

Laurel Advocacy and Referral Services, Inc. (LARS)

DRAFT STRATEGIC PLAN

Executive Summary – the main elements of LARS’ strategy for FY 2016 to FY 2020

LARS is a community-based, congregation-supported nonprofit that serves people in Laurel, Maryland¹ who are experiencing crisis.

LARS has a successful history of serving many low-income and homeless people in Laurel by providing Emergency Services, such as food aid and eviction prevention aid, and through its transitional and permanent housing programs. The funding for these services and programs has come from congregations, local governments, foundations, individuals, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) via Prince Georges County. Through its connections with congregations in the greater Laurel area, LARS has developed deep roots in the community. LARS has not, however, been able to help all of the people that seek its services and the need for such services continues to increase.

LARS has a competent staff with particularly strong skills in case management but lacks adequate capacity in fundraising. The LARS Board of Directors includes many individuals with a long history of involvement with LARS, who also serve as representatives of the congregations that support LARS. The board has identified board effectiveness and accountability, however, as areas in which it needs improvement.

Currently, LARS faces financial threats over the next two to three years because of the uncertainty of changing funding mechanisms by HUD and Prince George’s County, in addition to the end of a large foundation grant. However, LARS has a strong balance sheet, with sufficient reserves to give it time in which to plan and work its way into a surplus.

Given its successful history, LARS occupies an important niche in the community of Laurel, being seen as the primary provider of basic needs assistance. Because LARS’ work compliments that of the other human service providers in the area, the only competition between these agencies is in the area of fundraising.

The main threat to the work of LARS, and the achievement of its goal of serving more people and helping more become self-sufficient, is a generally hostile funding environment. However, if the organization is able to invest in developing fundraising capacity, it has the potential to meet this challenge.

Against this background, the board and staff have agreed to the following vision, goals, strategies and measures.

LARS’ vision is of a community that treats all people with dignity and helps everyone meet their basic needs.

LARS’ contribution to this vision is a mission to enable homeless and low-income people in Laurel who are in crisis to achieve stability and long-term self-sufficiency.

LARS will pursue this mission in the medium-to-long term (3 to 5 years) to serve significantly more people and serve them better through these goals and strategies:

¹ Laurel includes parts of Howard County, Anne Arundel County, and Prince George’s County.

Goal	Strategies	Measures of success
To increase the number of people in crisis served who resolve their crisis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify best practices and benchmarking against other agencies in similar fields. Increase access to LARS Emergency Services (e.g. by increasing no. of hours that LARS is open.) Increase outreach to people who are homeless and in crisis. Enhance partnerships with other agencies, e.g. credit counseling agencies. Provide 'wrap-around' services to clients with severe needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number served. The rate of recidivism: the proportion of people who keep returning to LARS with the same or similar problems. The rate of stabilization: the proportion of people served who report that they have resolved their problem. The speed of the resolution of problems. The number of people that LARS' support prevents from becoming homeless.
To increase the number of people in crisis who achieve long-term self-sufficiency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify best practices and benchmarking against other agencies in similar fields. Enhance partnerships with other agencies, especially social service organizations, to include partnering agencies working in LARS' programs. Provide sustained, longer-term, 'wrap-around' services to clients. Refer clients for substance abuse and mental health treatment. Support clients to claim their benefits. Support homeless clients to secure permanent housing. Support clients to secure educational qualifications and/or a job. Establish effective data collection procedures and using the results to improve services and raise money and awareness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number served. The number of people who are homeless. Changes in the number of people of low income who are at risk. Changes in housing status. Changes in employment status. Changes in income and financial assets The number of clients who obtain relevant education qualifications. The number of clients in move of benefits. The number of clients who self-advocate. Positive changes in personal and family relationships.
To improve the community infrastructure of support for people who are homeless and low income.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead the agencies engaged in helping people in the area stabilize and achieve self-sufficiency. Increase community outreach, starting with the congregations and focusing on engaging community members, e.g. through volunteering opportunities. Advocate for policy and funding changes that support stability and self-sufficiency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The level of engagement of the main other nonprofits and the government agencies in the area. The level of engagement of community groups of different kinds. Changes in policy and funding that support stability and self-sufficiency.
To establish effective data collection and use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define the measures that will best indicate progress in achieving the first 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The adoption of the tool for capturing and analyzing data.

Goal	Strategies	Measures of success
the results to improve services and raise money and awareness	two goals. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the data that will allow us to track these measures. Develop or adopt a tool for capturing and analyzing these data. Establish routines and disciplines for using the data for reviewing progress, learning and for improving programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The adoption of an agreed set of measures. The extent to which the tool and measures are used. The frequency and use of outcome reports and analysis.
To increase LARS' organizational capacity so that LARS can open for more days in the week and serve more people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the number of staff in program. Secure professional fundraising skills Optimize the use of staff skills, especially in case management, through organization design, matching of skills to tasks and appropriate use of volunteers and interns. Build the case for employees remaining at and for others to want to join LARS. Train staff, especially in the core area of case management. Implement a comprehensive board development strategy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased numbers served. Increased quality of service. Evidence of staff motivation. Evidence of increases in staff skill levels.

In the next 1 to 3 years, LARS will adopt the following specific strategies to both address the challenge of the decline in its income and build a foundation for future program growth:

1. LARS will change its income strategy to increase the amount of money it receives from grants, individuals, congregations and local businesses by repurposing the time spent by a current member of staff (rather than seeking to add additional staff members for development purposes). This change will also help further anchor relationships with congregations. To accomplish this, however, LARS will need to re-examine how it interfaces with these other entities, particularly congregations.
2. LARS will choose proven service models for stability and self-sufficiency that both leverage its core case management and other professional skills and provide a degree of standardization that will enhance LARS' ability to achieve client stability and self-sufficiency. These kinds of models also allow LARS' staff to learn from other organizations by, for example, comparing and benchmarking results. In developing this plan, LARS has assumed that the gains in efficiency and efficacy attributable to these models can be achieved without an increase in the number of program staff.
3. Program staff will pilot the application of the new self-sufficiency model with a limited number of users of the Emergency Services in FY 2016, assess the impact, and then expand the use of the model to a larger number of clients in FY 2017, as appropriate.
4. After identifying the optimal solution and identifying a funding source, LARS will implement a system/structure designed to capture and analyze data on its programs and services and report on their impact. It is estimated it may take up to two years to fully absorb and integrate the system into LARS' operations; the speed of full integration may also depend on securing dedicated staff time. This step is essential to LARS' goals of measuring its impacts, which in turn will enable it to make the business case for more funding, which is a prerequisite for expanded programming.
5. The LARS Board will review its roles and responsibilities, composition, policies and practices and develop and implement a board development plan so that it can oversee and support the implementation of this plan.

LARS' STRATEGIC PLAN

Context

The Board and senior staff of LARS decided to develop a strategic plan in Spring 2014, partly because they concluded that LARS lacked a road map for its future direction, but also because it is faced with the following changes in its organization and funding streams:

- LARS had been through a prolonged period of senior staff transition: the previous Executive Director (ED) departed in 2013 and was replaced by Lori Proietti, who served first as Interim ED and then as ED. Ms. Proietti subsequently left the agency in March 2015 and Deputy Director Leah Paley was promoted to Executive Director of the agency in May 2015.
- LARS has a financing gap, looking forward, of between approximately \$50,000 to \$75,000 per year for FY 2016 and 2017. Funding can vary year to year but LARS faces uncertainty of continued funding from the Weinberg Foundation and the lack of sustained funding as an alternative to the Fannie Mae Help the Homeless Program, which ended in FY 2014. The loss of Fannie Mae funding is impacting all community based providers of services to the homeless, making the need for LARS to differentiate itself and demonstrate impact all the more pressing.

These circumstances required that LARS take a step back and ensure that it is taking the direction in which it wants and needs to go. Because LARS' finances have been prudently managed and it has a good reserve, it has the breathing room in which it has been able to engage in such a planning exercise.

What will drive the formation of LARS' strategy?

The board and staff have chosen to focus on a subset of key drivers that it deems are most critical to success:

- The type and level of need in the community: LARS' work should be designed to address the most prevalent needs in the community.
- The strengths of LARS as a service provider: LARS future is grounded in its organization's strengths and experience with programming. It is more efficient and less risky to work from those strengths than to try and build new skills.
- Its current financial health: Resources, such as access to capital, constrain or enable any organization in making the changes it wants to see.
- What other organizations in the area are doing: LARS must choose goals and strategies that can complement or enhance their work and support enhanced collaboration.
- The availability of program models that can help clients to succeed cost-effectively: LARS needs to show its programs work if it is to raise money to expend on expanding those programs.
- The availability of the resources that allow LARS to deliver its programs: LARS needs to access non-financial community support, such as volunteers and in-kind support, as well as dollars.

The shape of the plan

This plan has been drafted so that its structure is consistent with the below numbered sequence of critical factors:

1. The needs in the community.

2. LARS as it is now: its current mission (before the recent discussions and agreement by the board to the new mission) its programs, business model and fundraising, staffing, financial health and governance.
3. The environment in which LARS operates, especially with regard to what other organizations in the area are doing and the funding environment in which LARS will function during the next 3 to 5 years.
4. An analysis of LARS' main strengths and weaknesses and the main opportunities and threats that it faces (based on the discussion that follows).
5. A description of the vision and mission of LARS and of the strategies, short-term as well as long-term, that LARS will pursue in order to achieve its mission, including:
 - a. The income strategy that LARS will pursue to finance its work,
 - b. A description of the programs that LARS will offer over the period of the plan
 - c. The plan for the development of LARS' governance so that the board is best equipped to support the achievement of the goals of this plan. and
 - d. How LARS plans to address other strategic issues that arose during the planning process.
6. A review of the financial implications of this plan.
7. A description of the ways in which LARS will use the plan.

Details of the Plan

1. The needs in the community: the numbers

Low-income individuals in Laurel

LARS' catchment area comprises zip codes 20707, 20708, 20723 and 20724. There are reasonably accurate numbers for people who are classified as low income in these areas.

Table 1*

Laurel Population, 2013 estimate	25,800
Laurel Per capita money income in past 12 months (2012 dollars), 2008-2012	\$33,075
Laurel median household income, 2008-2012	\$66,355
Laurel persons below poverty level, 2008-2012 @ 7.8%	= 2012

*City of Laurel Population Data came from U.S. Census Bureau:

http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml City of Laurel Income Data came

from U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates:

http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_13_5YR_DP03&sr=c=pt

Homeless people in Laurel

The difficulties of counting a transient population are evident in the lack of consistent data on people who are homeless. The homeless numbers below are for LARS' service area. That said, no data seems to be collected on what city the homeless tend to stay in. Our potential target group is therefore the total of these numbers:

Homeless per County in 2013 – Table 2*

County	Adults (18+)	Children	Households/Families	Total #
Prince Georges	435	251	123	686
Howard	***	***	***	203
Anne Arundel	305	95	299	400

*Prince George's County: Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments <https://www.mwcog.org/uploads/pub-documents/qF5cX1w20130508134424.pdf> Howard: Howard County Department of Citizen Services <http://www.baltimoresun.com/explore/howard/news/community/ph-ll-homeless-survey-0321-20130323-story.html> Anne Arundel: Anne Arundel and Annapolis Coalition to End Homelessness (CoC) <http://www.aacounty.org/Homeless/>

Homeless per County in 2014 – Table 3*

County	Adults (18+)	Children	Households/Families	Total #
Prince Georges	377	277		654
Howard	***	***	118	170
Anne Arundel	***	***	***	***

*Prince George's County: Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments <http://www.mwcog.org/uploads/committee-documents/ZF1ZVllc20140507152952.pdf> Howard: Howard County Department of Citizen Services http://www.howardcountymd.gov/uploadedFiles/Deleted_Content/Citizen_Services/CoC%20News%20-%20Vol.%201,%20Issue%201.%20March%202014.pdf

The needs in the community: people's individual numbers and experience

Homeless people, and those that are low income are vulnerable to crises because they lack resources in reserve – financial and otherwise. The cost of living, particularly the cost of housing in our area, exacerbates the risk and is often what drives people to LARS for services.

2. **LARS as it is now**

LARS current mission:

LARS currently describes itself as “a non-proselytizing ecumenical ministry serving the Greater Laurel area by assisting homeless and low-income individuals and families who are experiencing a crisis by providing both emergency and long-term services designed to promote self-sufficiency.”

How LARS achieves its mission: its programs

LARS delivers a range of programs that contribute to the achievement of this mission but on very different scales. The emergency services program reached the largest number of people but requires less intensive staff resources. In contrast, program activities “designed to promote self-sufficiency,” reach a much smaller number of clients but use a much smaller proportion of the staff than the emergency activities. Both programs have comparable budgets.

The following provides a summary of LARS' programmatic activities:

Emergency Services

Emergency services include:

- a. short-term financial assistance to prevent evictions and utility stoppage,
- b. assistance with security deposits and first month's rent,
- c. vouchers for eyeglasses, hearing aids, clothing and furniture,
- d. referrals for shelter, assistance with MEAP applications, and
- e. a food pantry which may be utilized by clients once every 30 days.

Please refer to Table 4 (below) for duplicated counts of people who received these services in FY14. Because of eligibility requirements and resource limitations that constrain LARS' ability to accommodate every request, the numbers served actually represent a relatively small proportion of those who ask for help.

Emergency Services are the main focus for LARS' relationship with and support from congregations and for use of volunteers (especially in the food pantry), so this program provides important links with the community.

LARS is currently open for the provision of Emergency Services for three days of the week.

Homeless Supportive Services

Homeless Supportive Services helps provide people who are homeless with help with housing, funds for dental treatment, and help with securing the basic documents that enable an individual to take the first steps towards self-sufficiency – ID cards and birth certificates, and referral to services that can help with mental health and substance issues. The size of the program is limited because of the size of the grant from PG County.

Transitional Housing

The Transitional Housing program is oriented towards helping people achieve self-sufficiency. Specifically, workers help homeless families develop individual service plans where specific goals are identified. Progress toward these goals is monitored through case management visits. Clients who are enrolled in the program are also eligible to receive drug and mental health treatment (through another agency), job search support, including required classes for resume-writing and enhancing interviewing skills, opportunities to attend training classes to learn a skill or trade, parenting and financial management classes, financial assistance for day care, summer camps and educational/recreational programs for their children; and, support through weekly group meetings at LARS.

For some time, however, this program has been under threat. HUD, the sole funding source for this program, has signaled a firm commitment to another model of support (Rapid Rehousing.)

Permanent Housing

LARS provides low-income housing, referrals, and ongoing case management to chronically homeless individuals with mental health and/or physical diagnoses. Clients in this program literally go from living on the streets to living independently in their own apartment. Clients are provided with considerable supports to ensure their success, including case management twice per week, referrals to mental health and/or substance abuse treatment, monthly life skills meetings, and assistance applying for disability benefits. In addition, individual service plans are developed and uniquely tailored to address the needs of each client with the goal of helping them live independently within a permanent supportive housing environment.

Other Programs

Historically, LARS has also run four other programs: a Holiday gift program, a very modest employment program (one day a week,) and back-to-school packs. The Holiday and Back-to-School packs can be seen as extensions of Emergency Services work.

LARS has also provided some case management support for the Winter Shelter that is provided on a rotating basis by local congregations.

Central to all these services is case management and a process that involves client intake, assessment for eligibility for assistance and referrals to other agencies that can provide help that LARS does or can not (e.g. because the terms of its grant precludes it helping;) and, in the case of transitional and permanent housing, sustained support, based on case management disciplines and good practice.

LARS' Results

Although the board does not review results of programs frequently (once a year formally), grants and the local jurisdictions that provide them require careful accounting of the numbers of people served and these are monitored carefully by staff. LARS is required to enter data into the local HMIS – Homeless Management Information System (HMIS.)

In addition, every March, LARS undertakes a survey of clients of Emergency Services and receives reports by clients of how well they think LARS is meeting needs and helping them deal effectively with challenges. And some funder reports: e.g. those for permanent and transitional housing require reports of housing stability, increases in total personal income, increase in earned income and so on. The numbers of people who are served in these cases is just 23/24.

The number of low-income individuals that LARS serves

In FY 2014, LARS assisted a total of 2,733 unique individuals. Historically, it has not tracked income information so the exact percentage of individuals served who are living at or below the poverty line is unknown. However, staff estimated, using anecdotal evidence and experience, that roughly 90% of individuals assisted meet this standard and are at or below the poverty line.

Technically, as provided for in its local jurisdiction funding arrangements and as noted on page 5, LARS helps specifically people in zip codes 20707, 20708, 20723 and 20724, who have an income < 50% of the median in Prince George County. Practically speaking though, it will try and help others who fall outside these criteria, even if only by referring them to other agencies.

Based on the estimated 2013 population numbers, LARS served around 10% of the Laurel population in FY 2014 (this includes homeless individuals.)

The number of homeless people served by LARS

According to the HMIS, there were 167 homeless individuals (over the age of 18) assisted by LARS during the 2014 fiscal year.

The number of clients who return to LARS with a new or recurring crisis

Staff has looked at two data series, one running from 2002 to 2014 and the other from 2011 to 2014. The first series indicates that 12.5% (480 out of 3919,) received Emergency Services more than once; the second that 19% did so (160 out of 835.)

Program number trends – Table 4

Program/Year	Staff Efforts Intensity *	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014
Emergency Services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Individuals and families given rental assistance ▪ Individuals and families helped through the MD Energy Assistance Program ▪ People given financial help to prevent loss of utilities ▪ Food: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individuals helped - No. of bags of food ▪ Employment assistance (with resumes and applications) ▪ Health (help with glasses:) number of individuals ▪ Holiday program: numbers of families and seniors helped with gifts and food 	Medium Medium Medium Low Medium Low Low/Medium Low	165 200 27 2205 11,000 100 N/A 150	170 185 15 2094 10,200 60 50 150	172 255 16 2543 13,159 50 35 145
Homeless Supportive Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Housing case management and support – number of families helped. ▪ Mental Health and Substance Abuse treatment referrals, funds for housing, dental services, ID cards and Birth Certificates: number of individuals helped. 	Medium/ High Low/ Medium	15 65	15 80	15 83
Transitional Housing Number of homeless families helped through individual service plans where specific goals are identified and frequently evaluated for individual progress; weekly case management visits; drug and mental health treatment; job search support, including required classes for resume-writing and enhancing interviewing skills; opportunities to attend training classes to learn a skill or trade; parenting and financial management classes; financial assistance for day care, summer camps and educational/recreational programs for their children; and, weekly group meetings at LARS.	High	16	15	16

Program/Year	Staff Efforts Intensity *	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014
Permanent Housing Number of chronically homeless people with disabilities helped through housing and case management.	High	8	7	7

*Staffing Efforts Intensity indicates the level of staff effort (low, medium, or high) invested in running each program.

Program Impact

LARS does not have a systematic approach to monitoring or measuring the impact of its work. However, it does periodically collect and analyze information that helps quantify impact:

- In the client survey of March 2014, at least 80% of the 76 respondents were positive about LARS case managers' accessibility, responsiveness, effectiveness, empathy, respect and confidentiality. Just over half (54%) reported that all or almost all of their needs had been met while 32% noted that most needs had been met, and 9% that only a few of their needs had been met. Only 5% reported that none of their needs had been met. Virtually all respondents (95%) indicated that the services received at LARS helped them to deal more effectively with life's challenges, of these 66% reported that the services definitely helped them.
- As a way of measuring its success in stabilizing people in a crisis, LARS has recently done an analysis of the proportions of the people who request help and who receive it. In the first four months of fiscal year 2015, 28% of those seeking rental assistance and 15% of those asking for utility assistance, in fact received it. The difference between percentage requesting and the percentage receiving a service can be attributable to eligibility requirements and limitations of funds. The percentage of people who ask for help with food and receive that assistance is much higher, though there is still an assessment of eligibility.

The difficulty in understanding exactly what impact LARS has underlines the importance of agreeing and implementing an effective approach to measuring its results.

LARS' Business Model

LARS has, at first glance, well-diversified funding (please see: **Chart 1: LARS' Income Distribution**)

In fact, LARS has two business models (Table 5, below:)

- Its permanent housing service is funded almost entirely by HUD money, which is passed through from the federal government by PG County. HUD also funds most of the costs of the transitional housing program and all of the costs of the Homeless Support Services. There are a handful of grants from local jurisdictions that diversify LARS' funding, but all three services would disappear if HUD funding was cut.
- Emergency Services has a very diverse funding and support base, including funds from Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) Howard County's

Department of Citizen Services, several private funding sources, including the congregations (Chart 1). Substantial in kind donations in the form of food donations and volunteers are also largely from the congregations.

Congregations provide a significant amount of unrestricted money and congregation members are among LARS' most consistent source of support. They make individual donations, participate in its events, and raise awareness of LARS' mission in many ways (e.g. attend county budget hearings). LARS' relations with congregations are also critical in ways that the numbers cannot show:

- As the founders and sponsors of the organization, the congregations have a claim on the time and attention of both board and staff.
- The legitimacy they confer on the organization in the Laurel community is uniquely valuable: the number and range of congregations that participate with LARS (15 out of Laurel's 21,) represent people of all socioeconomic and political persuasions and constitute a major part of Laurel's civil society.
- That said, the nature of the relationship between the congregations and LARS varies significantly and there is no defined or agreed model for that relationship.

Chart No. 1

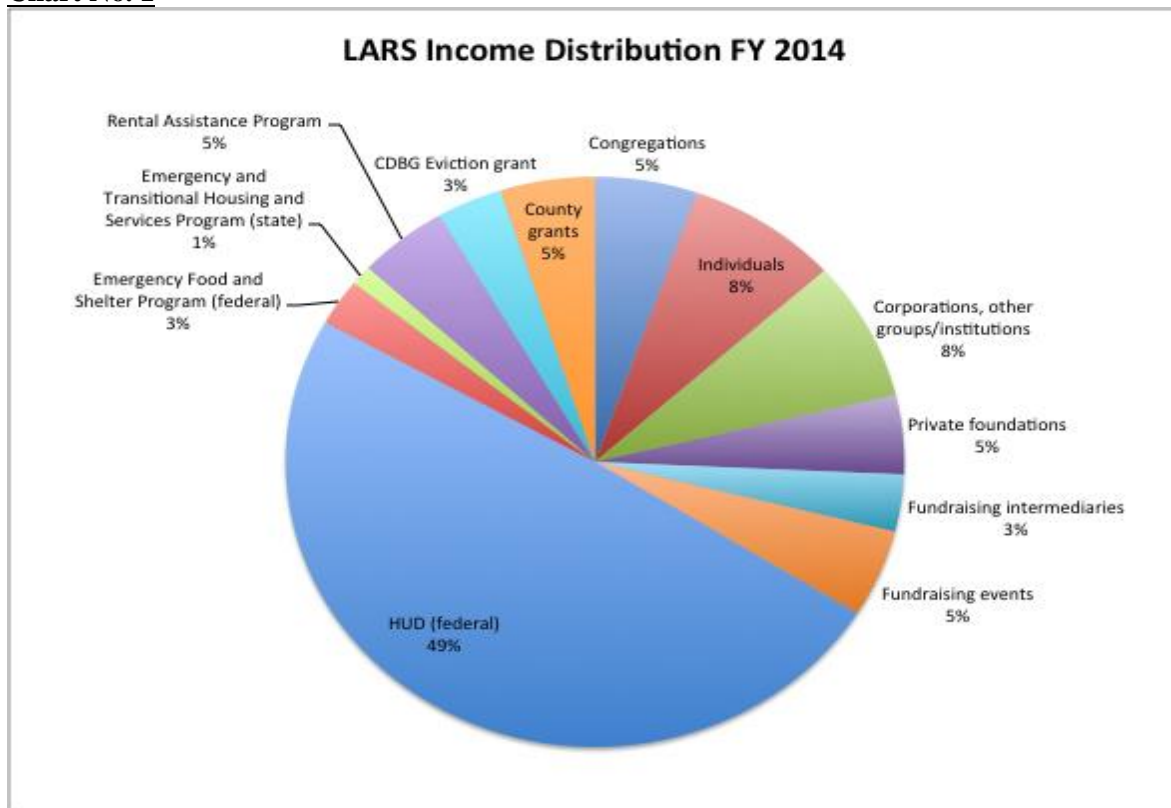


Table 5: LARS' Business Models

<i>Income/Expense item</i>	<i>Emergency Services</i>	<i>Homeless Support Services</i>	<i>Trans. Housing</i>	<i>Perm. Housing</i>	<i>Fund-raising</i>	<i>M&A</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
<i>Fundraising</i>					301950		
<i>HUD Grants</i>		48165	189312	163385			400862
<i>HUD Co-pay/client matching</i>			20000	17819			37819
<i>EFSP Grant</i>	23590						23590
<i>ETHS Grant</i>			10000				10000
<i>Rental Assistance Program</i>			41746				41746
<i>CDBG Eviction Grant</i>	30816						30816
<i>County Grants</i>	25000				19000		44000
<i>TOTAL INCOME</i>	79406	48165	261058	181204	320950		890783
<i>TOTAL DIRECT EXPENSE (incl. allocation of Mgt. And Admin.)</i>	316608	41138	233273	204253	56671	16088	868031
<i>NET INCOME</i>	-237202	7027	27785	-23049	264279	-16088	22751

Income generation capacity

LARS is well embedded with local government and foundation funders and HUD. The importance attached by these jurisdictions to LARS as a critical and long-term player in the local safety net is reflected by their willingness to enable LARS to benefit from CDBG and MD Board of Works grants for construction work on LARS office at 311 Laurel Avenue. The staff has a depth of knowledge of and experience with Federal and county grants and grant compliance. LARS has the capacity, therefore, at least to maintain the current levels of revenue from government sources and might even be able to deepen its relationships with some jurisdictions.

In raising private money, there are several opportunities to increase revenue:

- Although congregations already provide significant resources to LARS, there may also be potential to deepen those relationships and expand beyond the cadre of connected congregations. Specifically, LARS could provide feedback in a planned and consistent way to the congregations that already support LARS. And, more time could be carved out by staff and board members to approach, engage, and offer support for all the Laurel congregations.
- LARS has about 300 individual donors who give to its Holiday Appeal or spontaneously (LARS received around \$10,000 this way in 2014). Of these, 5 gave \$5,000 or more, 7 gave \$1000 to \$4999 and 15 gave around \$500. These are major donors by most small nonprofits' standards. Beyond the standard thank you letters after each gift, there is no coordinated relationship building or stewardship of these donors or even of the people who give smaller amounts. LARS keeps records of these donors in a spreadsheet and of donations in a handwritten log, rather than using donor management software. As a result, LARS has very little information on each donor that it can use to support relationship building and management. For example, the history of each donor's giving over time—

usually a critical piece of information for fundraising purposes— can only be constructed by going through the log.

- LARS has had success in writing private foundation grants: for example, it has received significant money from the Weinberg Foundation. Staff has recently compiled a list of grants for which, at first blush, LARS qualifies. The list contains 38 foundations that make grants of between \$1,000 and \$100,000. These include well known regional foundations such as Meyer and Cafritz that not only make grants of significant amounts —and sometimes for operations—but offer additional legitimacy and gravitas to those they fund.

However, LARS has not been able to take these opportunities because of lack of capacity. For example, many grants have gone unwritten because of a lack of staff time. In order to capture the potential described above, LARS needs (a) a working fundraising database, b) a fundraising plan that lays out the roles of staff and board members, and c) more staff time dedicated to fundraising

Staffing and volunteers

Reflecting the nature of its work and its structure as social work agency, LARS staffing is built around programs and services and the need for clinical supervision of its staff. For example, the two intensive services (permanent and transitional housing,) need dedicated staff and oversight but the volatility of demand in Emergency Services means all staff members are expected to serve these clients. In fact, all staff members engage in programmatic work at some point in a working week, including the ED.

The staff comprises: the Executive Director, a Deputy Director, a Lead Case Manager, one Case Manager each for the permanent and transitional housing services, a part-time case manager who works mainly in Emergency Services, a case manager/volunteer coordinator who has a particular responsibility for handling food donations and the volunteers who work in the food pantry and a Program Coordinator, who runs the Holiday and Back-to-School programs, fundraising activities, including the Turkey Trot, as well doing some casework.

In general, the staff is seen as well qualified, effective, responsive and flexible. As already noted, collectively the staff has a high degree of expertise in case management.

LARS' financial health

LARS is relatively wealthy and its balance sheet is strong:

- It has a current ratio 20:1, compared with a recommended 3:1 for nonprofits (2:1 for businesses.)
- It has building and land valued at nearly \$600k, and just \$84K of mortgage to offset against that.
- It has free reserves: around \$594,000 (as of the end of January 2015) which is equivalent to more than 7 months of budgeted expense (recommended is 3 to 6 months; 'typical' would be 3 months)

Table 6: LARS' Assets

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Current assets	299	465	548	576	607
Total net assets	480	809	1169	1254	1249

The sharp increase in net assets from 2011 onwards can be explained by the financial results in these years: table 7 shows the trends in the main income and expense lines over the last five years.

Table 7: LARS Income and Expense Trends

Income	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014 (est. only)
Congregations	56862	40587	41956	46486	47686
Individuals	86943	66690	77245	56426	71117
Other private contributions	205810	161721	166474	140452	139357
Fundraising events	50251	38951	46937	40467	44180
HUD	399517	402936	433929	443292	438681
Other govt. Funding	417513*	527379*	318089*	157392	163152
In-kind contributions	125000	130000	200000	204000	135000
Other income	2397	3006	1387	1031	1006
Total Income	1344293	1371270	1286017	1089545	1040179
Expense					
Personnel	186208	191314	219251	241099	279496
Program	582976	565204	553757	506621	530979
Fundraising	43305	31800	68995	49702	16451
In kind	125000	130000	200000	192834	135000
Administrative (incl. Dpn.)	68732	168987**	93509	116900	114037
Total Expense	1006221	1087305	1135512	1107156	1075963
Net Income	338072	283965	150505	-17611	-28118

Notes:

- Should be a note corresponding to the symbol in the Table

** Includes loss on asset disposal of around \$75000.

“Other private contributions” = foundations, corporations and fundraising intermediaries

“Other govt. Funding = federal emergency food and shelter funds, state emergency and transitional housing and services program, rental assistance program funds, a CDBG eviction grant and general County grants

The key line is “Other government funding” This includes the CDBG construction grant and/or MD Board of Works grant already described. LARS was able to use this influx of funds and a surge in private contributions in 2010 to increase its net assets to the healthy level it enjoys now and has since maintained that value, despite small losses in FY 2013, 2014 and, likely, 2015. Without the grants for construction, the Net Income for the years FY 2010 to 2012 would have been: \$168472, -\$25495, and \$10066, respectively.

All this said, LARS has reverted to a break-even existence. This leaves little room for significant programmatic growth, for which repeated surpluses are needed. The reserves do provide the possibility for a one off investment in activity, in program or fundraising, which yields financial gains and/or improvements in effectiveness.

Going forward, however, LARS faces a significant challenge in maintaining this current strong financial position:

- The recent loss of income entails a total reduction in revenue of between \$100,000 and \$150,000 from the level of FY 2014 (approximately \$900,000). This loss of income will result in deficits in the same range - between \$100,000 and \$150,000.
- LARS needs additional funds to help maintain its Permanent and Transitional Housing Program started in the 1990s, when fair market rent was much lower than it is today. HUD only reimburses LARS at the original rental rate from when the program began over a decade ago. Since costs are likely to keep rising, the current small surplus on the transitional housing is likely to shrink and then become a deficit.
- In general, jurisdiction and federal budgets are under severe pressure.

Governance

Throughout the planning process, participants have suggested that the board may need to review its own composition and develop its operations so that it will be best equipped to support the achievement of the strategic plan. Board members have made the following observations about the board and its work:

- All agreed that the board is very thorough in its oversight of finances.
- All agreed that there are significant differences in the levels of engagement by board members.
- There is not a consistently applied, structured recruitment process or a formal orientation for new board members. This may be due, in part, to congregations selecting their own representatives.
- Some expressed concerns about whether the current board “fits” the future vision and mission of the agency. For example, should congregation appointments be augmented by recruitment of professionals and community members?
- There is not as much outreach to funders or direct fundraising by board members as in the past.
- Although the ED reports on numbers served, the board has not concentrated routinely on the results of services in their own right. Agenda are driven by reports, rather than the most important strategic issues of the moment (though the board has very clearly prioritized strategic planning.)
- There is uncertainty about how the board evaluation of the ED works.
- There are relatively few policies to help board decision-making (e.g. on reserves.)

3. What’s happening in LARS’ environment?

Demand for services

There is no reliable set of indicators of likely demand for LARS services. However, demand for LARS’ services is likely to grow: Laurel’s economy is assumed to largely keep pace with that of the state and Greater Washington DC region and so is unlikely to show dramatic improvement that might help people at risk of falling into crisis and, since the population of Laurel is forecast to grow, then the number of people who will need LARS’ help will likely grow with it.

Availability of funds and other forms of support

As for most nonprofits, many sources of funds are being cut or are at least under pressure. For LARS, we have made the following assumptions in this plan:

- HUD’s threat to withdraw funding from transitional housing is a serious one but has been hanging over LARS for several years. We have therefore assumed that the funds will still be available going forward. If HUD acts on the threat, we will probably have to close the service, a major issue, but there would be few implications for the overall finances of LARS if all the associated expenses can be eliminated.

- There is potential funding for LARS from private foundations and individuals (Income Generation Capacity, pages 12 and 13.) This is mainly because LARS has not yet tapped those sources. More importantly, foundations should have more funds for grants looking forward because their endowments have improved significantly in the last three years. Individual giving tends to track the stock market indices, which have also improved.
- Businesses, especially local firms, also offer modest opportunities, mainly because they have not been cultivated.
- Support from congregations should at least stay stable overall, and offers the potential for a modest increase.
- We have made the same assumption that donations of food and volunteer time will remain at least the same level over time.

What other organizations do

Since LARS is only able to provide short term crisis assistance to emergency service center clients, they work closely with a number of organizations in order to meet client needs that cannot be addressed in-house. Clients are regularly referred to the North-Laurel Savage Multiservice Center for financial coaching, and Consumer Credit Counseling Service for debt management. LARS makes referrals to partner organizations like Success in Style and A Wide Circle for clothing and furniture. LARS has also established a partnership with Prince George's County's Department of Social Services, which has resulted in a DSS case manager working out of an office at LARS once per week; this case manager assists clients applying for public benefits including food stamps and Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA). There are also many agencies providing services to veterans and/or individuals with a mental health diagnosis; LARS regularly refers clients to these agencies for more in-depth and regular services. The activities and fundraising of other nonprofits and service organizations, including those run by local jurisdictions, provide the potential for both competition for funds, but also as alternative sources of assistance for LARS clients. These other entities may or may not offer better services that make a bigger difference to their lives. The organizations that have been researched and assessed as part of the planning process are these:

- The Laurel North-Savage Multiservice Center, a Howard County human services base offers financial assistance and makes some use of a self-sufficiency matrix. It appears the Center has just started using the matrix to determine who might qualify for certain case management services; it also uses the matrix for tracking the progress toward self sufficiency of clients. As most clients apparently keep returning for financial assistance, clients do not appear to have achieved self-sufficiency.
- The Salvation Army offers some of their core programs in Maryland, including emergency utility help and eviction prevention. It is unclear what their presence in Laurel is. Their main locations are Hyattsville in PG, a center in Anne Arundel County and a 'service center' in Howard.
- People Encouraging People is a large behavioral nonprofit 'corporation.' They have bases in Baltimore, their main focus, Glen Burnie and Hyattsville. Of their 10 services, only two deal with homelessness and housing, for which they have very few clients at present.
- Sarah's House is affiliated with Catholic Charities, serves people in Anne Arundel County only, offering emergency and transitional housing, case management, childcare, GED classes and other supports. They do not work with a self-sufficiency model but do measure recidivism.
- House of Hope is an ecumenical organization that offers emergency, transitional and permanent affordable housing to poor people and the homeless in Anne Arundel. Like LARS, it has relationships with several congregations. It also offers healthcare support, a day center and a social enterprise that provides employment.
- The Laurel Regional Workforce Center is part of the State's workforce programming, with the 'jobs first' approach of the Workforce Investment Act. The Center has a strong focus on GED

qualifications as well as placing people in jobs and claims high numbers for people both securing and retaining jobs.

- Way Station is primarily a mental health group, based in Columbia and part of a national organization. It offers supportive housing to people with behavioral health issues.

The main conclusion of this analysis, as it relates to nonprofits offering services to similar populations to LARS, is that they and LARS overlap somewhat but more generally complement one another. LARS is the only organization that focuses on Laurel. Even where the lists of services offered by agencies look similar, in reality, each has a different specialty or emphasis or covers a slightly different geographical area. For example, People Encouraging People has a focus on people with mental illness; several, as their names suggest (e.g. House of Hope,) offer shelter; others offer health care. The general conclusion about services provided by government entities is similar: they offer some services that seem to overlap with those of LARS but, in practice, they have proven complementary, at best, or inadequate, at worst. For example, PG County offers emergency services but only for families with children under 21 and only at 18-month intervals, “when funds are available.” Like other counties in the area, they rely on and partly fund private groups like LARS to provide a more robust service. The exception is the Laurel Regional Workforce Center, as described above, which is the dominant agency in employment in the area.

The analysis has pointed to a clear need and potential for strategic collaboration between all these agencies to better serve the clients in common and to minimize potential conflicts in fundraising.

4. LARS’ main strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT)

The strengths and weaknesses that we believe are critical to the formation of LARS’ plan for the next 3 to 5 years are as follows:

Strengths

- LARS is the main source of help for people with basic needs in Laurel. Based on the estimated 2013 population numbers and the data on the number of people it assisted, LARS served around 10% of the Laurel population in FY 2014 (this includes homeless individuals.)
- A knowledgeable and skilled programmatic staff, with professional social work skills, with particular strengths in emergency services, including food services, and a high degree of flexibility.
- Especially deep skills in case management (LARS’ “core competence.”)
- Deep roots in the community, especially through its physical presence in the community in the form of 311 Laurel Avenue and of its relationships with congregations.
- Good relationships with jurisdictions.
- Currently, a strong balance sheet, with more than the recommended levels of reserves and relatively well-diversified revenues, even if with a break-even operating budget.

Weaknesses:

- The wrong balance between short-term emergency services - a “band-aid,” and support to people to help them become genuinely self-sufficient. This leads to a high ‘recidivism’ rate.
- Although LARS applies a structured approach to its work with clients, it has not so far adopted a program ‘model’ that ensures consistency and has proven outcomes.
- There is no systematic and sustained tracking of the impact on the lives of clients of LARS’ services.
- Currently, there is only the funding for LARS Emergency Services to be accessible three days a week.
- There is not enough staff capacity devoted to high return fundraising; more professional fundraising skills are needed.

- The staff does not have the computer technology with which to deliver services and manage LARS as efficiently as possible.
- There is an acknowledged need for board development.

The main external factors are these:

Opportunities

- Private funds, especially from foundations and individuals, remain untapped.
- There are a number of people who use LARS' emergency services repeatedly and so could benefit from assistance that will help them achieve self-sufficiency.
- There are a number of service models in use around the country that can be leveraged by the high quality of case management in LARS and which are of proven impact and can allow LARS to standardize and benchmark the measures of its impact.
- There are several organizations that offer more potential for partnership than is exploited now. Examples include the Multi-Skills Center, Elizabeth House and the Workforce Development Center. There is a clear need and the potential for strategic collaboration between all these agencies; no one person, group or institution leads or coordinates services in the area.
- Relationships with congregations and jurisdictions could be strengthened and expanded.

Threats

The threats to LARS as an organization are:

- The loss of annual revenue from FY 2016 onwards of up to \$150,000.
- Policy shifts, especially in HUD, away from support services and transitional housing to rapid housing.
- The way in which the four counties in which Laurel sits pass off responsibility from one to the other.
- A generally hostile funding environment, particularly around government dollars.
- As LARS seeks to raise more money from people in its community, it may encounter competition, albeit limited, from other agencies, for example, the Route One day center.
- A lack of clarity about the nature of the relationship between LARS and the congregations.

The main threats to LARS' clients that we have identified are these:

- A lack of affordable housing.
- Trailer park clearances, and the corresponding reduction in affordable housing.
- The difficulty of accessing credit.
- Poor transportation locally.
- A shortage of affordable daycare.

5. LARS' Vision, Mission and main strategies to achieve these

Using an analysis of this 'SWOT' and drawing on some of the key discussions that have taken place during the planning process, we have identified the main goals and strategies that we believe will best achieve our mission. We have also defined the ways in which LARS plans to answer some questions that arose in the planning process and are seen as important enough in their own right to be addressed with specific strategies.

- How will we fill the income gap that appears likely from the beginning of the next fiscal year?

- How will LARS respond to the change of policy away from support services and transitional housing by HUD?
- How LARS can measure its results, learn from them and use them to raise more money, serve more people and, where appropriate, effect policy change?
- In the light of the threat to transitional housing and the generally tight budgets of jurisdictions, whether LARS should advocate more to directly influence policy?
- Given its importance to how effectively LARS can address these questions, how can it best develop the board (its composition, structure, mechanics of operation and accountability,) so that it is as effective as possible?
- What is the optimal purpose and nature of LARS' relationships with congregations and the contribution they make to the identity of LARS and developing those relationships so that congregations become more involved?
- How does LARS ensure staff stability (for example, by providing opportunities for staff members to grow and ensuring satisfactory benefits)?

The remainder of this section of the plan describes LARS' vision and mission, outlines medium-to-long-term (3 to 5 year,) strategies for LARS, and defines the short-term (1 to 3 year,) priorities and the answers to these specific questions.

Vision and Mission

In order to ensure clarity and ensure thorough discussion of what LARS aims to achieve, we have used the planning process to review the mission of the agency and introduce a simple vision – a view of how we want our community to be.

LARS' vision is of a community that treats all people with dignity and helps everyone meet their basic needs.

LARS' mission –its contribution to this vision is to enable homeless and low-income people in Laurel who are in crisis to achieve stability and long-term self-sufficiency.

This statement of the mission affirms LARS' commitment to the Laurel area, eliminates the description “a non-proselytizing ecumenical ministry” that is contained in the previous mission wording and strengthens the level of LARS' public commitment to its clients achieving stability and self sufficiency. Going forward, success has to be measured in terms of clients achieving these states, rather than the extent to which LARS provides services, which in turn requires addressing the critical question about how it can measure its results.

How LARS will achieve its mission: the medium-to-long term (3 to 5 years)

LARS seeks to serve significantly more people and serve them better. In our planning discussions there was a high degree of agreement on the main goals that need to be achieved and the strategies for achieving these goals in the long run. These strategies build on LARS' strengths and exploit the opportunities in its environment that are there to take.

Goal	Strategies	Measures of success
To increase the number of people in crisis served who resolve their crisis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify best practices and benchmarking against other agencies in similar fields. Increase access to LARS Emergency Services (e.g. by increasing no. of hours that LARS is open.) Increase outreach to people who are homeless and in crisis. Enhance partnerships with other agencies, e.g. credit counseling agencies. Provide 'wrap-around' services to clients with severe needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number served. The rate of recidivism: the proportion of people who keep returning to LARS with the same or similar problems. The rate of stabilization: the proportion of people served who report that they have resolved their problem. The speed of the resolution of problems. The number of people that LARS' support prevents from becoming homeless.
To increase the number of people in crisis who achieve long-term self-sufficiency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify best practices and benchmarking against other agencies in similar fields. Enhance partnerships with other agencies, especially social service organizations, to include partnering agencies working in LARS' programs. Provide sustained, longer-term, 'wrap-around' services to clients. Refer clients for substance abuse and mental health treatment. Support clients to claim their benefits. Support homeless clients to secure permanent housing. Support clients to secure educational qualifications and/or a job. Establish effective data collection and using the results to improve services and raise money and awareness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number served. The number of people who are homeless. Changes in the number of people of low income who are at risk. Changes in housing status. Changes in employment status. Changes in income and financial assets The number of clients who obtain relevant education qualifications. The number of clients in move of benefits. The number of clients to self - advocate. Changes in personal and family relationships.
To improve the community infrastructure of support for people who are homeless and low income.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead the agencies engaged in helping people in the area stabilize and achieve self-sufficiency. Increase community outreach, starting with the congregations and focusing on engaging community members, e.g. through volunteering opportunities. Pursue advocacy aimed at securing policies and funding that support stability and self-sufficiency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The level of engagement of the main other nonprofits and the government agencies in the area. The level of engagement of community groups of different kinds. Changes in policy and funding that support stability and self-sufficiency.
To establish effective data collection and use the results to improve services and raise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define the measures that will best indicate progress in achieving the first two goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The adoption of the tool for capturing and analyzing data. The adoption of an agreed set

Goal	Strategies	Measures of success
money and awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the data that will allow us to track these measures. Develop or adopt a tool for capturing and analyzing these data. Establish routines and disciplines for using the data for reviewing progress, learning and for improving programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> of measures. The extent to which the tool and measures are used. The frequency and use of outcome reports and analysis.
To increase LARS' organizational capacity so that LARS can open for more days in the week and serve more people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the number of staff in program. Secure professional fundraising skills Optimize the use of staff skills, especially in case management, through organization design, matching of skills to tasks and appropriate use of volunteers and interns. Build the case for employees remaining at and for others to want to join, LARS. Train staff, especially in the core area of case management. Implement a comprehensive board development strategy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased numbers served. Increased quality of service. Evidence of staff motivation. Evidence of increases in staff skill levels.

How LARS will achieve its mission: the short-to-medium term (1 to 3 years)

In the immediate future, LARS room for maneuvering is limited. It presently doesn't have the capacity with which it can increase services. Given that we have identified that there are likely additional revenues, particularly from individuals, foundations and small businesses, we could have anticipated building out programs and enhancing our impact by raising this extra money. However, it will be difficult to do that without first, or at the same time, filling the "gap" in revenue of \$100,000 to \$150,000 projected from FY 2016 onwards. We believe we need to address this challenge while building a foundation for future program growth:

- A. LARS will change its income strategy to increase the amount of money it receives from grants, individuals, congregations and local businesses by repurposing the time spent by a current member of staff (rather than seeking new investment). This change will also help further anchor relationships with congregations. To accomplish this, however, LARS will need to re-examine how it interfaces with these other entities, particularly congregations.
- B. LARS will choose proven service models for stability and self-sufficiency that both leverage its core case management and other professional skills and provide a degree of standardization that will enhance LARS' ability to achieve client stability and self-sufficiency. These kinds of models also allow LARS' staff to learn from other organizations by, for example, comparing and benchmarking results. In developing this plan, LARS has assumed that the gains in efficiency and efficacy attributable to these models can be achieved without an increase in the number of program staff.
- C. Program staff will pilot the application of the new self-sufficiency model with a limited number of users of the Emergency Services in FY 2016, assess the impact, and then expand the use of the model to a larger number of clients in FY 2017, as appropriate.

- D. After identifying the optimal solution and identifying a funding source, LARS will implement a system/structure designed to capture and analyze data on its programs and services and report on their impact. It is estimated it may take up to two years to fully absorb and integrate the system into LARS' operations; the speed of full integration may also depend on securing dedicated staff time. This step is essential to LARS goals of measuring its impacts, which in turn will enable it to make the business case for more funding, which is a prerequisite for expanded programming.
- E. The LARS Board will review its roles and responsibilities, composition, policies and practices and develop and implement a board development plan so that it can oversee and support the implementation of this plan.

While these changes are made, LARS will maintain its current level of operation. In addition, it will maintain its usual vigilance on jurisdictions and their planning and budgeting, to ensure that we can defend any funding streams that need it. For the purpose of this plan, we have assumed that LARS will not engage in advocacy or program development work beyond what it currently undertakes and/or is described here, because all available staff and staff leadership time needs to be devoted to current operations and supporting just these five changes.

Staff has begun work on developing operational plans for an income strategy and for operating the new program models and tracking data, and the board has identified the main elements of a board development plan:

Income strategy

The main potential changes identified so far are:

- To re-categorize some classes of revenue, especially Individual donors, which will now combine the current 'Individuals – Public,' the 'Holiday Appeal' and the Newsletter.
- To transition the majority of the time of the Program Coordinator to planning and implementing a fundraising plan for congregations, foundation grants and individual giving.
- The purchase of an industry standard fundraising software package that will allow for the capture of relevant information about people who give or have some other form of relationship with LARS (like being on the mailing list or participating in the Turkey Trot.)
- To transfer the details that LARS does hold on individuals from the handwritten log and spreadsheets where the information is held currently into the new donor base program.
- To develop a plan to test different types of appeals to donors who give less than \$500 and to identify and research major donors, those who give \$500 or more.
- To create a schedule of grants that LARS will write over the rest of this fiscal year and during FY 2016.
- To create a plan for securing support from Laurel's congregations and being good stewards of such support through which LARS will enhance its relationships with Laurel's congregations.

Operating new program models

The staff has provisionally planned as follows:

- It has identified the Roberts 7 Stage Crisis Intervention Model as the main candidate for work intended to help people stabilize their situation and the Bridge to Self Sufficiency (BTSS) for the new work to support clients to achieve that.
- It has developed a set of eligibility criteria for each of these program models. For the stability model, the criteria are comparable with current Emergency Services criteria and include the grant restrictions used currently, as well as Laurel only zip codes. The self sufficiency criteria proposed include that the

person is an individual, that basic needs are already met, that there are no (major) barriers to obtaining and maintaining employment, HS diploma/GED, that the client is clean from all substance use, is willing to meet with the case manager once per week and shows some evidence of being motivated to change.

- It is evaluating client assessment tools. The staff plans to use LARS intake assessment tool and an additional crisis evaluation tool for clients seeking financial assistance; and a self-sufficiency matrix to assess vulnerability in various domains, as well as quality of life and debt/asset assessment tools.
- Staff is also proposing the following Program Outcomes for FY 2016 – FY 2018

Emergency Services:

- Number of individuals served is expected to remain about the same as previous years (~1100 unduplicated households served)
- Success rate for rental (currently 22%) and utility assistance (currently 15%) will depend on grant availability, but aim for a 3-5% increase each year. For rent assistance: FY2016-22%, FY2017-25%, FY2018-30%
- Food assistance should remain at 100%

Self Sufficiency Support:

- First year: 1-2 clients per Case Manager
- Second/third year: 5-8 clients per Case Manager
- With a full-time SS case manager, once affordable: 15-20 clients

Tracking Data on Impact

As described previously, fundamental to this achievement is acquisition of a client-tracking database. All case managers will be trained to enter data into a consolidated system, allowing staff to run reports across all Emergency Services and Self-Sufficiency programs

Staff proposes to measure the impact of programming initially, as follows:

- Financial Assistance (i.e. rental and utility assistance): impact of services will be measured using data from a survey administered at time of entry (baseline), exit, and 30 days after exit. These results would be captured at a very basic level by creating an excel spreadsheet to include the client's name and survey results and client income secured (# of points total, if we are able to identify a tool that can be scored) at the various intervals.
- The Self-Sufficiency Program: depending on which assessment tools we decide to use, these tools will be administered at entry, 3 months, and 6 months (and if necessary, 9 and 12 months) of service in order to determine if progress has been made. Again, a spreadsheet can be created and assessment tool results can be logged on this document.

Board Development Plan

- The board will make these overall changes to the way it works:
 - Ensure board members have a shared understanding of the needs of the people that LARS serves and of how LARS can make the biggest differences in their lives.
 - Clarify and affirm the main roles and responsibilities of nonprofit board members and the particular priorities of the LARS board required by this strategic plan and its priorities.
 - Identify any gaps in experience and skill-sets that the boards' agreed priorities require.

- Develop a plan through which the board will recruit new board members that will fill these gaps.
 - Develop a plan to enhance the board's performance as a board. This will include a board self-assessment, board member job description, a board expectations agreement; agendas being planned around the main elements of the strategic plan and monitoring of progress by reviewing summary data on key, agreed, measures.
 - Clarifying the board's expectations of support from staff for its work and of the respective roles of board and staff members.
- There may be specific changes in the board and in the way it works that will help the achievement of the goals of this plan:
 - Recruitment of some new members who will help lead the board's contribution in raising funds from individuals.
 - Training of all board members in raising funds from individuals.
 - A plan to engage board members appropriately in enhancing relationships with key partners, including jurisdictions and other local institutional funders.

Specific strategic questions

- *How will we fill the income gap that appears likely from the beginning of the next fiscal year?*
As the financial projections show, (please see Table 8, below,) we will not fill this gap, under current assumptions, until the third year of this plan. We believe that the income assumptions that we have made are realistic and imply significant improvements in both fundraising capacity and performance. While it would be possible to project higher revenues to reduce the deficit more quickly, we believe this is impractical.
- *How will LARS respond to the change of policy away from support services and transitional housing by HUD?*
LARS' transitional housing service is its only current investment in helping people build self-sufficiency. The commitment in this plan to increase the provision of services designed to help people achieve self-sufficiency is a response to the threat of change from HUD, as well as an important goal in its own right. The loss of a transitional housing service would not represent a financial loss to LARS - it effectively breaks even.
- *How LARS can measure its results, learn from them and use them to raise more money and, where appropriate, effect policy change.*
As this plan describes (pages 23-24), LARS will invest in a new client tracking database and train staff in how to use this and institute management practices that ensure effective review and learning from the new information that is captured.
- *In the light of the threat to transitional housing and the generally tight budgets of jurisdictions, whether LARS should advocate more to influence policy.*
In the long run, LARS is likely to engage in policy advocacy. As the plan describes, in the short run, we do not have the staff capacity or the board readiness to undertake such work.
- *Given its importance to how effectively LARS can address these questions, how can it best develop the board (its composition, structure, mechanics of operation and accountability,) so that it is as effective as possible?*
We will address this important need by building a plan to develop the board, as described on pages 23-24.

- *The need to clarify the purpose and nature of LARS' relationships with congregations and the contribution they make to the identity of LARS and developing those relationships so that congregations become more involved.*

The board has agreed to task some of its members to lead systematic outreach to all congregations in Laurel and develop a plan through which their support can be enhanced. A specified member of staff will support this work.

- *Ensuring staff stability (for example, by providing opportunities for staff members to grow and ensuring satisfactory benefits.) is critical to our success.*

The board will work with the Acting Executive Director to review the benefits of staff and how they compare with those offered to the staff of other organizations and take any steps required to ensure that they are competitive.

A critical discipline will be to keep this plan under constant review, especially our progress in income generation: if more income is raised than is assumed in the plan's projections (please see section 6, below,) then regular review of the plan will allow the board to consider advancing the developments planned for the longer term (please see pages 20 and 21 above.)

6. Financial Implications

We have projected finances for the remainder of FY 2015 and for FYs 2016, 2017 and 2018. Although this plan envisages broad changes in the longer term, we have not included any assumptions about these in the financial projections. We have also adopted a very simple approach to the expense side of the equation, which is to keep the totals line by line the same as in FY 2015. There will, of course, be changes in expense, especially in the form of salary changes and some low level fundraising expense but, for the purpose of this draft, we have assumed that these will be covered by corresponding if modest increases in HUD and other statutory funding, or in cost control measures. Our main focus has been on revenue streams. Our main assumptions for the main revenue line items are as follows:

- An increase of around \$8,500 from FY 2015 levels in the two subsequent years from congregations, in response to planned outreach and communication.
- A significant increase in individual donors' giving in keeping with improved information that allows LARS to build relationships.
- Foundation grants increases based on the assumption that the grants writing strategy will secure 2 or 3 new grants of 10,000 to 20,000 each year.
- A modest amount of money from local businesses in each year.
- One successful new fundraising event – a 5K.
- No change in state, county or HUD funding.

Table 8: LARS Projected finances, 2015 to 2018, based on proposed strategic plan

Revenue	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018
CFC National Cap. Area	1,000.00	1,000.00	1,000.00	1,000
City of Laurel	1,000.00	1,000.00	1,000.00	1,000
Congregation Donations-Schedule 1	55,100.00	55,000.00	55,000.00	55,000
HUD Co-Pay/client matching	45,000.00	40,000.00	40,000.00	40,000
HUD Grants-Schedule 2	399,318.00	399,318.00	399,318.00	399,318
Individuals	69,000.00	94,000.00	119,000.00	139,000
Local Independent Charities (LIC)	35,175.00	35,175.00	35,175.00	35,175
Businesses	10,000.00	15,000.00	15,000.00	20,000
Fannie Mae Foundation	0.00	0.00	0.00	
PG County Grants-Schedule 3	213,590.00	133,590.00	133,590.00	133,590
Payroll Campaigns (UW MD)	2,000.00	2,000.00	2,000.00	2,000
United Way	3,500.00	2,000.00	2,000.00	2,000
MD-Food Grant	13,000.00	12,132.00	12,132.00	12,132
Foundations	40,000.00	65,000.00	90,000.00	100,000
Howard County-CSP-Technology	4,200.00	0.00	0.00	
Howard County-CSP	25,000.00	25,000.00	25,000.00	25,000
Running events	44,500.00	41,500.00	41,500.00	41,500
Other income	3,000.00	3,000.00	3,000.00	3,000
Total Revenues	964,383.00	924,715.00	974,715.00	1,009,715.00
Total Expenses	1,002,883.00	1,002,883.00	1,002,883.00	1,002,883.00
Surplus/Deficit	-38,500.00	-78,168.00	-28,168.00	6,832.00

7. How the plan will be used

Board and senior staff are committed to embed this strategic plan in the work of the organization in these main ways:

- As a means for the board to review progress against the measures for each goal.
- To drive the board and staff meeting agendas.
- To ensure accountability through the alignment of staff members' goals with the plan's direction and goals.
- As the basis of reports from the staff to the board.
- To provide a basis for planning personal development of staff members.
- As a support and basis for fundraising work.
- For internal and external communication.