (e.g., anonymous digital suggestion boxes, short post-service surveys, dedicated feedback email/phone line, client advisory groups).
- Establish a cross-departmental "Process Improvement & Feedback Review Team" to regularly analyze collected feedback.
- Create a standardized protocol for categorizing pain points, prioritizing solutions, and tracking their resolution based on customer suggestions.
- Communicate transparently with staff and customers about how their feedback is being used and the improvements being implemented.
- Train staff on active listening techniques and how to consistently capture qualitative feedback during client interactions.

GOAL FIVE

SUSTAIN OUR PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE BY LEVERAGING CONTINUOUS MEASUREMENT AND DATA-DRIVEN INSIGHTS TO REFINE SYSTEMS, ENSURING ONGOING QUALITY IMPROVEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY TO THE HAMILTON COUNTY COMMUNITY WE SERVE.

Objective 5.1: Achieve National Tier of Excellence Designations.

- Metric: Obtain Silver Tier of Excellence designation from the National Community Action Partnership by Q4 FY26.
- Metric: Achieve Gold Tier of Excellence designation from the National Community Action Partnership by Q4 FY30.

Objective 5.2: Embed Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) into Daily Operations.

- Metric: Develop and implement a formal agency-wide CQI framework by Q4 FY27.
- Metric: Ensure 100% of agency programs conduct documented quarterly CQI reviews, leading to at least 3 actionable improvements per year.

Objective 5.3: Leverage Data Dashboard for Proactive System Refinement.

- Metric: Achieve a 15% increase in process refinements and programmatic adjustments directly informed by agency dashboard data insights annually by Q4 FY28.
- Metric: Increase the frequency of strategic data review sessions by leadership and relevant teams to 1 time per quarter by Q4 2027.

Objective 5.4: Enhance Community Accountability and Transparency through Impact Reporting.

- Metric: Develop and publicly release an annual Community Impact Report that utilizes dashboard data by the end of Q1 FY28.
- Metric: Increase engagement from the Advisory Board in reviewing and providing feedback on agency outcome data by 15% by Q4 FY28.

Objective 5.5: Develop and Implement a Comprehensive, Updated OFE Policy and Procedure Manual.

- Metric: Complete and formally approve the updated OFE Policy and Procedure Manual by Q4 2028.
- Metric: Ensure 100% of staff receive mandatory training on key changes and new policies within 90 days of manual approval.
- Metric: Establish a cyclical review process (e.g., biennial) for all major policy sections by Q2 FY29.

STRATEGIES

For Objective 5.1: Achieve National Tier of Excellence Designations.

- Conduct regular self-assessments against the NCAP Pathways to Excellence standards for Silver and Gold tiers.
- Engage relevant staff and Board committees in reviewing and addressing areas for improvement identified in self-assessments.
- Participate in peer review processes and seek guidance from other high-performing Community Action Agencies.
- Allocate necessary resources (time, budget, personnel) to meet specific documentation and performance requirements for each tier.

For Objective 5.2: Embed Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) into Daily Operations.

- Develop a clear, agency-wide CQI framework that includes standardized processes for identifying, analyzing, and resolving performance issues.
- Provide comprehensive training to staff at all levels on CQI principles, tools (e.g., PDSA cycle), and their application to daily work.
- Establish dedicated CQI teams or review cycles within each department/program to regularly assess processes and implement improvements.
- Integrate CQI discussions and feedback loops into regular staff meetings and supervision.

For Objective 5.3: Leverage Data Dashboard for Proactive System Refinement.

- Establish regular, mandatory data review meetings for all relevant staff and leadership, focusing on dashboard insights and trend analysis.
- Develop clear protocols for translating dashboard data insights into actionable recommendations for system or program refinement.
- Provide ongoing training and support for staff to enhance their data literacy and ability to interpret dashboard information.
- Create internal feedback loops where staff can directly propose refinements based on data they observe.

For Objective 5.4: Enhance Community Accountability and Transparency through Impact Reporting.

- Design and produce a compelling annual Community Impact Report that visually presents agency outcomes and impact data from the dashboard.
- Establish a consistent schedule for presenting key agency outcome data and the Community Impact Report to the Advisory Board and other community stakeholders.
- Utilize diverse communication channels (website, social media, community presentations, newsletters) to share transparent impact data with the broader Hamilton County community.
- Actively solicit feedback from the Advisory Board and community partners on the clarity and relevance of reported outcomes.

For Objective 5.5: Develop and Implement a Comprehensive, Updated OFE Policy and Procedure Manual.

- Convene a cross-departmental Policy Review Task Force responsible for auditing, drafting, and reviewing policy content.
- Conduct a thorough gap analysis of existing policies against current operations, grant requirements, City directives, and best practices.
- Develop a standardized format and clear, concise language for all policies and procedures within the manual.
- Draft and revise all necessary policies and procedures, soliciting input from relevant subject matter experts within the agency.
- Establish a formal internal review and approval process involving leadership, compliance, and legal (as needed).
- Develop and deliver comprehensive training sessions for all staff on the updated manual, emphasizing key changes and new protocols.
- Implement an accessible digital repository for the manual, ensuring all staff can easily access the most current versions of policies and procedures.

GOAL SIX

EXPAND COMMUNITY UNDERSTANDING OF OFE'S COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES AND OUR VITAL IMPACT IN HAMILTON COUNTY, DIRECTLY LINKING OUR AGENCY TO CRITICAL SUPPORT PROGRAMS LIKE LIHEAP, AND TRACKING INCREASED BRAND AWARENESS.

Objective 6.1: Significantly Increase OFE's Brand Awareness and Recognition.

- Metric: Achieve a 30% increase in general Hamilton County resident recognition of "OFE" (Office of Family Empowerment) on an annual awareness survey by Q4 FY28.
- Metric: Increase correct association of "LIHEAP" and "Community Action" with OFE as the primary local provider by 40% on annual surveys by Q4 FY28.

Objective 6.2: Enhance OFE's Visible Presence in Key Community Resource Hubs.

- Metric: Establish and maintain a consistent OFE presence (e.g., dedicated staff hours, branded materials, information sessions) in at least 4 designated Chattanooga Community Resource Hubs by FY27.
- Metric: Conduct at least 10 OFE-led educational sessions (e.g., financial literacy, housing counseling, LIHEAP info) within Community Centers annually by FY28.

Objective 6.3: Implement a Comprehensive Multi-Channel Communications Strategy.

- Metric: Increase OFE's overall social media engagement (likes, shares, comments) by 15% annually.
- Metric: Achieve at least 3 earned media mentions (news articles, TV segments) featuring OFE's impact annually by Q2 FY29.

STRATEGIES

For Objective 6.1: Significantly Increase OFE's Brand Awareness and Recognition.

- Develop and implement a clear, consistent branding guide for all OFE communications and materials.
- Conduct a baseline community awareness survey in March 2026 and subsequent annual surveys to track recognition and association.
- Launch targeted public awareness campaigns using accessible language, highlighting OFE's name and its connection to specific life-changing programs (e.g., "LIHEAP: Powered by OFE").
- Utilize success stories across various platforms to humanize OFE's impact.

For Objective 6.2: Enhance OFE's Visible Presence in Key Community Resource Hubs.

- Formally establish partnerships with Chattanooga Community Centers to designate OFE as a primary resource for financial literacy, housing counseling, and energy assistance information.
- Develop a rotation schedule for OFE staff (or dedicated staff if capacity allows) to be present at Community Resource Hubs during peak seasons.
- Provide branded, easy-to-understand informational materials (flyers, brochures, QR codes to online resources) at all designated hubs.
- Regularly offer informational sessions or workshops on OFE services at Community Centers, leveraging staff who enjoy public speaking (if appropriate).

For Objective 6.3: Implement a Comprehensive Multi-Channel Communications Strategy.

- Develop a strategic content calendar for social media (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn) focusing on OFE's impact, services, and clear branding.
- Cultivate relationships with local media outlets (print, broadcast, online) to share OFE's success stories, program updates, and expert insights.
- Utilize writing talent for compelling website content, newsletters, and opinion pieces (where approved by the City/Mayor's office) that can be shared widely.
- Encourage staff, Board members, and partners to actively share OFE's approved messaging and content across their networks.
- Invest in digital advertising (e.g., social media ads, Google Ads) targeting Hamilton County residents to increase reach and recognition.

V. IMPLEMENTATION, ACCOUNTABILITY, & SUSTAINABILITY

OPERATIONAL ALIGNMENT

This plan is built on a foundation of collective ownership, as it is our first plan truly created in our shared, collective voice. To maximize the effectiveness of this buy-in, accountability will be aligned with ownership. Specific teams and their leadership will be assigned primary responsibility for different parts of the plan, with performance goals directly tied to the related strategic objectives. Senior leadership will provide dedicated oversight, ensuring all aspects of the plan are executed with precision and purpose.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT & REPORTING

We are committed to a culture of transparency and data-driven decision-making. Key outcomes and performance metrics will be captured on the OFE dashboard, making them accessible to staff, Board members, and other stakeholders. Teams will regularly discuss this data to monitor progress and identify opportunities for improvement. These results will be reported at regular intervals to the Board and leadership, ensuring that all levels of the agency have a clear, real-time understanding of our performance and progress toward our goals. This direct link between individual work and overall impact will deepen engagement and commitment across the agency.

RESOURCE MOBILIZATION & SUSTAINABILITY

The effective execution of this plan will require the leveraging of resources from across our community. Given the limited nature of some of our core funding streams, such as CSBG, building and maintaining strong partnerships and a robust resource network will be critical to our success. We will intentionally seek to diversify our funding and collaborate with our partners to ensure the sustainability of our work.

MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND ADAPTATION

This plan is not a static document. It is intended to be a living, adaptive framework that provides a vehicle for being intentional and responsive to community needs and unforeseen changes. While our work is grounded in the core goals of CSBG and the needs of Hamilton County residents, we recognize that priorities and conditions can evolve. This plan provides the flexibility and structure to adjust our strategies as needed, ensuring our mission remains relevant and our impact remains strong, regardless of changing government policy or external circumstances.

VI. CONCLUSION: OUR COMMITMENT TO HAMILTON COUNTY'S FUTURE

This Strategic Plan is more than a document; it is a testament to the dedication, resilience, and vision of every member of the OFE team. Over the past five years, we have navigated unprecedented challenges and emerged stronger, clearer, and more committed than ever. This plan is our collective response to the needs of Hamilton County—a data-informed, community-driven roadmap for the future we want to build together.

Our commitment is simple, yet profound: we will continue to be a relentless force for positive change. We pledge to move beyond simply managing the effects of poverty and to instead **forge proactive pathways to economic independence.** We will achieve this by strengthening our staff culture, building a truly integrated network of partners, and leveraging data to refine our systems with unwavering excellence.

This future is not ours to build alone. It is a shared vision that requires the continued passion of our outstanding staff, the strategic guidance of our Board, and the invaluable collaboration of our partners and the broader Hamilton County community.

As we embark on this new era, we do so with confidence, strengthened by the knowledge of what we have overcome and driven by the immense potential of what lies ahead. We are committed to fostering a community where every individual has the opportunity to thrive, and we promise to work tirelessly to make that vision a reality.

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2025-2026 OFE Advisory Board:

Harlee Milligan, Chair
Kate Parsons, Vice-Chair
Meghan Creecy, Secretary
Micah Chapman
Alexa LeBoeuf
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