

# Ferndale Community Services STRATEGIC PLAN

July 1, 2023 - December 31, 2025



In response to the increasing community demand for services and the organization's rapid growth, Ferndale Community Services (FCS) launched an effort in Spring 2023 to develop a Strategic Plan with two primary goals:

1. Strengthen the organization so that it's sustainable, dependable, and financially healthy.
2. Review programs to determine if what FCS is currently doing best aligns with the organization's mission and to identify any gaps in community services.

Development of the Strategic Plan was guided by Jim and Elizabeth Boyle (Consultants) with extensive Board, staff, and community input. To ensure the Strategic Plan reflects the needs of FCS, a 4-member Strategic Planning Committee was formed consisting of Sara O'Connor, Kate Bishop, Ken Rehberger and Leela Nelson Hollcroft.

The final report include two key sections:

1. Report on the Community Interviews
2. Strategic Plan with actions and timelines (*including a separate spreadsheet that lists all the actions and additional information, and ideally serves as a working document*)

The following document is the Strategic Plan which outlines the specific recommendations and a timeline for implementation over the next 2 ½ years. This document was reviewed by the Board, and will be voted on officially for adoption at their next Board Meeting.

The plan focuses on four key areas:

1. Communications
2. Operations
3. Fundraising
4. Programs

Each section provides an overview of the problem statement, a summary of findings from the interviews, and recommended actions for Year 1 (the remainder of 2023), Year 2 (2024) and Year 3 (2025). The recommendations are based on findings from the interviews, input from the peer review process, and conversations with staff.

# COMMUNICATIONS

### Problem Statement

Ferndale Community Services has experienced significant growth in its programs, but due to limited bandwidth, communication has not yet been a top priority. To increase support and recognition from the community, it is important to expand awareness of FCS programs and their impact on the community. This will help FCS meet the needs of the community more effectively.

### Findings from Interviews

Communications was at the forefront of several questions in the interviews as it is a widely recognized need from the Board and the Strategic Planning Committee. Consistently, interviewees agreed that FCS’ services are not well known. Interviewees had different ideas on which audience(s) should be prioritized in communications as there are multiple audiences for FCS to reach: clients, community members, organization/providers, funders, and elected officials/government.

### General Recommendations

The overarching recommendation for communications is a broad statement to “strengthen awareness and outreach of FCS in the community.” To reach this goal, the following goals are recommended based on current bandwidth:

- Year 1 (2023): Strengthen the network of community leaders and community organizations through one-on-one meetings. Support Board, staff and volunteers to articulate their interest and passion for FCS work.
- Year 2 (2024): Develop and launch a comprehensive communications plan. Expand outreach through additional meetings, Open Houses, house parties, and event(s) with government officials and community leaders.
- Year 3 (2025): Assess outcomes from Year 2 Communications and make any needed adjustments.

### Communications Plan

Action	Year	Lead	Notes
Develop targeted outreach strategy with key community leaders and organizations.	Year 1	Staff / Board	This is an ongoing list of prioritized relationships.
Begin meetings with community leaders. Target one meeting per month, to continue into year 2.	Year 1	Staff / Board	Board to help make connections and attend meetings with Sara.
Execute a distribution plan for a new three-minute video to the community, key stakeholders, elected officials, organizations.	Year 1	Staff	This should be shared numerous times over the course of 2-3 months (social media, e-news, direct emails). Everyone in Ferndale should see it.
Host a workshop with Board members, staff and volunteers to help them articulate their interest and passion for FCS work.	Year 1	Staff / Board	

Action	Year	Lead	Notes
Review current outreach activities (i.e. tabling, event participation) to assess resources and impact.	Year 1	Staff / Board	Assess whether FCS is doing the right events and having the desired outcomes.
Continue with ongoing Communications efforts until a Communications Plan is developed. (See plan in Year 2.)	Year 1	Staff	
Create a Board Communications Committee.	Year 2	Board	This could potentially include a non-Board Member that specializes in Communications.
Include a regular report from the Communications Committee at every board meeting.	Year 2	Board	
Host roundtable(s) of community organizations to build relationships and intersection of work.	Year 2	Staff	These are targeted conversations on specific issues (i.e. homeless youth, hunger).
Host Open Houses at the current space for elected officials and community leaders.	Year 2	Staff/ Board	Depending on the timing for a new space.
Develop an "outreach/communications" effort to local governments to fully convey their role in addressing large scale community issues. <i>(Also identified in Fundraising)</i>	Year 2	Staff/ Board	Efforts should include the WA State Legislature, Whatcom County Council, Ferndale City Council as well as councils for the small cities throughout Whatcom County.
Initiate a process to create a comprehensive communications plan that includes a calendar of messaging that builds on each other.	Year 2	Staff	Plan to include branding elements, consistent language, key audiences defined and available tools to reach those audiences. This includes a review/revision of the website to ensure it's meeting the needs.
Launch the communications plan.	Year 2	Staff	This includes social media, e-news, letters to the editor, etc. May require an increase in staffing and/or short term contractors.
Develop two 15-minute presentations that Sara or a board member can easily give. One could be focused on housing issues and the other could share the overarching impact/work of FCS.	Year 2	Staff/ Board	
Host house parties to increase awareness. <i>(House parties are also included in the FR plan. These may look different based on the attendees.)</i>	Year 2	Board	House Parties to build awareness can differ in message, audience, and structure than house parties for fundraising.
Continue outreach strategies from Year 2 with community leaders and community organizations.	Year 3	Staff/ Board	
Assess outcomes from Year 2 and make any needed adjustments.	Year 3	Staff	
Evaluate outreach efforts to clients and the greater community.	Year 3	Staff	

# OPERATIONS

## Problem Statement

Ferndale Community Services has experienced tremendous growth in its programs and before expanding even further, needs to strengthen the foundation of the organization so that it can continue to serve Ferndale for years to come. It is important to build a solid foundation that can support the organization's future success without being solely dependent on the Executive Director.

## Findings from Interviews

Interviewees consistently spoke positively about FCS and its leadership, but they also expressed concern about the effects of the organization's rapid growth on its staff, volunteers, Board, and overall operations. Additionally, the office space and location were frequently discussed as a potential issue, as the current space may not be sufficient for the growing number of staff and clients.

## General Recommendations

The overarching recommendation was to strengthen the foundation of the organization before developing new initiatives. FCS has experienced significant growth and needs to ensure the infrastructure is strong before additional growth occurs. The recommendations cover four categories: 1. Staff and Volunteers, 2. Finances, 3. Board, and 4. the Resource Center. In Year One, much of the work focuses on growing and strengthening the Board of Directors and addressing space issues at the Resource Center which lays the foundation for continued work in Year Two (2024).

## Operations Plan

Action	Year	Lead	Notes
<b>STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS</b>			
Secure additional support for ED and the team to ensure the team stays healthy.	Year 1	Staff	Create a plan in Year 1 for Year 2 to support ED and team.
Evaluate current staffing structure for strategic growth and infrastructure support. Include review and revision of each team members; role and job description and create an updated organizational chart.	Year 1	Staff	Helpful to communicate with stakeholders. Also can help identify needs for potential new hires such as a third program manager.
Create a calendar and plan for professional development opportunities for staff, volunteers and Board (when applicable).	Year 2	Staff	
Continue building a strong and healthy volunteer team through consistent recruitment, communication, clarity on roles, and volunteer onboarding.	Year 2	Staff	Ongoing
<b>FINANCES</b>			
Create a Finance Committee to support Sara with financial decisions. Delivers monthly reports to the Board.	Year 2	Board	

Action	Year	Lead	Notes
Evaluate monthly and quarterly budget review processes and make necessary changes.	Year 2	Staff/ Board	
Strengthen and review financial systems.	Year 3	Staff/ Board	This includes clarity on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accounting Systems</li> <li>• Donations</li> <li>• Guidelines for purchase with the board</li> <li>• Create a budget together with the board</li> <li>• Documentation about each funding source</li> <li>• Current Finances</li> </ul>
<b>BOARD</b>			
Recruit three new board members that fulfill identified needs from interviews: Diversity, Social Service Experience, Fundraising Experience, Geographic Diversity.	Year 1	Board	Bylaws say up to 9. Consider bringing in board members 3 at a time so they create mini cohorts.
Host Board training on roles and responsibilities.	Year 1	Board	
Developing onboarding process for new Board Members.	Year 1	Board	
Complete Board onboarding materials.	Year 1	Board	Board has all the documents for a binder. Heather is putting it together.
Coordinate onboarding process for new Board Members.	Year 1	Sara	
Create two community/Board committees to support FCS work.	Year 2	Board	Advisory Board (Community) and Advisory Board (Clients)
Strengthen and expand Board Committees. Board Committee leaders report back to the full Board.	Year 2	Board	CURRENT: Executive, Events/Fundraising NEW: Finance, potential new Fundraising committee solely focused on larger fundraising efforts, Communications, Board Recruitment
<b>SPACE / COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTER</b>			
Determine the viability of the Civic Space for current and future needs. Make plans with the City so they can anticipate FCS participation.	Year 1	Staff	
Examine the potential of a new space until Civic Space is ready.	Year 1	Staff	Sara is planning on conversations with Jori and Whatcom Occ Health by the end of July.
Once in new space, host additional Open Houses.	Year 2	Staff	

# FUNDRAISING

### Problem Statement

To build long-term operational and programmatic security, FCS (Ferndale Community Services) is interested in increasing and diversifying its income stream to include greater philanthropic revenue including individuals, private foundations, and corporate support.

### Findings from Interviews

The community interviews tested the idea of FCS conducting an endowment campaign. Although there was general support for the concept, the organization and community are not yet ready for a major fundraising campaign. The benchmarking interviews reinforced the value of having an endowment for long-term security.

### General Recommendations

Successful fundraising efforts result from four key elements: Case for Support, Inspiring Leadership, a Broad Donor Pool, and a Fundraising Plan. FCS is well positioned on the first two elements, but currently lacks the broad donor pool to provide significant philanthropic revenue.

Since FCS is not in immediate need of additional unrestricted dollars, the recommendation is to build FCS fundraising capacity over the next two years in preparation for a larger fundraising effort in 2025.

- Year 1 (through Dec 2023) - Strengthen FCS’ internal fundraising systems and experience as well as build connections to potential supporters.
- Year 2 (2024): Test community support by conducting a targeted fundraising effort for \$50,000 - \$100,000.
- Year 3 (2025): If appropriate, launch an endowment campaign or similar major fundraising effort.

### Fundraising Plan

Action	Year	Lead	Notes
Develop a library of Case Statements for major programs/initiatives that describes the project, problems to be solved, and the impact if successful.	Year 1	Staff	These case statements can be used for individual donors, corporate solicitations, and grant proposals.
Evaluate the current Events/Fundraising committee to identify its purpose and skillsets of the current members.	Year 1	Board	
Consider the development of a four-person Fundraising Committee of 2 board members and 2 community members (non-board).	Year 1	Board	This committee can help guide the development of case statements, identify donor prospects and serve as ambassadors.
Continue to host annual fundraising event with significant focus on a	Year 1	Staff	Goal of the event should focus more on "friend-raising."

Action	Year	Lead	Notes
follow-up strategy to further engage potential donors.			
Include a regular report from the Fundraising Committee at every board meeting.	Year 2	Board	The goal is to “normalize” fundraising as part of the board activity.
Actively engage with potential prospects both individuals and corporations. These connections will help inform the viability of a future fundraising campaign.	Year 2	Staff	Individual prospects: Tom Soren and Barlean Family Corporate Prospects: Nature’s Path, Samson Rope, Cascade Dupo, refineries
Develop an “outreach/communications” effort to local governments to fully convey their role in addressing large scale community issues. <i>(Also identified in Communications.)</i>	Year 2	Staff/Board	Efforts should include the WA State Legislature, Whatcom County Council, Ferndale City Council as well as councils for the small cities throughout Whatcom County.
Begin identifying and engaging with potential House Party Hosts.	Year 2	Board	
Add a donor component to the new software, Plan Street, for managing donor relations.	Year 2	Staff	
Organize four house parties (one per quarter) in Ferndale, Blaine, East County and Bellingham to raise awareness of FCS in the donor community.	Year 2	Board	The goal of the House Party is to invite 10 – 20 people for an intimate event to share the work of FCS. The key to a successful event is recruiting high profile hosts.
Conduct a Board training on fundraising that outlines Board roles and responsibilities and provides an overview of FCS’ fundraising program.	Year 2	Board	In preparation for a larger fundraising effort.
Review FCS policies and procedures for receiving and acknowledging charitable gifts.	Year 2	Board	In preparation for a larger fundraising effort.
Increase the number of individual donors by 50 in preparation for a larger fundraising effort. Clear fundraising messages will be developed for all materials (printed and electronic).	Year 2	Staff	Consider an e-campaign to the 100 Women of Whatcom to engage them further in the work.
Hold 1 donor meeting per month.	Year 2	Staff / Board	Important for building a donor pool for a larger fundraising effort.
“Test campaign” between \$50,000 - \$100,000 in unrestricted revenue.	Year 2	Staff	Develop a message as the need becomes clearer.
Develop a donor appreciation event that thanks all supporters (donors, volunteers, gov’t officials).	Year 3	Staff	

<b>Action</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Adopt the expectation that every Board member makes a charitable gift to the organization.	Year 3	Board	In preparation for a larger fundraising effort.
Incorporate language from Case Statements into fundraising materials.	Year 3	Staff	
Assess successes and growth opportunities of fundraising efforts from Year 2 to determine plans for Year 3.	Year 3	Board	
Conduct a feasibility study to determine opportunity for a comprehensive fundraising campaign.	Year 3	Board	

# PROGRAMS

**Problem Statement**

One of the goals of the FCS strategic plan is to determine if FCS is providing the services needed by the community and if there are needed services that are not being provided.

**Findings from Interviews**

One of the key findings that emerged from the interviews was a collective appreciation and acknowledgment of the incredible work of Ferndale Community Services. From elected officials to community members, there is much gratitude and support. There were a handful of program gaps identified such as additional support for youth and seniors, however the overarching program gap that was identified was the need to address housing. From the interviews, it was clear that there are mixed feelings about the role that FCS should play in housing.

**General Recommendation**

Given the FCS’ current resources, especially staff and space, it is recommended that FCS does not add any new programs in the first year, but instead, the initial efforts should be concentrated on deepening/expanding the impact of current programs.

The only exception(s) are the organization’s commitment to explore the development of a safe parking program and the commitment to convening a larger conversation around housing with the community.

There is also an acknowledged community need to explore services for youth, senior and housing that should be addressed in Year 2.

Recommendations for each program are provided for Year 1 (2023) followed by recommendations for Year 2 (2024). For Year 3 (2025), the recommendation is to conduct an assessment or audit of the current programs.

The programs included in this review:

- 1. Connect Ferndale
- 2. Severe Weather Shelter
- 3. Clothing Bank
- 4. Navigation Services
- 5. Mobile Outreach
- 6. Other Bank
- 7. Holiday Giving
- 8. Resource Center
- 9. Volunteer Mobilization Center
- 10. Safe Parking
- 11. Youth
- 12. Seniors
- 13. Housing

**Program Plan**

Action	Year	Lead	Notes
Each Board member “adopts” one program to help serve as an internal/external champion of the effort.	Year 1	Board	

<b>Action</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Maintain Connect Ferndale, Severe Weather Shelter, Clothing Bank, Other Bank, Holiday Giving Store, Volunteer Mobilization Center at their current level of activity.	Year 1	Staff	
Severe Weather Shelter - focus on capacity building by helping other areas develop a shelter.	Year 1	Staff	
Increase Navigation Services.	Year 1	Staff	Expanding by a full FT by July with the hire of a new Mobile Resources Navigator. Community Resources Navigator has also been expanded to a full time position.
Evaluate county need for Mobile Outreach services.	Year 1	Staff	
Resource Center – continue branding effort to communicate the services offered at the RC.	Year 1	Staff	Clearly communicate how the organization is structured. Consider a new name for the Resource Center.
Safe Parking – FCS will become the community leader in guiding the discussion for creating a safe parking space.	Year 1	Staff	
Create a Safe Parking Steering Committee.	Year 1	Staff	
Host a community conversation around housing.	Year 1	Board	Convene community members to better understand what's happening, what needs to happen.
Expand Mobile Outreach services with additional staffing and more services.	Year 2	Staff	
Safe Parking – conduct pilot effort.	Year 2	Staff	
Clothing Bank – Expanding once space allows.	Year 2	Staff	Consider adding a furniture bank if space permits or as an online service. Consider the House to Home Program model (virtual furniture bank).
Youth – actively build partnerships and increase collaboration with other organizations, particularly Ferndale School District.	Year 2	Staff	
Seniors – work to intentionally integrate with current services.	Year 2	Staff	
Housing – actively collaborate/support the work of other organizations.	Year 2	Staff	

<b>Action</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Increase Board understanding of FCS programs by conducting a half day workshop of programs including a tour of the facility and meeting staff and volunteers.	Year 2	Board	Hold workshop after new board members are recruited.
In conjunction with staff, conduct a "program audit" to determine what programs should be expanded, dropped or changed as FCS moves into the third year of the strategic plan.	Year 2	Board	