



Strategic Plan



2026-2031

Background

Agency Description

The Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency (AEOA) was incorporated in April 1965 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and established as a Community Action Program (CAP) for the Northeast Minnesota counties of St. Louis, Lake, and Cook in response to the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act. AEOA offers services in these counties, as well as in the neighboring counties of Aitkin, Carlton, Cass, Chisago, Crow Wing, Isanti, Itasca, Koochiching, and Pine, making it one of the largest private, non-profit Community Action Agencies in Minnesota.

AEOA is guided by a 27-member Board of Directors, representing a balanced mix of low-income individuals, public officials, and private sector partners. With a dedicated team of more than 350 full- and part-time employees and the support of over 800 volunteers, we proudly serve as a leading resource for individuals and families of all ages facing social and economic challenges that stand in the way of achieving financial stability and independence. Every service AEOA delivers is rooted in creating pathways to stability, opportunity, and lasting change. Offering a broad range of services and personalized support, we help individuals and families break down barriers and take meaningful steps toward a brighter, more independent future.

Mission

To strengthen communities by providing opportunities for people experiencing social and economic challenges.

Vision and values

AEOA’s vision is all people served will make measurable progress toward self-reliance or independence.

The Agency’s values are **Respect, Stronger Together, and Believe**. These values support person-centered service, collaboration, and commitment to the mission.

Overview of Organizational Structure

Behind AEOA is a dedicated team driving daily operations and coordinating efforts through Central Services and six service departments that deliver vital programs throughout our service area, including:

Employment & Training
Head Start
Housing Resources
Housing Services
Senior & Nutrition Services
Transportation

Alignment with Organizational Standards

In an effort to help the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Network increase accountability and achieve results, the Office of Community Services (OCS) launched several initiatives in 2012. One focused on establishing organizational standards for eligible entities. Under this effort, CSBG Network leaders developed and recommended a set of organizational standards to strengthen the capacity of the more than 1,000 eligible entities providing services across the country.

Through a two-year cooperative agreement funded by the OCS the CSBG Organizational Standards Center of Excellence (COE) worked with local, state, and national partners to develop and share organizational standards for CSBG-eligible entities. The standards help ensure agencies have the capacity to deliver high-quality services to low-income individuals and communities.

The final result of the COE and OCS efforts is a comprehensive set of organizational standards developed by the CSBG Network for the CSBG Network. The CSBG Network is to be commended for its commitment to ongoing performance improvement and strengthening accountability.

The standards are organized in three thematic groups comprising nine categories and a total of 58 standards for private, nonprofit eligible entities.

Maximum Feasible Participation

Consumer Input and Involvement • Community Engagement • Community Assessment

Vision and Direction

Organizational Leadership • Board Governance • Strategic Planning

Operations and Accountability

Human Resource Management • Financial Operations and Oversight • Data and Analysis



Organizational Standards

Category Six: Strategic Planning

Establishing the vision for a Community Action Agency is a significant task, and setting the course to reach it through strategic planning is an essential marker towards success. CSBG eligible entities take on this task by looking both at internal functioning and at the community's needs. An efficient organization knows where it is headed, how the board and staff fit into that future, and how it will measure its success in achieving what it has set out to do. This agency-wide process is board-led and ongoing. A “living, breathing” strategic plan with measurable outcomes is the goal, rather than a plan that gets written but sits on a shelf and stagnates. Often set with an ambitious vision, strategic plans set the tone for the staff and board, as well as a key leadership and management tool for the organization.

Standard 6.1 • The organization has an agency-wide strategic plan in place that has been approved by the governing board within the past 5 years.

Standard 6.2 • The approved strategic plan addresses reduction of poverty, revitalization of low-income communities, and/or empowerment of people with low incomes to become more self-sufficient.

Standard 6.3 • The approved strategic plan contains family, agency, and/or community goals.

Standard 6.4 • Customer satisfaction data and customer input, collected as part of the community assessment, is included in the strategic planning process.

Standard 6.5 • The governing board has received an update(s) on progress meeting the goals of the strategic plan within the past 12 months.



Planning Process

MinnCAP engaged with AEOA in the Spring of 2026 to facilitate a review and the development of a strategic plan to carry the agency into the next five-year period. These activities included:

- Engagement of Stakeholders- Board, Staff, Clients, Community Partners (Surveys)
- Review of Community Needs Assessment (2024)
- Review of Customer Satisfaction Survey (2025)
- Review of Current Plan (2023-2025)
- Review of Mission, Vision, Values

***KEY ACTIVITY: Standard 6.4**

Direction Setting Day, July 14, 2026

Representatives of the board and staff leadership met with the MinnCAP facilitator for a full day work session to: Review Strategic Process and Requirements; Conduct an Environmental Scan; Do a SWOT Analysis; Align Strategic Priorities.



Goal Setting

From these strategic priorities, the following outcome-based goals were developed:

Organizational Excellence: *Build efficient, innovative, and integrated systems that strengthen agency operations.*

People & Leadership: *Develop an engaged Board, empowered workforce and strong leadership pipeline.*

Financial Stability: *Ensure long-term financial health through diversified funding and strategic resource development.*

Community Engagement and Partnerships: Strengthen relationships, increase visibility, and collaborate to address community needs.

Community Impact: *Expand equitable access to services that improve the lives of individuals, families, and communities.*



Strategic Goal Area

Strategies

Strategic Goal Area	Strategies
Goal 1: Strengthen Organizational Excellence *KEY ACTIVITY: Standard 6.3/6.4	- o Document and update policies and procedures - o Develop and implement a comprehensive technology and AI strategy - o Implement a centralized intake process - o Implement a Whole Family approach across agency programs
Goal 2: Build a Strong, Engaged Workforce and Governance	- o Develop a succession planning process - o Increase Board engagement - o Strengthen employee recruitment and retention - o Expand leadership development, onboarding, mentoring, and training
Goal 3: Increase Financial Sustainability	- o Diversify funding sources - o Strengthen fundraising efforts and Foundation strategy - o Explore mission-aligned revenue-generating opportunities
Goal 4: Strengthen Community Engagement and Partnerships *KEY ACTIVITY: Standard 6.3	- o Develop and implement a comprehensive communication and outreach plan - o Revisit agency vision and values as part of communications - o Expand community presence through outreach and events - o Build and strengthen partnerships to address unmet community needs, including tribal relationships - o Increase volunteer engagement
Goal 5: Expand Community Impact and Access to Services *KEY ACTIVITY: Standard 6.2	- o Expand transportation services and increase access - o Explore affordable housing solutions - o Develop financial capability and financial knowledge services - o Create opportunities that increase social belonging and community connections

Strategic Priorities at a Glance

Number of strategies in each goal area

Goal area	Strategies
Goal 1	4
Goal 2	4
Goal 3	3
Goal 4	5
Goal 5	4

Next Steps & Recommendations

It is important that the strategic plan be agile; able to respond quickly and effectively. The mission and core values remain static, but the strategies and priorities need to be able to shift and adapt to a changing environment. AEOA will need to develop systems and structures that allow it to rapidly respond to immediate needs in the community, redirect resources, and seize opportunities that may appear.

Ongoing communication, training, and engagement of stakeholders, along with monitoring and reporting of results, will build trust and alignment and ensure that consistent progress and accountability are sustained.

I. Communication of the Plan

When communicating with stakeholders, highlight the strategic plan's purpose, intended impact, timelines, and expected outcomes. Share the process that was used to develop the priorities and highlight the feedback that was included from each stakeholder group. Address potential concerns and emphasize how the plan aligns with community needs and stakeholders' interests. Ensure messages are concise, transparent, and actionable.

Consider the format for communication. Communication will need to occur consistently on an ongoing basis. Ideas for consideration include: a kickoff event to share the plan and energize people around the goals, meetings, strategic workgroup invitations, collaborative platforms (Teams, Google, etc.), newsletters, emails, visual dashboards to illustrate progress, etc.

***KEY ACTIVITY: A required organizational standard (6.1) is formal board approval of the plan.**

II. Implementation

This phase turns the plan into action!

For each strategy, use a workplan tool to identify steps for the implementation, including:

- develop an implementation team
- identify lead person
- create actionable steps to achieve the strategy
- identify financial resources as needed
- set deadlines
- delegate activities
- review progress
- report on results and celebrate successes along the way to keep everyone motivated!

Allow for feedback in order to make adjustments or shift direction as new information informs the team.

Staff should be trained on the use of these tools and they should live on a collaborative platform so all stakeholders can view the workplans and contribute to the process.

Tie the workplan to ROMA data collection and reporting for identified programs and services. This should also inform the development of the community action plan and budget proposals.

III. Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting

Develop a rhythm for regular review of the progress towards goals. (*Recommendation: at least quarterly)
Identify barriers, solutions, changes made, etc. Document and report through the workplan template and dashboards. Include in annual reports, community communications, stakeholder groups, partners, lawmakers, etc.

***KEY ACTIVITY:** A required organizational standard (6.5) is an annual progress report to the agency Board of Directors.

