



inspiration
corporation

2020 - 2022
INSPIRATION CORPORATION
STRATEGIC PLAN

2020 – 2022 INSPIRATION CORPORATION STRATEGIC PLAN

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I. MISSION ALIGNMENT

During the previous strategic planning process for fiscal years 2017 through 2019, Inspiration Corporation board and staff members revisited the agency's mission and discussed alignment with the agency's work and the needs of the people who walk through Inspiration Corporation's doors seeking help. Board and staff positively affirmed the mission of the agency and clarified two key questions: (1) who is it most important to serve, and (2) what impacts should programming achieve?

1. Inspiration Corporation's focus should remain on serving people in poverty with the highest levels of need:

Inspiration Corporation's mission already states that it serves people in poverty, but it is not explicit about the priority to serve people with the greatest needs. Inspiration Corporation is reaffirming its commitment to work with people who may be described as experiencing deep or persistent poverty, people with multiple barriers, people served by few other programs, etc. This includes people who have experienced homelessness but is not limited to them. Participants face many other specific barriers that correlate with poverty, and Inspiration Corporation is not more concerned with one than another. By necessity, some programs will have higher thresholds to participate than others. Within the bounds of what participants need to succeed, Inspiration Corporation will endeavor to keep entry requirements as broad as possible.

2. Inspiration Corporation will emphasize the impact of its work in a broader set of outcomes that include participants:

In keeping with the needs of the people Inspiration Corporation is committed to serving, there is a broad array of outcomes that have important and observable positive impacts on people's lives. In recent years, the most attention has gone to economic self-sufficiency. Inspiration Corporation will now articulate a holistic set of outcomes with participants that include:

- improving the quality of life;
- increasing the stability of living situations;
- increasing non-economic self-sufficiency; and
- increasing economic self-sufficiency.

As the agency embarks on strategic planning work for fiscal years 2020 through 2022, board and staff affirm the agency's mission. Furthermore, board and staff recommit to serving people in poverty with the highest level of need and to deepening the agency's impact in the lives of people seeking and accessing services. These interlocking decisions continue to serve as the foundation for the strategic directions included in this plan.

II. FOODSERVICE TRAINING

Background

Inspiration Corporation's Foodservice Training program advances economic stability for low-income individuals through hard and soft skills job training, transitional jobs, and placement and retention services, providing opportunities for job seekers affected by deep poverty to obtain the skills and services needed to become employed.

Through the Foodservice Training program, students receive 12-weeks of hands-on instruction, kitchen demonstrations, classroom culinary instruction, nutrition education, employment and life skills classes, and learn about foodservice sanitation, after which all participants test to receive their ServSafe Food Handler certification (required by the State of Illinois to work in any retail food establishment).

The food service industry is one of the fastest growing economic sectors. Since 2006, the industry in the United States has grown by more than 3.4 million employees, according to the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics. Today, there are almost 12 million employees working in food service. The combination of significant numbers of job openings that do not require undergraduate degrees or expensive professional certifications makes the industry an excellent fit for the participants Inspiration Corporation serves.

Training takes place at the agency's Inspiration Kitchens social enterprise restaurant in East Garfield Park. Students gain hands-on restaurant and catering experience, training during lunch and brunch shifts and learning a broad range of skills. Training is supported by individualized case management, addressing barriers to success and providing resources such as referrals, direct support grants, and transportation passes.

Strategies

Implement a comprehensive program recruitment and onboarding plan.

- Year 1: Using best practices develop a plan to increase recruitment into the Foodservice Training program by 10%. Enhance and develop social media marketing for recruitment purposes. Streamline orientation process and shorten period between orientation and program start date.
- Year 2: Fully implement new recruitment process and measure impact of new strategies. Implement online sign-up for intakes and kitchen auditions.
- Year 3: Evaluate recruitment plan and make adjustments as needed.

Re-design foodservice training program to better meet the needs of students and employers.

- Year 1: Create and implement new program design that is competency-based, explores open entry/open exit, and includes adult education best practices (e.g., blended learning). Develop tracking tools and avenues for participant feedback to measure the impact of program changes.
- Year 2: Continue to pilot new program design and iterate as needed in order to meet the needs of students and employer partners.
- Year 3: Evaluate new program design and utilize data analysis to inform further program development.

Increase employer engagement.

- Year 1: Create an employer advisory council. Utilize employer advisory council to provide program feedback to ensure program is aligned with employer needs. Formalize process for on-site employer demonstrations. Develop avenues for employer feedback to evaluate impact of employer engagement.
- Year 2: Hold quarterly employer advisory committee meetings. Hold monthly employer demonstrations.
- Year 3: Evaluate the employer advisory committee and the employer demonstrations and iterate as needed.

Extend retention support for students who become employed from one year to two years to help students advance in their careers. Explore partnerships with secondary training providers. Utilize the Foodservice Training program's large alumni network to provide mentoring and support of current students.

- Year 1: Seek funding to hire staff to provide extended retention services to alumni. Request a City Colleges of Chicago evaluation of the Foodservice Training program to determine the number of college credit equivalents that students earn in the program that could be applied to the culinary program at Kennedy-King College. Determine mentoring interest of current alumni and create online community for former graduates of the program.
- Year 2: Develop and implement scope of services for two-year retention support. Formalize partnership with City Colleges of Chicago to refer alumni that are interested in advanced culinary training. Develop mentoring program based on interest of current students and alumni.
- Year 3: Evaluate all retention services and make program modifications as needed.

III. HOUSING SERVICES

Background

Inspiration Corporation's Housing Services program seeks to alleviate the immediate, persistent unmet demand for housing services in Chicago, providing individuals and families with housing and wraparound supportive services. While the provision of housing addresses a basic need, wraparound supportive services help combat participants' numerous and complex barriers to independent living and self-sufficiency.

The Housing Services program administers ten publically funded initiatives. Each initiative carries a requirement that Inspiration Corporation match a percentage of the total amount of the government contract with private funds.

Applicants are placed in housing according to eligibility criteria and position on waiting lists. All participants must be homeless upon entry according to the definition provided by the U.S. Department of Urban Development (HUD): an individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. Eligibility criteria vary by initiative and can include the candidate's period of homelessness prior to entry, disabilities, income level, and/or whether the individual has dependents.

In 2012, Inspiration Corporation opened its first project-based housing site, an eight-unit building to provide permanent housing for families in Washington Park. Four homeless families are placed in permanent supportive housing, and four homeless or low-income families are placed in affordable housing in the building.

Strategies

Provide Housing Services team with administrative solutions to improve productivity and performance.

Year 1: Develop a new operations workflow for housing team that improves ability to work virtually and provide services on-site at participants' homes; explore necessity of and opportunity for developing a South- or West-side office space that housing team members can utilize.

Grow number of housing units by 10%.

Year 1: Evaluate current housing portfolio and determine best fit for program expansion (permanent vs. rapid re-housing, family vs. individual).

Year 2: Apply for additional 30-35 units of housing.

Year 3: Implement new housing program and develop tracking tools and data analysis needed to assess the program.

Add family-centered services to the housing program.

Year 1: Determine organizational strategy to expand services to whole household, including all children.

Year 2: Implement strategy to support all household members. Develop tracking system and outcome measures to track new programmatic strategies.

Year 3: Evaluate new program elements and iterate as needed.

Establish employment navigator services for housing participants in transitional housing.

Year 1: Develop and implement assessment and referral process to employment navigator. Begin to connect housing participants that are seeking employment to workforce development providers or directly to employment. Develop tracking systems and outcome measures for the program.

Year 2: Evaluate employment navigator outcomes and share outcomes with Continuum of Care partners working at the intersection of the homeless response system and workforce development.

Year 3: Determine the feasibility of expanding the employment navigator model internally and externally through partnerships with other housing providers.

IV. HOMELESS OUTREACH SERVICES

Background

Inspiration Corporation links street-based individuals in Chicago's Uptown neighborhood with clinical case management and housing through the Homeless Outreach Services program. Participants are eligible to participate in Inspiration Corporation's Meals program at Inspiration Cafe and other enrichment activities.

In order to identify potential clients, the program's case manager visits locations in Uptown and surrounding neighborhoods where people experiencing homelessness have been observed, such as

parks, alleys, street intersections and other public places. They also network with other service providers and government offices who may have encountered homeless people in the course of their work, and check with shelters for people who may have previously used their programs. Some agencies refer possible participants they have not been able to serve. People also hear about the program by word of mouth and come to the agency's Uptown office to learn more about services. Directly adjacent to the Wilson stop on the Red Line of the CTA "L", the agency's physical location also helps participants using the trains as a place to sleep overnight connect with the program.

Currently, more individuals inquire about the program than there is capacity to enroll them, thus identifying and recruiting clients is not a consistent activity. More pressing is strengthening Inspiration Corporation's ability to provide quality case management to as many people as possible.

Once placed in the program, participants create individual work plans outlining the goals and objectives they will accomplish. Participants meet regularly with a case manager, evaluate progress toward their goals, and assemble the resources to address their individual situations. Each participant fills out a mainstream benefits form designed to help him or her pursue public benefits he or she may be eligible for, including the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid and Medicare, Social Security Income (SSI), and veterans' benefits. Participants have access to technology resources such as phones and Internet through Inspiration Corporation's employment resource center.

Strategies

Expand program to serve more individuals experiencing homelessness. Add program enhancements that include drop-in case management and transition services to the housing program for participants that become housed.

Year 1: Add new staff to support the expansion of the program. Develop program model for expansion that includes traditional delivery of case management service and drop-in services. Formalize transition process for Homeless Outreach Services' participants who become housed to receive long-term housing retention services.

Year 2: Evaluate program changes and iterate as needed. Determine homeless outreach participant needs for long-term housing retention services and seek additional funding to support, if needed.

Year 3: Iterate as needed.

V. MEALS

Background

Inspiration Corporation's Meals program creates a unique, supportive community at *Inspiration Cafe* to provide Chicagoans experiencing homelessness and poverty with high-quality healthy and nutritious meals in an atmosphere of dignity and respect. The Cafe is a refuge in which current participants and program graduates are welcome and can participate as part of a supportive community. Attendance at meals helps participants maintain a schedule and socialize with fellow diners, volunteers, and staff. Meals provide a time to discuss issues and current events, thank volunteers, celebrate milestones and hear announcements. While food is the key element of the program, opportunities to connect with others and strengthen social support networks are equally important steps toward recovery and self-sufficiency.

Meals are prepared and served by volunteers five mornings and four nights a week at Inspiration Cafe. The menu varies each day, accommodating individual dietary restrictions and preferences. Meals include fresh produce and other healthy options. The Cafe offers bagged lunches to participants and operates a food pantry that is open to Inspiration Corporation participants. Bagged lunches provide an important nutritional support to participants who do not have access to other nutritional support for 24-36 hours between meals service at Inspiration Cafe.

Participants become eligible for the Meals program following an initial intake session to determine qualification. Enrollees must be participants or graduates of Inspiration Corporation's Workforce Development or Housing Services programs; a Homeless Outreach Services participant; or a participant of a partner agency with a signed Memorandum of Understanding with Inspiration Corporation. All participants must demonstrate food insecurity to be admitted to the Meals program; for example, program participants who have access to a kitchen and enough income to purchase their own food are not eligible. Meals program participants must set goals related to increasing income and/or obtaining or maintaining housing, and review those goals and progress with a case manager at Inspiration Corporation or with a partner agency every 90 days to maintain eligibility for meals. All Inspiration Corporation Meals program participants receive 20 meals per month and can earn additional meals by assisting staff and volunteers in the Cafe with chores.

Partner agencies providing referrals to the Meals program include: Cornerstone Community Outreach, Heartland Alliance Health, Housing Opportunities for Women, Howard Area Community Center, North Side Housing & Supportive Services, Sarah's Circle, Single Room Housing Assistance Corporation, Streetwise and Thresholds.

Strategies

Expand the Meals program to serve more participants while limiting additional costs.

- Year 1: Research models and program designs to add capacity to Meals program. Begin exploration of possible new location in Uptown with increased seating capacity and site visibility.
- Year 2: Implement new program design elements while increasing the amount of donated food to offset costs of serving more participants.
- Year 3: Evaluate and refine program design.

Improve the evaluation processes of the Meals program. Develop new outcome measures that capture the full impact of meals on program participants (e.g., increased levels of food security, benefits of community on meals participants). Institute tracking mechanisms and analyze data to inform program development.

- Year 1: Develop new outcome measures for the Meals program based on best practices and a review of outcomes tracked by comparable providers. Deepen our understanding of the value that the Meals program brings to partner organizations.
- Year 2: Pilot tracking tools for new outcome measures. Evaluate the outcome measures.
- Year 3: Fully institute data analysis for meals program.

VI. SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

Background

In the late 1990's, the leadership of Inspiration Corporation began adding services to the Meals Program to help participants to become self-reliant. When thinking specifically about how to help people become employed, the leadership saw an obvious asset in the commercial kitchen that the Inspiration Cafe had for providing meals for the homeless. The Cafe also had numerous connections with chefs who were able to provide insight into the development of the training curriculum. This pointed to food service as an obvious vocational training route for the corporation.

From the earliest days of planning, it was always the intent to have a real restaurant that would function as the training center, the rationale being that the best preparation for work is work. The Foodservice Training program was piloted in 2000 and 2001, and began running year-round in 2002. In 2005, the organization opened its first restaurant social enterprise, Inspiration Kitchens – Uptown (formerly known as Cafe Too) and the majority of the Foodservice Training moved to be on-site at the restaurant.

In 2008, Inspiration Corporation was approached by a local philanthropist named Leonard Goodman. Leonard was beginning to think about his legacy and had an idea for a restaurant where working poor families could have a nice meal at an affordable price. In 2011, through a capital campaign and lead gift from Leonard, the organization opened a second and larger restaurant social enterprise and training center on Chicago's west side, Inspiration Kitchens – Garfield Park. The larger space and convenient location to downtown allowed Inspiration Corporation to expand into catering.

The past five years have been challenging. Unfortunately, in 2014, the federal funding that covered the Foodservice Training Program in Uptown was eliminated. Inspiration Corporation moved all Foodservice Training operations to the Garfield Park location and continued to operate the Uptown restaurant, focusing efforts on increasing its profitability. The agency was not successful in increasing the profitability of the Uptown restaurant and decided to close the restaurant in July 2016.

Increasing revenue from restaurant sales at the Garfield Park location has continued to be challenging over the past three years. In fiscal year 2019, progress was made towards improving efficiencies and bringing costs in line with sales.

Revenue from catering sales decreased in fiscal year 2018. In fiscal year 2019, the agency experienced turnover in key staff positions, including the General Manager and Executive Chef, and intentionally slowed down catering sales as the social enterprise re-staffed and revised systems to accurately track food and supplies costs. Over the next fiscal year, board and staff will evaluate the performance of the social enterprise and determine next steps.

Strategies

Determine the best path forward in continuing social enterprise operations to support the Foodservice Training program.

Year 1: Evaluate the performance of the social enterprise through 12/31/19 and determine comprehensive operation model going forward.

Year 2: Based on evaluation, develop course of action and implement plan.

Year 3: Evaluate implementation of plan and revise, as needed.

Implement capital improvement plan and develop long-term facility plan, including maintenance and future capital improvements.

Year 1: Complete fundraising for capital improvement. Begin and complete capital improvements. Develop and implement facility maintenance plan and complete long-term facility plan.

Year 2: Maintain facility according to plan, including identifying and securing funding for capital improvements.

Year 3: Maintain and support capital improvement needs.

Identify and secure contract catering business.

Year 1: Partner with North Lawndale Employment Network to design and launch a pre-packaged meal product line for NLEN's Worker Bee Café. Pursue contract catering with Garfield Park Conservatory and Rush University Medical Center.

Year 2: Expand contract catering business.

Year 3: Evaluate expansion of contract catering business and revise, as needed.

Explore expansion of catering business to embed contract catering and foodservice training programs in residential programs.

Year 1: Complete feasibility plan for project.

Year 2: Implement plan and evaluate progress and effectiveness.

Year 3: Evaluate capacity to expand project.

VII. AGENCY ADMINISTRATION & FISCAL MANAGEMENT

Background

Along with the Executive Director & CEO, the agency's executive staff team includes the Chief Financial Officer, Chief Development Officer, and Chief Program Officer. The executive staff team oversees and manages day-to-day operations of the agency's administration, finances, fundraising, marketing/public relations and programming.

In addition to fulfilling legal duties and serving as a fiduciary of the agency's assets, the Board of Directors providing guidance to the organization's culture, strategic focus, effectiveness, and financial sustainability, as well as serving as ambassadors and advocates.

Working together over the next three years, the agency's executive staff team and board members will work to improve the agency's sustainability and risk management practices.

Strategies

Achieve financial stability and re-build a cash reserve fund.

Year 1: Include depreciation expense in the agency budget beginning in FY20 and each year thereafter, in order to create year-end cash surpluses. Create contingency plans for revenue replacement and/or expense reduction in the event of the loss of a major donor or funding source.

- Year 2: Explore possibility of a new Capital Campaign and integration of dedicated fundraising for reserve fund into campaign.
- Year 3: Based on evaluation of feasibility, develop action plan and implement.

Perform technology audit to ensure we are adequately protecting our data and investing in the right technology and technological infrastructure.

- Year 1: Develop a thorough assessment tool which can be used to evaluate the security of the current systems in use.
- Year 2: Evaluate audit responses and address deficiencies as necessary.
- Year 3: Review technology infrastructure including server and evaluate against agency needs.

Develop long term capital improvement plan in order to plan for asset replacement at end of useful life, protect and maintain current assets, and provide an optimal working environment for staff.

- Year 1: Engage with IFF consultants who will perform analysis of long term facility and program goals for Inspiration Corporation and 5840 LLC and assist with creation of five year capital improvement plan for Inspiration Kitchens building.
- Year 2: Implement IFF recommendations.
- Year 3: Evaluate and revise, as needed.

Create succession plan for executive and senior staff.

- Year 1: Develop written succession plan for executive and senior staff. Identify skill gaps and create a training schedule to address them.
- Year 2: Provide training for identified staff/positions.
- Year 3: Revisit and revise plan as needed based on staff turnover.

Analyze agency risk exposure and identify appropriate levels of liability insurance coverage.

- Year 1: Connect with subject matter expert for thorough analysis. Review and implement recommended changes.
- Year 2: Evaluate and revise as needed.

VIII. COLLABORATIONS

Background

Inspiration Corporation has a long history of collaboration and works with more than 100 providers to refer participants to resources in the community. Inspiration Corporation is a member of the Chicago Continuum of Care (CoC), a membership organization comprised of more than 100 organizations and individuals who work to prevent and end homelessness in Chicago. Agency staff is active in CoC committees, including holding leadership positions within those committees.

Inspiration Kitchens is a Model Member of Catalyst Kitchens, a collaborative network of more than 60 foodservice training social enterprises. As a Model Member, Inspiration Kitchens is a recognized leader in the field and participates in annual peer review and outcomes tracking. Inspiration Corporation provides technical support, including curriculum consulting, to several agencies in Chicago and nationally.

Over the next three years, Inspiration Corporation will continue to build on our history of collaboration. The centerpiece of Inspiration Corporation’s collaborative approach will be planning, development, and implementation of a multi-agency collaborative effort to create a space in Chicago’s central business district serving individuals experiencing homelessness. The site will leverage an Inspiration Cafe-style Meals program to engage and support participants, connecting them on-site to other services to provide the opportunity for personal transformation and growth.

Inspiration Corporation is also embarking on a plan to relocate the Inspiration Cafe into another space in the Uptown neighborhood with increased accessibility, visibility, and opportunities for additional programming, and will be approaching other human services agencies to collaborate on this effort.

Strategies

Create a program site downtown that is a multi-agency collaborative effort.

Year 1: Complete planning phase which includes service model, staffing, collaborative partners, and site for downtown expansion. Secure funding for project.

Year 2: Complete construction and development of site.

Year 3: Open site and launch programming.

Move the agency’s Uptown space into a co-location with other providers to streamline services and increase Meals program effectiveness.

Year 1: Complete facilities assessment and long-term facility plan via IFF consulting contract.

Year 2: Develop plan to move office space in Uptown area. Complete virtual work plan for Inspiration Corporation’s housing team. Convene non-profit leaders in Uptown to develop a plan for service alignment, collaboration, and resource sharing.

Year 3: Implement plan to move office space in Uptown area. Evaluate virtual work plan for housing team. Implement plan for service alignment, collaboration, and resource sharing.

IX. CULTURAL COMPETENCY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION & EQUITY

Background

Beyond homelessness, the vast majority of people who enter Inspiration Corporation’s programs report extensive barriers to achievement. Chief among these barriers are criminal backgrounds (42%), chronic health problems (24%), mental illness (31%), substance or alcohol abuse (24%), and a lack of stable employment. Many are survivors of domestic violence (17%). Across all program areas, 77% of participants are black or African American, 12% are white, 11% identify as Hispanic or Latino, 3% identify as American Indian or Alaska Native, 1% identify as Asian, and 5% identify as “other” or multi-racial. Fifty-four percent of participants are male, 44% are female, and 1% identify as transgender.

Inspiration Corporation staff and Board of Directors are committed to creating an environment that respects and values individual difference along varying dimensions. By prioritizing diversity, equity and inclusion in our work, we will foster an environment and culture that minimizes bias and recognizes and addresses systemic inequities.

Diversity includes all the ways in which people differ, encompassing the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another (e.g. race, ethnicity, and gender, we embrace a broader definition of diversity that also includes age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, and physical appearance).

Equity is the fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups.

Inclusion is the act of creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate.

Strategies

Become a model nonprofit that incorporates diversity, equity and inclusion in our work and among our organization’s board, staff and volunteers.

Year 1: Create board and staff diversity and inclusion committee. Develop plan and timeline to scan and assess the agency’s mission, policies, practices and impact through a racial equity lens and address areas where improvement is needed. Develop practices and systems to incorporate participants’ voices and to respond to participant feedback in programming, including policies and procedures.

Year 2: Implement diversity and inclusion plan. Implement plan to ensure participants’ voices and feedback are incorporated in programming.

Year 3: Evaluate and revise, as needed.

X. BOARD DEVELOPMENT

Background

Inspiration Corporation’s Board of Directors is passionate about the agency’s mission. All board members make financial contributions, at varying levels, and they represent diverse backgrounds and perspectives. Over the past three years, board and staff have worked to address the size of the board, areas of skills, and onboarding and board development strategies. We will continue to build on this work over the next three years.

Strategy

Expand board to 20 members.

Year 1: Implement recruitment, onboarding and ongoing development strategies.

Year 2: Assess effectiveness of strategies and revise, as needed.

Year 3: Assess effectiveness of strategies and revise, as needed.