



strategic plan

2022 - 2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

table of contents

- 01 Letter from the Chair and CEO
- 02 What We Learned
- 06 Our Mission
- 07 Our Vision for Way Finders
- 08 Our Vision for the Region
- 10 Housing Continuum + Our Areas of Work
- 12 Values About Our Work
- 14 Values About How We Work
- 16 Strategic Goals | Overview
- 18 Strategic Goals | Proposed Key Results
- 22 Our Planning Process

For the past 50 years, Way Finders has proudly served the Pioneer Valley by providing critical housing support for families and individuals throughout the region. In the past 18 months, our organization expanded significantly, rising to meet the challenges caused by the COVID pandemic. During this time, we welcomed new leaders, adapted our services, and continued to work hard to serve our clients, residents, landlords, and the community.

The pandemic has proven just how critical stable, affordable housing is for a household's well-being. It highlighted pressures that existed before COVID—notably the lack of sufficient affordable housing in the region—and exposed the stress that a high housing cost burden has on a family's economic stability. The pandemic's impacts were especially pronounced for low-income households and people of color, exacerbating preexisting disparities. At the same time, funding provided by Congress in response to the pandemic has resulted in unprecedented resources for the region, including new funding for affordable housing resources and development.

Today, we are doing more than ever before. We felt this was the right moment to embark on a strategic planning process—to take a step back and survey the programs and services we currently provide, to thoughtfully consider the full impact that we want to have, and to understand and imagine how our work may need to change to best serve the region.

This Strategic Plan—which includes our vision, mission, and strategic goals—both builds upon our history and reaches forward by intentionally engaging more deeply with those around us. What will this look like? We will weave together our work in housing stability and economic mobility to help strengthen households; we will fully recognize the opportunity we have to support strong communities; we will create new ways to partner with residents and stakeholders across the region; and we will advocate for greater changes systemwide. As we do so, we will center our values of equity, collaboration, communication, and compassion.

We want to recognize and thank our clients, landlords, community partners, staff, and Board for their contributions to this Plan. The feedback you provided—about the work we do and the opportunities we have to grow—was invaluable. We're excited for the vision outlined here and look forward to working together to realize it.



James Sherbo
Chairperson



Keith Fairey
President & Chief Executive Officer



what we learned

Central to our planning process was listening to our key stakeholders, including clients, residents, landlords, partners, staff, and Board. Their input provided invaluable learning that has helped shape our priorities and our plan for the next three years.

Continued Call to Action to Address Intertwined Challenges of Affordable Housing and Economic Opportunity

In Way Finders' prior Strategic Plan, there was a recognition that stable, affordable housing was not the end of our work but rather the foundation for supporting and strengthening families. This focus on strengthening families economically and helping them thrive is also reflected in Way Finders' programs and services. The current strategic planning process elevated the organization's understanding and focus on this connection between housing and economic opportunity—recognizing that a main driver impacting housing affordability in Western Massachusetts is the lack of a strong and inclusive regional economy. Combined with the role that homeownership plays in creating household wealth, these are major factors behind the ownership and wealth gaps that currently exist, particularly for BIPOC residents. Helping to stimulate economic opportunities and supporting all residents to fully participate in these opportunities can help increase housing stability, close the wealth gap and create a thriving and inclusive region for everyone.

Regional Context and Needs Require Transformation of Our Way of Work and Deeper Internal Understanding of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The Greater Springfield Regional Housing Analysis¹ found that economic disparities by race and ethnicity are worsening in the region. These income disparities contribute to unequal access to homeownership,

as well as a significant “rent burden” for lower-income households, who are often households of color, in the region. The Analysis found that people of color rent at higher rates in the region, and Black and Hispanic households own their own homes at less than half the rate of the Pioneer Valley's white population.

As a result, addressing the issue of affordable housing in the region is intimately tied to addressing the racial and ethnic disparities and their root causes. Doing so necessitates increasing awareness, knowledge, and commitment within the organization to principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion across all levels of the staff and Board.

Region's Affordable Housing Ecosystem Is Underdeveloped

There is a significant dearth of affordable housing, and affordable housing resources and developers in the region. This creates an opportunity for expansion, while underscoring the need to further partner with others to increase capacity and draw more resources. A key finding in the Greater Springfield Regional Housing Analysis was not only the lack of affordable housing in the region but also a lack of capacity to develop affordable housing at the scope and scale needed to address the housing gap. Way Finders has an opportunity to share our knowledge and expertise to support other organizations working in this area and serve as an advocate to highlight the need for external resources and investment to support this sector.

¹ The full Greater Springfield Regional Housing Analysis report can be accessed and downloaded here: <https://www.wayfinders.org/greater-springfield-regional-housing-analysis-report>.

Importance of Centering Client, Resident and Stakeholder Voice in Designing and Executing Our Work

The planning process provided Way Finders with the opportunity to conduct deep listening sessions and seek input from an array of external stakeholders—including clients, residents, landlords, partners and supporters, and community agencies across the region. This process of gathering input provided valuable learning, sparked deep curiosity among staff, and promoted the importance of centering client and resident experience in designing processes, programs, and policies. Way Finders has the opportunity to strengthen practices that lift up client and resident voices in meaningful ways to ensure greater self-determination and input in designing their futures.

Opportunity to Increase Advocacy Efforts

Advocacy, especially as it relates to influencing resources, systems, and policies, is an opportunity to further scale Way Finders' work and to change the conditions that prevent individuals and families from accessing affordable housing in communities where they want to live. Systems (institutions, regulations, and policies) sustain the forces that hold the conditions of disparity, inequality, and lack of opportunity in place for many residents of the region.

Delivering programs and services to clients, and real estate development alone are not sufficient to change these systems and alter

the conditions that have perpetuated these challenges. Advocacy, the act of seeking change in institutions—their policies, practices, rules, and regulations—is an important area of focus for Way Finders to grow in, to advance the mission and achieve our regional vision. Advocacy can not only change how resources are allocated (and to whom) but also change requirements related to zoning, neighborhood revitalization, and access to capital. Mobilizing Way Finders' resources and the communities it serves can create a potent force for change in the region in the future.

Opportunity to Increase Synergies Across Way Finders and with Common Capital to Advance Efforts to Increase Economic Mobility

Way Finders is increasingly engaging with multiple aspects of residents' lives—beyond housing stability—as we better understand the factors and forces that contribute to housing stability and upward mobility for our residents and clients. The input gathered during the listening process highlighted the critical importance of economic mobility and wealth-building for clients, residents, and communities, and the opportunity for Way Finders to enhance our work in this area, including financial assistance and employment supports.

Additionally, defining the shared work of Way Finders and Common Capital is important in order to optimize these resources and expertise for regional impact. The acquisition of Common Capital grew out of a hope,

but not necessarily a clear and defined plan, for synergy based on areas of shared work. The needs of the region and this Plan call out significant opportunities for closer collaboration between Common Capital and Way Finders. For both organizations, this shared work will center on several of the shared initiatives outlined in the Plan, as well as increased coordination and communication around our respective work and investments.

Opportunity to Increase Internal Collaboration to Advance Impact

Over the years, Way Finders has built an impressive array of programs, services, and resources designed to address the affordable housing needs of the region. However, these resources were frequently secured and allocated to individual departments, and work was typically completed within these departments in order to fulfill discrete contracts. A fresh perspective from new leadership throughout the organization, together with discussions during the strategic planning process, surfaced interest and passion among staff to work more closely together across department lines to address the intersecting needs of residents and clients. Bringing together and sharing expertise, knowledge and resources across departments can help Way Finders create meaningful and lasting change for clients and the region. At the same time, we realize that building a culture of collaboration requires support, access to resources and funds, and an infrastructure that promotes shared work, shared learning, and shared resources.

Board of Directors Seeks to Become More Engaged

There is an opportunity to further activate and engage the Board in the relational work of the organization as ambassadors, advocates, and philanthropic supporters. Board members have expressed an interest in becoming more engaged and in further contributing their talents to support Way Finders' impact. Given the sheer size of the region that Way Finders serves, there is a significant opportunity for Board members to engage as ambassadors in their own communities.

Whether it is engaging with local government, potential donors, entities that can provide capital support for real estate development, or businesses that could serve as employers for Way Finders' clients, Board members could be well-positioned to be an effective "extension" of the organization. Activating this work involves additional education for Board members to be able to confidently represent Way Finders to key constituencies and structures to coordinate communication and collaboration.

wayfinders builds and advocates for a thriving and equitable region by improving the stability and economic mobility of families and individuals, together with developing and managing a wide range of housing to support strong communities.

TAGLINE: Way Finders lights pathways and opens doors to homes and communities where all people thrive.

our vision for way finders

We will be:

1. A trusted community provider that is accessible, easy to navigate, and supportive of all who we serve.

- We are responsive, adaptable, and client- and resident-centered. We continue to keep up with best practices in our fields and improve the ways we work to bring the most informed support possible for our clients and residents.
- We will meaningfully engage community members, clients, residents, and key stakeholders across all our work.

2. An outstanding place to work, operating as one strong, unified team.

- Our employees feel valued and understand how their work contributes to our overall impact in the region.
- We share knowledge, experience, and best practices to support each other and better serve our clients.
- We support all our employees with the tools they need to be successful and invest in our employees and their development and growth so that we can achieve the big goals and impact we want to have together.
- We work together in inclusive and respectful ways.

3. An organization that seeks to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion internally and externally.

- Values of diversity, equity, and inclusion are embedded in our work, in our culture, and in all of our interactions.
- We will make decisions with an understanding of the legacy of past policies and systemic inequality to build toward racial, ethnic, and economic equity through our work.

4. A community leader and partner.

- We are known as a trusted, effective partner and advocate for those we serve and support.
- We are a catalyst for connections, bringing resources together to strengthen our region.

5. Informed by our results and transparent to the communities we serve.

- We are data-driven in our decision-making and use data to improve our approach and outcomes. We share our impact and what we have learned with communities in our region.

our vision for the region

We envision a Western Massachusetts region where:



people (community members, including our clients and residents)

- Everyone is able to live where they choose, without barriers and regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, age, or identity.
- Low and moderate-income people and communities of color experience a measurable decrease in poverty and an increase in incomes, resulting in greater housing and financial stability and increased economic mobility. This also helps close the wealth gap and increase household resilience.
- Fewer families and individuals experience homelessness, and when it occurs, it is rare, brief, and nonrecurring.

communities

(homes, neighborhoods, and cities)

- Every community has a robust range of housing options that are safe, affordable, healthy, and resilient to climate change (a robust housing continuum).
- Families and individuals have a range of safe and healthy communities where they can choose to live, work, learn, and play.
- Across the region, communities are thriving economically and socially, with robust education and employment opportunities, a wide array of successful small businesses, strong civic institutions, and healthy, engaged residents involved in the life of the community.

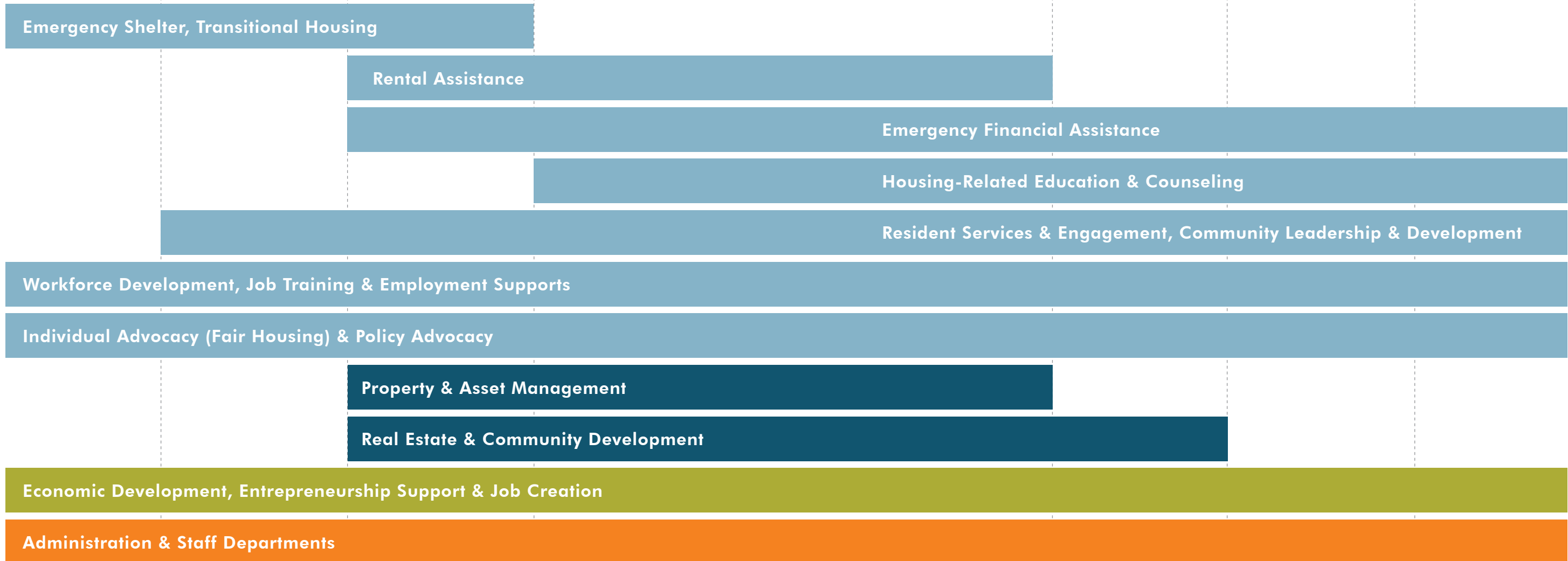
systems

(institutions, regulations and policies)

- Families and individuals have easy access to effective supports, tools, and resources to help grow their resilience, improve their economic mobility, and achieve their aspirations.
- Cross-sector partnerships (government, private, community groups, and nonprofits) work in concert with residents to provide programs, capital, and policies to sustain and grow communities and build an inclusive region, with a full and healthy housing continuum, housing stability, and economic prosperity for all.
- The presence and impact of structural racism are reversing; communities of color fully participate in the region's economic prosperity and its social and civic fabric.
- Small businesses, housing developers, and other community organizations have access to effective tools and resources to increase their capacity to create jobs and contribute to a thriving regional economy.

housing continuum

A healthy housing continuum in a community supports residents with a range of available, accessible and affordable housing options



our areas of work



values about our work:



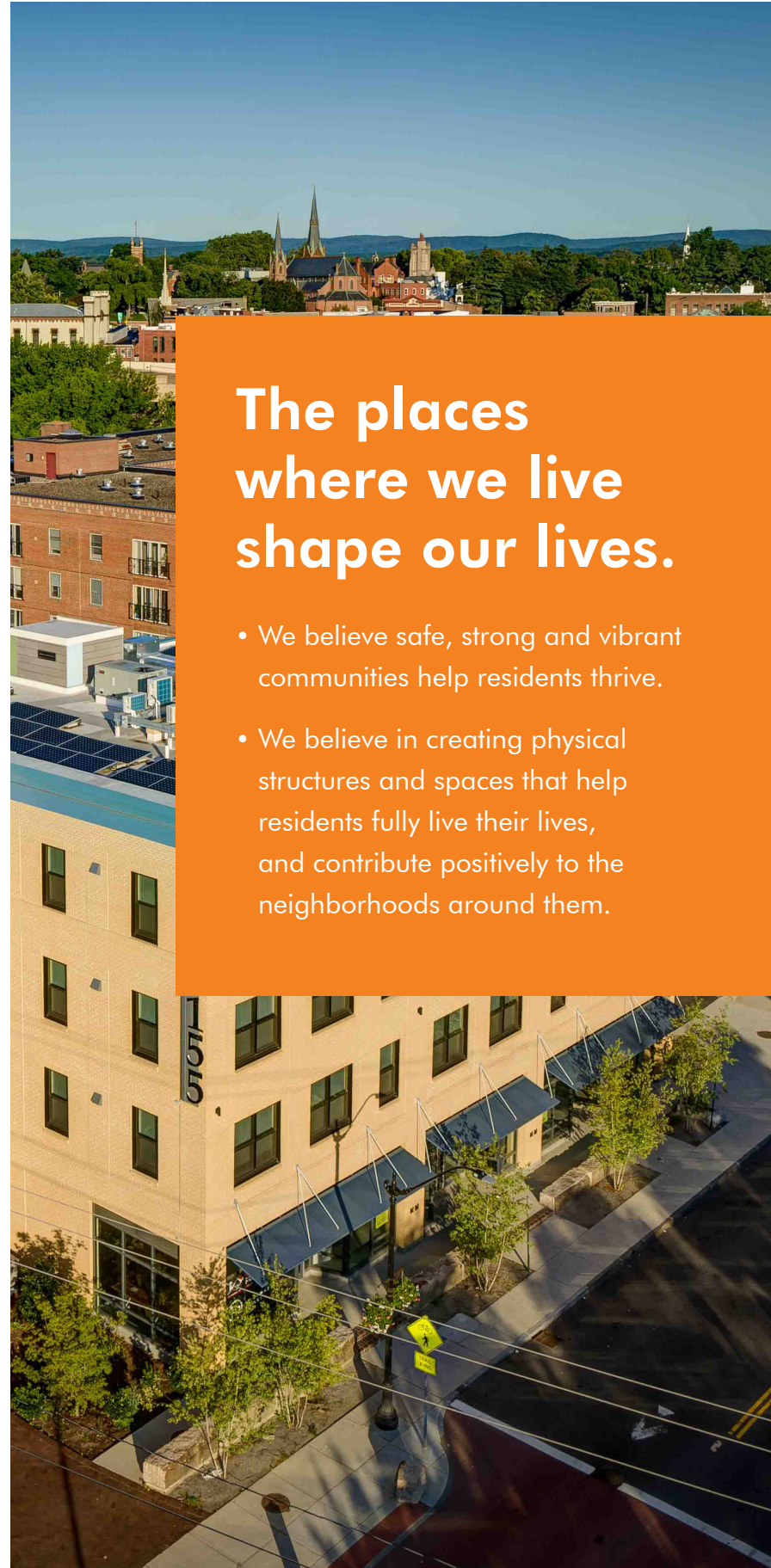
Housing is a basic human right.

- Everyone has the right to live in safe, affordable, stable, and healthy housing, without barriers and regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or identity.
- Safe, affordable, stable, and healthy housing is an important contributor that enables families to move toward financial security and a better quality of life.



Economic stability is the foundation for strong households and communities.

- Everyone deserves a range of opportunities and resources to build economic stability.
- Everyone deserves affordable, stable housing, safe neighborhoods, access to services, and opportunities for education, jobs, and entrepreneurship.
- Affordable homeownership is one way for households to build generational wealth.



The places where we live shape our lives.

- We believe safe, strong and vibrant communities help residents thrive.
- We believe in creating physical structures and spaces that help residents fully live their lives, and contribute positively to the neighborhoods around them.

Successful community development is led by the community.

- We value the knowledge already present in each community and commit to centering and elevating their voices. We will meaningfully engage community members, clients, and residents across our work.
- Active civic engagement is the foundation for a thriving community. We will support and encourage this engagement and help develop resident leadership.
- We believe that there are a range of ways to engage—from community-informed to community-driven to community-led. We will work with each community to choose the approach that fits them, with the goal of supporting their overall well-being.
- We will support communities that want to explore forms of community ownership of land or housing, in order to preserve affordability and retain assets for neighborhood use.

values about how we work:



We will actively work to advance racial and ethnic equity, increase economic opportunity, and build just and inclusive communities.

- We recognize that there are historic, structural and systemic factors that affect each person's life and impact racial, ethnic and economic disparities in our region today. We believe that inclusive communities and shared economic prosperity benefit us all, and commit to building them in our region.
- Everyone deserves to achieve their own aspirations. We will meet individuals where they are, recognizing that racism and inequality may have affected them in different and compounding ways, and work to support them in achieving their goals.
- As an organization, we recognize that our actions have an impact and that inaction has an impact as well. We will make decisions to build toward racial, ethnic and economic equity through our work.



Our employees are the heart and soul of our organization.

- Our employees' experience and insights are valuable and important to advancing our work.
- We value our employees, and the hard and critical work they do for our clients, our communities, and our region.

We treat everyone with respect and compassion. We always work to build trust.

- Everyone deserves to be treated with respect.
- We will listen thoughtfully and hold ourselves accountable to our clients and our colleagues in order to keep building trust.
- Every voice adds value and every voice has power and potential. We believe in creating space for all voices, especially those less frequently heard.

We make an exponential and lasting impact when we work together.

- Strong, smart and collaborative partnerships with policymakers, partner organizations, and communities are critical to creating structural, lasting change.



strategic goals

In this Strategic Plan, we are putting forward a bold vision for the region, outlining a vision for the organization and describing how we will work together to achieve this overarching impact.

summary of goals

Our Impact

Advance measurable, equitable and positive change in our region by transforming our approach to how we do our work

Our Culture

Embed diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout our work

Our Organization

Invest in our staff and systems to increase our impact

Our Relationships

Be a regional partner of choice

Our Board

Invest in our Board as ambassadors for our work



strategic plan

It's time to stretch into new ways of working.

The overarching goal of our Strategic Plan is to realize a demonstrable impact for people living in the Pioneer Valley, in communities across the region, and on the systems and structures that shape our lives to create a thriving and equitable region for all.

This section describes how we will achieve our vision for impact, including the goals we have set for ourselves, what we will do to meet each of these goals, and illustrative indicators of our progress and success.

As we implement the Plan, we will continually learn and adjust—but always with our vision for impact in mind.

1. Our Impact: Advance measurable, equitable and positive change in our region by transforming our approach to how we do our work

STRATEGIES

Strategy 1: Launch Initiatives for Collective Impact that align our programs, services, and resources to address our shared goals for the region

Initiative 1: End family homelessness in our region

Initiative 2: Build wealth and promote upward mobility

Initiative 3: Transform neighborhoods

Initiative 4: Strengthen community engagement and leadership

Strategy 2: Develop systems and supports to ensure increased accessibility, ease of navigation, and increased coordination for clients and residents across the housing continuum to support housing stability and economic mobility

Strategy 3: Develop and implement service delivery models that reflect a shared Way Finders approach or way of work

Strategy 4: Strengthen internal collaboration as a foundational way of work within the organization

KEY AREAS OF MEASUREMENT

People (community members, including our clients and residents)

Client and resident outcomes:

- Housing stability indicators, such as length and stability of tenancy, reduced number of terminations, and emergency aid distributed to support housing stability
- Economic mobility indicators, such as growth in incomes and household assets over time and access to educational, employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, including access to capital

Community perspectives:

- External sentiment analysis and indicators, such as survey results and Net Promoter Scores for key stakeholders (including clients, landlords, and community partners)

Communities (homes, neighborhoods, cities and towns, and the region)

Community level indicators in neighborhoods of focus, such as improvements in community safety, health, and social cohesion

Real estate market indicators in areas of interest, such as assessed value and number of affordable units in the region and in the Way Finders portfolio that contribute to a full and robust housing continuum in each area

Systems (institutions, regulations, and policies)

Systems change indicators such as rate of family homelessness, affordable housing dynamics, and housing impacts on households by race, ethnicity, and income

Organization (changing our work)

Organizational collaboration indicators, such as flexibility, creativity and performance of cross-collaborative teams, and efficiency of internal processes requiring interdepartmental collaboration

2. Our Culture: Embed diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout our work

STRATEGIES

- Strategy 1:** Launch a comprehensive Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion program that engages all staff and Board members
- Strategy 2:** Embed an understanding and consideration of diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout all areas of operational work
- Strategy 3:** Support local businesses and promote equity through our organizational policies and work

KEY AREAS OF MEASUREMENT

Internal DEI indicators

Organizational equity and inclusion indicators, such as staff and Board diversity, representation in management and leadership roles, and effective use of equity frameworks in developing and delivering organizational programs and activities

External DEI indicators

External equity and inclusion indicators, such as supplier diversity and contract provisions that provide for fair and living wages

3. Our Organization: Invest in our staff and systems to increase our impact

STRATEGIES

- Strategy 1:** Strengthen and invest in staff supports and systems
- Strategy 2:** Leverage technology and data analysis to streamline and strengthen operations
- Strategy 3:** Invest in our administrative infrastructure to further support programs, services, staff, clients, and our community
- Strategy 4:** Fully implement an organizational assessment and learning program to drive service and program improvement

KEY AREAS OF MEASUREMENT

Organizational indicators for effective administration

- **Financial health indicators**, such as days in cash and revenue/expense and balance sheet ratios
- **Organizational HR indicators**, such as recruitment time to hire, retention and turnover rate, and regular staff climate survey results
- **Legal, compliance and risk management indicators**, such as number of known internal issues and risks, and favorable outcomes to these issues
- **Organizational technology indicators**, such as staff satisfaction surveys and uptime of key software systems
- **General organizational efficiency indicators**, such as time to complete a process

4. Our Relationships: Be a regional partner of choice

STRATEGIES

- Strategy 1:** Assess and develop customized strategies for current partnerships and establish new relationships to align with Way Finders' priorities for regional transformation
- Strategy 2:** Expand resource development efforts to include a comprehensive approach to generating philanthropic, public and private funding support
- Strategy 3:** Develop and implement a marketing and public awareness plan to share more broadly about programs and services, and about major organizational priorities
- Strategy 4:** Position Way Finders as a leading advocate for the region in advancing policy, programs, and services that expand the housing continuum, ensure effective supports, and enable residents to build wealth and achieve economic and social mobility in their communities

KEY AREAS OF MEASUREMENT

Partnership indicators

External engagement and partnership indicators, such as survey results for external partners, internal assessments for effectiveness and quality, and meaningful participation in or leadership of regional networks or roundtables

Fund development indicators

Fundraising and development indicators, such as amounts raised toward program or real estate development capital goals, and donor retention and acquisition rates

Marketing & public communications indicators

Marketing and public communications indicators, such as press and social media engagement and new participants or clients based on outreach channels

Advocacy indicators

Advocacy and engagement indicators across a range of stakeholders, such as resident leaders trained in community advocacy and quality of partnerships and relationships built and maintained with key partners and legislators

5. Our Board: Invest in our Board as ambassadors for our work

STRATEGIES

- Strategy 1:** Establish and launch a comprehensive Board education and training program
- Strategy 2:** Further engage the Board in advancing the strategic work of the organization
- Strategy 3:** Further strengthen the Board development process

KEY AREAS OF MEASUREMENT

Board engagement indicators

Board engagement indicators, such as participation in fundraising and advocacy efforts and Board survey results

our planning process

The strategic planning process was launched in May 2021, with two key goals: creating an updated, shared vision for Way Finders and developing a plan to realize this vision. A third-party consultant with expertise in advising nonprofit organizations (Fio Partners, LLC) was engaged to support these efforts.

A key priority for Way Finders in developing this Strategic Plan was seeking meaningful input from a wide range of stakeholders—everyone from the people we serve to the people we work with, and the people who work for us. Feedback was sought from internal and external sources through a range of methods—from interviews to surveys to facilitated discussions—to capture observations of the organization from a variety of perspectives, assess the greatest opportunities facing the region and the organization, and surface the issues and areas where Way Finders can make the greatest impact through our work.

This extensive external and internal stakeholder input was combined with additional organizational information to create an information base for planning. Developing this information base included the following:

Internal

- Way Finders' All-Employee Staff Climate Survey
- Way Finders' Board of Directors Survey
- Common Capital Board of Directors Survey
- Leadership Staff Interviews
- Middle Management Focus Groups
- Five-Year Financial Analysis
- Input and Feedback from Way Finders' All-Employee Town Halls
- Written Leadership Input—describing current work (programs, services) and outlining priorities and goals for this Plan

External

- Community Partner Input Survey
- Landlord Survey
- Client Survey
- Key External Stakeholder Interviews
- Market Research on Communities of Interest
- Greater Springfield Regional Housing Analysis Report

In addition to these inputs, the Way Finders Board provided strategic input at two retreats held in October 2021. At the first retreat, Board members provided input on critical issues facing the region, where they thought Way Finders could make the most significant impact, identified an initial set of organizational beliefs and values, and developed aspirations for the role of the Board in the future. At the second retreat, the Board provided input and feedback on the Plan's vision, mission, and values, and discussed how the work of Way Finders may need to evolve to realize our vision for impact. Staff leadership used this input and feedback to shape an organizational logic model and the three-year Strategic Plan.



family.neighborhood.community.

wayfinders.org



NeighborWorks®
CHARTERED MEMBER

