



## **AppCAA Strategic Plan 2022-2027 Executive Summary**

### **Agency Overview**

Serving the remote coalfields of Southwest Virginia since 1965, Appalachian Community Action and Development (AppCAA) delivers sustainable program interventions, technical expertise, and grassroots mobilization to build local resilience. AppCAA has become an agent of change for financial, educational, healthcare and workforce development initiatives in the notoriously-isolated and rural counties of Southwest Virginia. We provide emergency, first-line interventions for families while leveraging our reputation as a reliable community partner in emergency situations to build resiliency through wrap-around services. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have continued to provide assistance by modifying our modes of service delivery.

AppCAA's Mission Statement is "To be a partner of choice, responding to our region's challenges and helping communities of Southwest Virginia on their path to self-sufficiency." Operating in the counties of Lee, Wise and Scott and the City of Norton (known as the Lenowisco District), we serve approximately 3,000 residents a year through housing repair and weatherization, programs for independent living, school meals, hygiene supplies, eviction prevention, financial technology education, housing counseling, financial literacy training and utility payments. AppCAA's target population is the working poor who might otherwise not qualify for assistance; with the pandemic forcing some individuals to remain at home the situation has become dire for those struggling to make ends meet.

### **Community Needs Assessment and the Strategic Planning Process**

Appalachian Community Action and Development (AppCAA) designed its Strategic Plan 2022-2027 as part of ongoing organizational development efforts. When AppCAA's previous Strategic Plan expired in FY2020 an interim, updated Strategic Plan was devised by the AppCAA Board and staff members.

### **Community Needs Assessment**

To improve the impact and sustainability of programs and to generate evidence for the Strategic Plan, AppCAA conducted a Community Needs Assessment July-August 2020 spearheaded by

the Community Needs Assessment Task Force<sup>1</sup> with support from members of the AppCAA Board of Directors. The Assessment was completed in adherence to the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) requirements and Organizational Standards. The purpose of the CNA was to: identify and assess gaps in service delivery; to determine complementarity between activities; and to develop priority action areas to continue adapting activities and services to emergent community needs. The Task Force executed an online and telephone survey with over 100 respondents as well as a Focus Group Discussion to validate conclusions.

The Community Needs Assessment identified key areas for programmatic focus, including:

- Affordable Housing;
- Low wages;
- Low educational attainment;
- COVID-related social issues (e.g. substance abuse, isolation, child abuse); and
- Childcare.

The Community Needs Assessment also asked respondents about which population groups are not accessing services and will need additional outreach to learn about AppCAA and enroll in programs:

- Working poor;
- Communities of St.Charles, Keokee, Rose Hill and Ewing;
- Rural farm communities; and
- Wise County.

The outcomes of the Community Needs Assessment served as a jumping-off point for the AppCAA team, who began writing the Strategic Plan in early 2021.

## **Strategic Planning Process**

AppCAA contracted with a consulting firm in December 2020 to help carry out additional stakeholder surveys and assist in the generation of the Strategic Plan. AppCAA staff and the Strategic Plan Steering Committee met weekly to guarantee that the planning process was on track and meeting the needs of the Agency. The consulting firm reached out to potential partners, government officials, other Community Action Agencies and organizations with a similar scope to gather information about the comparative advantage of AppCAA and areas for growth. A Risk Assessment was conducted and recommendations developed for improving internal and external processes.

AppCAA's Strategic Plan 2022-2027 was completed in May 2021. Building on the past experience of the organization and its long history helping the people of Southwest Virginia, four

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<sup>1</sup> AppCAA's Community Needs Assessment Task Force included: a client representative; Board Members (a former Head Start Director and extractive industries executive); higher education representative (professor at university located in the region); Americorps VISTA Volunteer; and AppCAA staff (Executive Director and Agency Planner). The Task Force met weekly for 16 weeks.

Strategic Objectives, each with three Intermediate Results were developed. All AppCAA staff were oriented to the Strategic Plan in June 2021 and advised to integrate the Strategic Objectives into their annual work objectives. Staff were provided monitoring worksheets to capture and report all data in one location, so that programmatic progress can be easily tracked.

## **Mission Statement**

As part of the Strategic Planning process, AppCAA staff and other stakeholders were asked to revisit and revise the organization's Mission Statement (last updated in 2016). The previous Mission Statement was: *"To eliminate poverty and make our clients more self-sufficient by development of resources and services to low-income individuals and households in our service areas."* The Steering Committee felt that the original Mission Statement did not accurately reflect the purpose of AppCAA or how we provide services (e.g. "eliminating poverty" is a result AppCAA cannot achieve) and was too broad to be achievable.

Reflecting on the work of AppCAA and to better demonstrate our value to the people of Southwest Virginia, AppCAA staff and Board devised the following Mission Statement: *"To be a partner of choice, responding to our region's challenges and helping communities of Southwest Virginia on their path to self-sufficiency."* This Mission Statement shows the intention of the Agency to use our history and comparative advantage to be a first-line partner in responding to the needs of communities in our service area while helping them to move out of poverty. The revised Mission Statement makes clear that AppCAA's way of doing business is to help people help themselves. By focusing on self-sufficiency, AppCAA is making a statement that we are moving away from emergency/crisis services and instead emphasizing giving people the tools they need to cope.

## **Vision Statement**

The Agency's Vision Statement was revised to more accurately indicate the change AppCAA would like to affect. The previous Vision Statement: *"The elimination of poverty by enabling residents to achieve self-sufficiency,"* is based on the assumption that AppCAA can eventually eliminate poverty and that it can be achieved through self-sufficiency alone without any structural changes or external support. The AppCAA team and Board felt that this statement was not a realistic summation of the progress we would like to see. The Vision Statement was revised to *"Appalachian Community Action and Development Agency is an agent of change, empowering our communities to be strong and self-supporting."* The revised version includes AppCAA's achievable intention: to introduce positive change while building community capacity and resources to become self-sufficient.

With the updates to the Mission and Vision Statements, AppCAA is placing the onus on the client to help themselves achieve independence rather than the Agency doing all of the work "to eliminate poverty."

## **Organizational Values**

Guiding values for the organization were discussed as the core principles by which AppCAA will be doing our work. These include:

- Client focused: We highly value the residents of Southwest Virginia whom we serve. We will strive to provide compassionate support to meet people where they are.
- Community betterment: AppCAA will partner with a variety of stakeholders to improve community engagement, expand impact, and promote the development of community resources.
- Quality programming: AppCAA will institute systems and practices to guarantee the timely and accurate reporting of data and monitoring of activities as well as making course corrections as needed.
- Employee empowerment: AppCAA staff will be encouraged to take calculated risks and to explore innovative ways of doing business. Employees will be supported to apply best practices to actively contribute to the development and implementation of activities.
- Integrity and Accountability: AppCAA will adhere to the highest ethical standards and will provide transparent information to team members and the public about our work and management of resources.

### **Strategic Objectives and Intermediate Results**

The Strategic Objectives contained in the Strategic Plan are intended to provide a framework for understanding how our discrete activities complement each other while providing a basis for program expansion. Each Strategic Objective has three Intermediate Results with Key Outcomes indicated.

#### **Strategic Objective 1: To increase availability of and access to safe, affordable housing.**

This Strategic Objective is at the heart of AppCAA's work: to improve housing conditions so that families can live in environmentally safe and energy efficient homes. To achieve this, AppCAA is focusing on its weatherization and housing repair activities to anchor this Strategic Objective, with additional activities centered on helping families remain in their homes through rent/mortgage/utility relief programs. Intermediate Results under this Strategic Objective include:

- I.R. 1.1. Increased number of homes with improved energy efficiency and safe environments.
- I.R. 1.2: Fewer families evicted as a result of AppCAA activities.

#### **Strategic Objective 2: To improve clients' financial literacy and economic decision-making.**

Complementing our work on safe and affordable housing, AppCAA is emphasizing financial literacy and housing counseling as ways to build the capacity of clients to be self-sufficient. These courses encourage improved financial decision-making while offering clients actionable tools to immediately begin bettering their financial situation. Intermediate Results under this

Strategic Objective include:

I.R. 2.1: Increased number of clients reporting financial wellbeing.

I.R. 2.2: Increased number of partnerships between AppCAA and financial institutions.

**Strategic Objective 3: To enhance community self-sufficiency through low income individuals' participation in activities.**

This Strategic Objective centers on providing a safety net for the most vulnerable individuals in our service area, while increasing community involvement with AppCAA activities and initiatives. Focus will be placed on generating community support for those in crisis, raising awareness of AppCAA's activities, improving food security and providing stop-gap solutions to assist families in need while directly measuring progress on our Mission Statement. Intermediate Results under this Strategic Objective include:

I.R. 3.1: Increased number of clients reporting self-sufficiency;

I.R. 3.2: Increased percentage of clients reporting food security;

I.R. 3.3: Increased participation of the community in AppCAA's activities.

**Strategic Objective 4: To improve the quality and impact of AppCAA's programs.**

Strategic Objective 4 emphasizes the internal, organizational improvements necessary to ensure: programs are having their intended impact; activities are benefitting as many clients as possible in the most efficient manner; and the Agency is being accountable to donors, clients and other stakeholders. This Strategic Objective systematizes aspects of AppCAA's monitoring, reporting and outreach so that information is accurate and Agency messaging is consistent. Intermediate Results under this Strategic Objective include:

4.1: Improved program quality and impact;

4.2: Consistently on time and accurate reporting;

4.3: Increased public awareness of the work and impact of AppCAA.

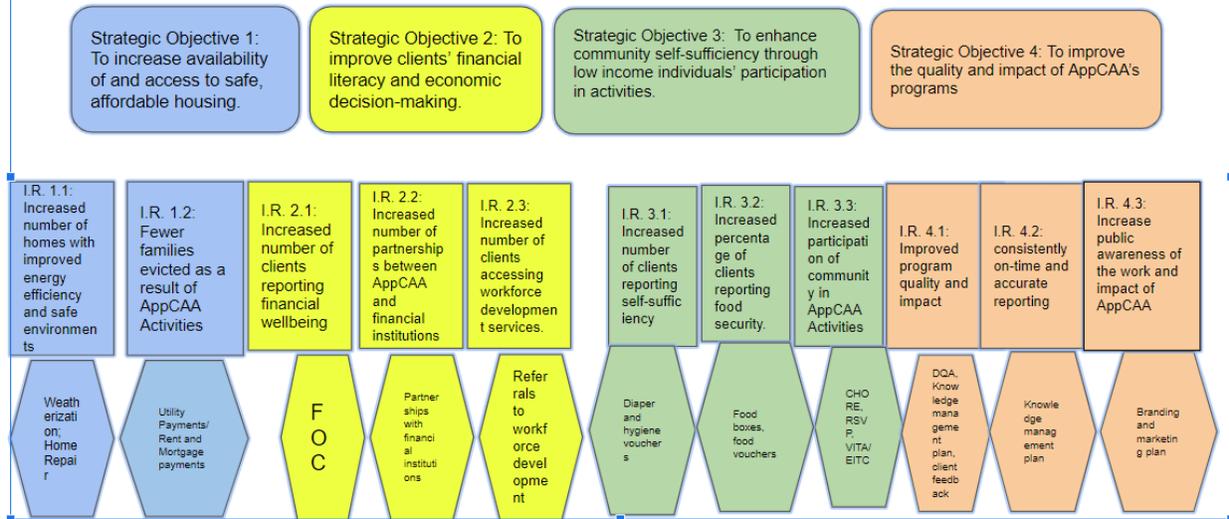
**Next Steps**

Implementation of the Strategic Plan 2022-2027 requires a strong results framework for monitoring. The results framework explains how the Agency will move from a tactical to a strategic level, while incorporating key concepts necessary for meeting Organizational Standards<sup>2</sup> requirements.

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<sup>2</sup> Organizational Standards are yearly-reviewed requirements for all Community Action Agencies to complete and include professional development, Board involvement, community engagement, financial controls and other aspects of organizational programs and operations.

# RESULTS FRAMEWORK APPCAA STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-2027



Each staff member has received an orientation to the Strategic Plan Results Framework and has a set of measures for which s/he is responsible. These data are collected monthly and reported to the Board. Targets have been set based on historical data on participation and staff are kept informed if changes need to be made or if targets might not be met.

## Conclusion

The Strategic Planning process, development of new Mission and Vision Statements and the establishment of a Results Framework for monitoring has reenergized AppCAA staff. By including the team in each step of the strategy development, they gained a better understanding of our work and how each action builds towards a strategic outcome. AppCAA staff are buying into the work we do with enthusiasm and this sentiment is readily visible to the community we serve.

We at AppCAA realize that the COVID pandemic and its associated loss of income, isolation and family hardship has disproportionately affected the working poor in Appalachia. With our new Strategic Plan, AppCAA is well-positioned to channel resources to those who are struggling to make ends meet. By giving a hand up instead of a hand out, we can build a vibrant future for our area together.

## Connect with AppCAA

If you would like to learn more about AppCAA's programs, need assistance, or would like to support our efforts with a tax deductible donation, please visit our website: [www.appcaa.org](http://www.appcaa.org).

