

# Reaching for Tomorrow: Building Community and Transforming Lives

**A Strategic Plan  
for the  
Cheltenham Township Library System  
July 2013 – June 2018**



***Appreciation is extended to the following people for their contributions, hard work and dedication in creating this plan for the Cheltenham Township Library System:***

**Strategic Planning Committee**

Barbara Kotzin, Chair (Library Board)  
Stephanie Campbell (Library Staff)  
Christopher Cerski (Community)  
Barbara Duffy (Community)  
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**Library Board**

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**Appreciation is also extended to the Township Commissioners who graciously consented to participation in personal interviews about the Library**

**Township Commissioners**

Art Haywood, President  
Kathy A. Hampton  
Charles D. McKeown  
Daniel B. Norris  
Harvey Portner  
J. Andrew Sharkey  
Morton "Mickey" J. Simon

**Last, but certainly not least, appreciation is due to the hundreds of Cheltenham Township residents who participated in the plan through their attendance at focus groups and/or by completing one of the several surveys that were conducted as part of the planning process.**

## INTRODUCTION

The Public Library has been an important part of American life for well over a century. Public libraries have served as a “door to learning” for generations of children, as the “people’s university” for knowledge seekers of all ages and as a dependable source of access to information for thousands of individuals seeking to better themselves and their communities. Libraries have been the places that people could turn to for answers to their questions, for a good book to read or a good movie to watch in their leisure time and, in recent years, for a connection to a world of online resources. Libraries have served as centers of community life where people of the community come together for informative programs or simply to meet their neighbors and friends.

The Cheltenham Township Library System is facing significant challenges in 2013. Tax dollars are hard to come by at a time when record numbers of individuals are turning to public libraries for access to job-seeking resources, affordable recreational opportunities and answers related to important life decisions. The Internet and the proliferation of laptop computers, smart-phones, tablets and e-readers are changing the way a new generation of readers, listeners and viewers acquire content. While some of the mechanisms used to acquire content are changing, the public library service model of acquiring once for the benefit of many is more vital than ever. Opportunities for lifelong learning are essential to the development of a prosperous economy and thriving communities. Libraries must embrace change while preserving fundamental print-based services that will continue to be valued well into the future.

For a number of years, the Library has struggled to balance the community’s desire for smaller neighborhood-based libraries with the cost of maintaining four separate facilities. A great deal of time and effort were expended in the planning process to examine the important questions related to this issue. While there are many compelling reasons to consider a consolidated model, it became apparent that the existing economic climate makes the pursuit of such a solution impractical at the present time. Consequently, the approach of enhancing some of the existing facilities and working to replace the Elkins Park facility with a new building has been adopted for this plan.

The plan that follows is built on two key concepts that are characterized as “desired futures.” The plan is designed to ensure that the Cheltenham Township Library System remains VITAL to the entire community and that it is SUSTAINABLE well into the future. The Library maintains its place as the Township’s most heavily used service. The value of the contributions that the Library makes to the quality of life in the Township is incalculable. Join us as we discover a new future for one of the Township of Cheltenham’s finest and most respected institutions!

## **THE PLANNING PROCESS**

This Plan is the result of many months of hard work by a 16 member Strategic Planning Committee comprised of citizen representatives as well as Library Board Members and Library staff members. The Committee met on four occasions throughout the process.

The Committee considered a significant amount of information that came directly from residents of the Township. A total of 265 individuals responded to a mail survey distributed to 1,000 randomly selected households. Another 813 residents participated through web-based surveys. Focus groups involving the public and staff netted another 117 and 21 participants respectively. Finally, six of the seven Township Commissioners made their valuable time available to contribute through personal interviews.

Demographic data, cost estimates for a variety of facility development scenarios and a host of library input and output statistics were also analyzed as part of the process.

## **A FINAL NOTE TO READERS OF THE PLAN**

Readers will note that a strategy and a series of potential actions are listed under each of the plan's goals. The actions are organized using an approach that is loosely based on a planning methodology called "balanced scorecard" planning. Balanced scorecard planning was developed by Dr. Robert S. Kaplan and Dr. David P. Norton. Simply stated, Norton and Kaplan pointed out that successful organizations need to consider the implications of their actions from multiple perspectives. This plan looks at each goal from five different perspectives. They are:

- Customer
- Products & Services
- Organizational Effectiveness/Efficiency
- Human Resources
- Financial

The strategies and the actions that are presented represent a general course for moving forward. A detailed plan, which breaks each of these actions into specific tasks (including how the success of the actions and tasks will be measured) that are spread across the five years covered by the plan, has also been developed. This highly detailed document will be used as the Library's internal "action plan." The Library Board will review and modify the plan and will refine the measures used to evaluate success on an ongoing basis.

# CHELTENHAM TOWNSHIP LIBRARY SYSTEM STRATEGIC PLAN

## Vision Statement

*Building Community, Transforming Lives*

## Mission Statement

*The Cheltenham Township Library System fosters the joy of reading, inspires a love of learning and encourages the sharing of ideas by providing free access to information and technologies that enlighten, inspire and delight.*

## Values

The Cheltenham Township Library System (CTLS) is guided by the following values in everything it does:

### **RESPECT FOR THE COMMUNITY**

- The Library celebrates the rich diversity of the Cheltenham community and respects every individual. CTLS strives to promote the building of strong bonds between and among neighbors and to help create a cohesive community.

### **INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM**

- CTLS respects every individual's privacy and his/her right to explore a wide variety of ideas. The Library strives to provide free resources and programs that offer a broad spectrum of viewpoints on an extensive range of topics.

### **EXCELLENCE IN CUSTOMER SERVICES, STAFF & RESOURCES**

- The Library strives to maintain excellence in customer service and to continuously develop the knowledge and skills of its staff and the quality of the resources it provides.

### **STEWARDSHIP/INTEGRITY**

- CTLS recognizes that it "belongs" to the people of Cheltenham Township and, as a result, manages the public's investment in the Library wisely to sustain quality services.

## CREATIVITY, FLEXIBILITY AND INNOVATION

- The Library endeavors to be creative, flexible and innovative in responding to the needs of the community by continually incorporating new technologies and best practices in a timely manner to benefit its customers.

## DESIRED FUTURES

The future of the Cheltenham Township Library System and of the community will be different if the strategic plan is fully implemented. The future that the Library wants for itself and for the community can be summarized in two “desired futures” statements.

They are:

- **The Library is a VITAL community asset.** The people of the community are served by a Library that provides valued and relevant resources, programs and services that are constantly changing to reflect the needs and desires of the public. The community recognizes the positive impact that the Library has on the lives and welfare of individuals.
- **The Library is SUSTAINABLE.** The people of the community are served by a Library that is future-oriented. The Library cultivates future generations of users and is a good steward of the funds entrusted to it and strives to provide the public with the highest possible return on its investment.

These “Desired Futures” are captured in the words **VITAL** and **SUSTAINABLE**. The Goals of the Plan are organized under these two categories.

The Plan outlines eight strategies designed to help it achieve the desired futures. While all eight strategies address both of the desired futures to some degree, four of the strategies focus more on the **vitality** of the Library, one equally addresses both vitality and sustainability, and three concentrate more on the **sustainability** of library services.

The four strategies focused on **vitality** are:

- **Retain the customer base of users of traditional library materials**
- **Cultivate the new generation of library users**
- **Facilitate community discourse and the development of “One Cheltenham”**
- **Expand the Library’s role as a primary access point to the online world and a portal to digital content**

The strategy that equally addresses **vitality** and **sustainability** is:

- **Grow new readers**

The three strategies that focus on ***sustainability*** are:

- **Provide library services at safe, clean and efficient library facilities**
- **Ensure that all residents are aware that the Library has information and services that are relevant to their lives**
- **Ensure that Cheltenham Township residents receive a high return on their investment in the Library**

## THE PLAN

### THE LIBRARY IS A VITAL COMMUNITY ASSET

**GOAL 1:** *Residents of all ages in Cheltenham Township will continue to have free and convenient access to a wide range of high-quality traditional library resources, services and programs that contribute to the quality of life in the community and enable them to succeed at work, at school, and in their personal lives.*

**Rationale:** The Cheltenham Township Library System is widely respected in the community. The public recognizes many of the Library's strengths, such as its collection, extensive children's programming, and outstanding customer service. While the Library must be innovative and must develop new, technology-based mechanisms for the delivery of service, interest in and the use of traditional print resources remains high. Because the taxpayers place a high value on these traditional resources and services, an ongoing effort must be made to preserve and enhance them.

**Strategy:** Retain the customer base of users of traditional library materials

#### Potential Actions:

##### Customer

- Continue to offer collections of high-quality print materials that are adequate to meet the needs and demands of the public
- Identify ways to offer enhanced educational and cultural programming for adults and implement these measures
- Enhance virtual and in-person readers' advisory services
- Ensure that users of traditional materials are aware of the digital resources that are available to them

##### Products & Services

- Improve the "browsability" of library collections through user-friendly/intuitive arrangement of shelving, enhanced displays and improved signage
- Enhance the homelike quality of reading areas in the libraries to accommodate the public's desire to spend more time during each visit



### **Organizational Effectiveness**

- Improve the quality and breadth of collections by increasing the centralized coordination of collection development
- Explore the concept of “floating collections” to enhance the public’s access to library materials
- Conduct a feasibility and cost analysis study to determine the potential for the implementation of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology including RFID self-check, RFID-based security systems and automated materials handling systems (AMHS) that increase efficiency and enhance the customer experience
- Explore reprogramming of space in the library facilities to achieve greater efficiency

### **Human Resources**

- Increase the staff’s capacity to serve through training, the provision of quality work tools and technology and by streamlining processes

### **Financial**

- Improve ongoing tax-based funding for operational support of basic library services and supplement funding for enhanced programming and outreach with non-tax revenues and through strategic partnerships

## **THE LIBRARY IS A VITAL COMMUNITY ASSET**

***GOAL 2: Residents of all ages in Cheltenham Township will be offered relevant resources, services and programs delivered in non-traditional ways that save a new generation of technologically savvy library users time and money and contribute to their personal success and quality of life.***

**Rationale:** In addition to print materials, the Library already provides a wide variety of physical materials in digital formats including audiobooks on CDs and movies on DVDs. It is offering downloadable audiobooks and e-books for use on e-readers and other handheld devices. The Library affords access to a wide variety of online informational content ranging from general databases (e.g., Reference USA) to education and employment related resources (e.g., Māngo Languages and Learning Express). The Library is also actively using social media to connect directly to current and potential library users. The Library must continue to remain abreast of technological innovations and must implement new and emerging content delivery methods if it is going to remain relevant to a new generation of library users.

## **Strategy: Cultivate the new generation of library users**

### **Potential Actions:**

#### **Customer**

- Enhance efforts to acquaint customers with the process of downloading library resources to their e-readers, tablets and other handheld devices
- Continue to expand connections with library users and potential library users through greater use of social media
- Increase the awareness of digital resources among users of more traditional library materials
- Develop a “continuum of service” for people of all ages that links services targeting one age group to services that target the next older age group to foster the development of new generations of library users
- Increase the comfort-level of users of traditional library materials in using digital resources

#### **Products & Services**

- Increase the quantity and range of downloadable resources
- Expand the promotion of the availability of downloadable resources as the quantity and range of offerings increases
- Adopt a “virtual branch library” strategy for the ongoing development and enhancement of web-based services that treats the Library’s website as a full-service access point similar to a branch library
- Create physical spaces that highlight new technologies and create environments conducive to using them
- Work with other libraries and library organizations to advocate for more advantageous treatment of libraries by vendors of digital content
- Enhance communications efforts designed to communicate the availability of services that may be relevant to people who don’t regularly use the Library

#### **Organizational Effectiveness**

- Explore the formation of a high-tech library advisory group comprised of residents and representatives of local businesses and non-profits that possess exceptional information technology expertise and resources
- Continue to work with other libraries and library organizations to obtain the most advantageous pricing on the licensing and distribution of proprietary digital content

- Use technological-based solutions to teach customers how to use library technologies (e.g., YouTube videos and other online tutorials)

### **Human Resources**

- Review job descriptions and increase the expectation that all staff will acquire appropriate technological competencies
- Develop a comprehensive program designed to provide all staff members with the enhanced technological knowledge and skills they need to serve the public

### **Financial**

- Identify and implement metrics that guide the division of funding allocated for the acquisition of print and digital resources
- Identify ways to increase expenditures on downloadable resources while maintaining the high quality of print collections

## **THE LIBRARY IS A VITAL COMMUNITY ASSET**

***GOAL 3: Residents of all ages in Cheltenham Township will be fully engaged in community life and will enrich their quality of life by taking advantage of opportunities provided by the Library to interact with their fellow residents/citizens.***

**Rationale:** Libraries are centers of community life that help build a sense of community and encourage civic discourse. The residents of Cheltenham Township indicated strong support for an enhanced role of their libraries as community gathering places and for enhanced programming in the focus groups and surveys that were conducted as part of the planning process.

While the staff needed to plan and implement enhanced educational and cultural programming for adults is in short supply, the Library needs to work to respond to the public's desire for enhanced opportunities for interaction and civic discourse.

## **Strategy: Facilitate community discourse and the development of “One Cheltenham”**

### **Potential Actions:**

#### **Customer**

- Enhance meeting room facilities and the overall customer experience in the libraries
- Use customer/potential customer preferences to inform decisions regarding hours of operation

#### **Products & Services**

- Identify and implement ways to offer enhanced adult programming
- Enhance physical facilities to make them more accessible, comfortable and inviting to encourage people of all ages to spend more time in the Library and to interact with each other
- Install appropriate technologies and more comfortable seating in meeting rooms

#### **Organizational Effectiveness**

- Review policies regarding meeting room use and revise to encourage constant use of meeting facilities

#### **Human Resources**

- Develop an enhanced volunteer program designed to recruit and train individuals who can support Library staff in their efforts to increase the quantity and enrich the quality of adult program offerings
- Explore the potential of allocating additional staff resources to program development and implementation
- Increase the coordination between and among branches on the development and implementation of programming

#### **Financial**

- Pursue grants and gifts to supplement public funds available for programming purposes

## THE LIBRARY IS A VITAL COMMUNITY ASSET

***GOAL 4: The people of Cheltenham Township will consider the Library to be a dependable access point to the online world (public computers and Wi-Fi access) and as an essential portal to digital content.***

**Rationale:** Access to the Internet has become a necessity in a digital world with a global economy. A connection to the online world has become essential to apply for many jobs, to file many governmental forms and to pursue an education in many fields. Public libraries provide the primary access to the Internet for a significant number of people. Furthermore, as more individuals begin to acquire a larger and larger percentage of their information in digital formats, the library will play an increasingly important role as an aggregator of demand and as a supplier of high-quality digital content through licensing agreements with publishers and with suppliers of costly information databases. By providing connections to the online world and by offering access to quality fee-based digital resources at no direct cost to the end user, the Cheltenham Township Library System can provide valuable services to a growing segment of the population that may visit the Library's online presence as much or more than they visit the Library's facility.

**Strategy: Expand the Library's role as a primary access point to the online world and a portal to digital content**

### **Potential Actions:**

#### **Customer**

- Engage young professionals and "digital natives" to increase their awareness of digital content offerings and services
- Offer frequent opportunities for the public to be trained to use library resources on e-readers and other handheld devices
- Implement efforts consistent with Library 2.0's user-driven service model

#### **Products & Services**

- Enhance the user friendliness of library facilities for the users of laptops, tablets, e-readers, smartphones and other handheld devices
- Expand digital content offerings
- Enhance web presence and content available through the Library's website

### **Organizational Effectiveness**

- Work with MCLINC to expand bandwidth available for internal library functions and for library customers
- Adopt best practices related to technology and piggyback on the development of digital applications and services developed by other libraries
- Attempt to anticipate emerging technology needs in order to prepare to meet customer demands quickly and efficiently

### **Human Resources**

- Review job descriptions and increase the expectation that all staff will acquire appropriate technological competencies
- Develop a comprehensive program designed to provide all staff members with the enhanced technological knowledge and skills they need to serve the public

### **Financial**

- Increase ongoing operational support for digital services and supplement funding for advanced technology-based services with non-tax revenues and through strategic partnerships

## **THE LIBRARY IS A VITAL COMMUNITY ASSET AND THE LIBRARY IS SUSTAINABLE**

***GOAL 5: The children of Cheltenham Township and their parents/caregivers will have access to programs and services that prepare children to enter school ready and eager to learn while imparting the joy of reading and fostering a pattern of lifelong learning.***

**Rationale:** Providing young children with opportunities to develop early literacy skills in a supportive and enjoyable environment is critical to their success in school and, ultimately, to the development of an informed citizenry and the preservation of a democratic society. The Library is uniquely suited to assisting families and schools with this important goal because it has resources and programs for pre-school children and is open evenings, weekends and during the summer when schools are closed. By enabling children to experience the joy of reading and by providing resources and guidance to parents and caregivers, the Library can play an important role in ensuring that children enter school ready and eager to learn and can foster a pattern of lifelong learning.

The Library also plays a major role in lifelong learning that encompasses people of all ages. Creating a “continuum of service” in which library users are guided into new relevant resources and services as they mature is essential to maintaining the Library’s ability to foster lifelong learning.

**Strategy: Grow new readers**

**Potential Actions:**

**Customer**

- Engage all families with young children in the Township, not just those who are already motivated to take advantage of library services
- Develop mechanisms to transition preschoolers and primary-age children into services for older children, teens and adults as they mature

**Products & Services**

- Review and refine children’s services to maximize appeal to and impact on families with children
- Review and refine children’s programming to emphasize the relationship between the activities and learning readiness
- Enhance the children’s service areas by making them more colorful, engaging and whimsical in ways that enhance their capability to serve as learning environments
- Maintain a focus on making the introduction to books and reading “fun”

**Organizational Effectiveness**

- Adopt best practices used by exemplary libraries to maximize the impact of services to children
- Maintain a high level of collaboration with the school district, daycare facilities and other community partners with a stake in pre-literacy and literacy efforts

**Human Resources**

- Maintain the level of youth services staffing and work to increase staff capacity through the provision of training and opportunities to interact with youth services’ staff from other libraries

## **Financial**

- Maintain operational support for children's services and work to increase supplemental funding for enhanced programming and outreach with non-tax revenues and through strategic partnerships

## **THE LIBRARY IS SUSTAINABLE**

***GOAL 6: Residents of all ages in Cheltenham Township will have access to library services offered from safe, clean, efficient and well-maintained facilities.***

**Rationale:** Digital resources offered through the virtual/web presence of public libraries are increasingly important; however, physical library facilities have also grown in importance for 21<sup>st</sup> century public libraries. Unfortunately, the Cheltenham Township Library System's facilities are aging and are inadequate to support the full range of 21<sup>st</sup> Century library services envisioned and desired by the public.

While there are many sound reasons to consider the consolidation of Cheltenham Township Library System services into a single facility, the preference of many Township residents for neighborhood libraries coupled with the costs associated with building a large centralized facility make a consolidated solution impractical at this time given the current economic climate. Consequently, the approach of enhancing some of the existing facilities and working to replace the Elkins Park facility with a new, expanded building in the near future will be pursued.

**Strategy: Provide library services at safe, clean and efficient library facilities**

### **Potential Actions:**

#### **Customer**

- Identify and implement ways to enhance the customer experience in the libraries
- Increase the amenities offered to the public to encourage individuals to visit more frequently and to stay longer when they visit
- Use customer/potential customer preferences to inform decisions regarding hours of operation

#### **Products & Services**

- Identify ways to offer enhanced educational and cultural programming for adults and implement these measures



- Enhance physical facilities to make them more accessible, comfortable and inviting to encourage people of all ages to spend more time in the Library and to interact with each other
- Enhance the quantity (by reallocating existing space and, in some instances adding new space) and quality of meeting room spaces
- Install appropriate technologies and more comfortable seating in meeting rooms
- Commence planning for the replacement of the Elkins Park Library with a new, larger facility

### **Organizational Effectiveness**

- Ensure that library buildings are well-maintained to enhance user safety and to eliminate costs related to deferred maintenance

### **Human Resources**

- Explore the allocation of additional staff resources to program development and implementation
- Increase coordination between and among branches on the development and implementation of programming
- Develop community partnerships to ensure the preservation and enhancement of library facilities

### **Financial**

- Seek commitments for ongoing support for maintenance of existing facilities from tax-based funds and support for enhancements through charitable/philanthropic sources
- Seek commitments for a specific level of tax-based funding for efforts to replace the Elkins Park facility with a larger, more accessible building
- Begin work to secure private/charitable/philanthropic contributions for the replacement of the existing Elkins Park facility

## **THE LIBRARY IS SUSTAINABLE**

***GOAL 7: The people of Cheltenham Township will be aware of what the Library has to offer and will consider it to be an essential community asset that is relevant to their lives.***

**Rationale:** Many people in the community are unaware of the nature and scope of the services provided by the Library. This was illustrated in the mail and web surveys that

were conducted as part of the strategic planning process. The surveys asked respondents to identify resources and services that could be added that would encourage them to use the Library or to use it more frequently. Many respondents mentioned services that are already provided, indicating that they were not aware of what the Library currently offers. Making sure that the public is aware of services that are offered that are relevant to them will maximize use of resources and will therefore increase the public's return on investment of every tax dollar allocated for library purposes.

Public libraries also enjoy considerable support from individuals who do not regularly use them but who recognize the contribution that libraries make to the overall quality of community life. Ensuring that the entire community is aware of what the Library is doing will ensure essential ongoing support.

**Strategy: Ensure that all residents are aware that the Library has information and services that are relevant to their lives**

**Potential Actions:**

**Customer**

- Increase public awareness of relevant resources through focused efforts to reach targeted audiences
- Communicate the value of the Library to those who don't regularly use it through traditional media and new social media outlets

**Products & Services**

- Enhance communications efforts designed to communicate the availability of existing services that may be relevant to people who don't regularly use the Library

**Organizational Effectiveness**

- Employ technology and social media as well as more traditional methods to communicate with targeted audiences
- Explore alternative communication outlets to reach target audiences
- Enhance relationships with community organizations as a strategy to reach broader audiences

**Human Resources**

- Conduct staff and Board surveys to better understand the connections to community organizations that already exist

- Build on existing connections and initiate new ones by establishing formal Board and staff liaisons to key community organizations
- Extend staff capacity through the use of student internships and opportunities for student projects that further the Library’s public awareness efforts
- Train and equip every Board and staff member to serve as “library advocates”
- Grow library advocates among library Board members, members of library Friends’ organizations and among the general public

**Financial**

- Secure in-kind donations of professional services and seek grant funding to support public awareness efforts

**THE LIBRARY IS SUSTAINABLE**

***GOAL 8: The people of Cheltenham Township will receive exceptionally high-quality public library service at an affordable cost by implementing new technologies and best practices and by supplementing public tax support with gifts, grants and bequests.***

**Rationale:** Securing additional tax-based funding for library services in the current economic climate will be extremely difficult; however ongoing stagnant budgets actually represent the beginnings of a downward spiral of services. While implementing some components of the plan will undoubtedly require additional public support, the Library also recognizes that it must continue to provide both existing and emerging services as efficiently as possible and to supplement tax funding with charitable/philanthropic support during this period of economic uncertainty.

**Strategy: Ensure that Cheltenham Township residents receive a high return on their investment in the Library**

**Potential Actions:**

**Customer**

- Communicate the Library’s needs and the financial realities faced by the Library to the public on an ongoing basis

- Structure requests for support from the public in terms of “value propositions” (Specify the benefits that grow out of the requested financial support)

### **Products & Services**

- Identify products and services that are increasing and decreasing in relevance and adjust budget priorities to reflect these realities
- Quantify the benefits the community receives because specific services are provided

### **Organizational Effectiveness**

- Conduct a feasibility and cost analysis study to determine the potential for the implementation of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology including RFID self-check, RFID-based security systems and automated materials handling systems (AMHS)
- Establish ongoing benchmarking/continuous process improvement relationships with other exemplary libraries to identify best practices and emerging labor-saving technologies
- Work with the Library Board and with the individual Library Friends’ organizations to clarify fund-raising and fund-development responsibilities
- Work with the Library Board and with the individual Library Friends’ organizations to determine fund-raising and fund-development priorities and targets

### **Human Resources**

- Provide staff with training that prepares them to undertake benchmarking/continuous process improvement efforts
- Engage staff in benchmarking/continuous process improvement efforts designed to streamline operations
- Provide opportunities for key individuals in the Library administration, on the Library Board and in the Friends’ organizations to gain additional knowledge and skills related to fund-raising and fund-development

### **Financial**

- Work to identify core services and enhanced services and seek ongoing tax support for the adequate support of high-quality basic services
- Identify enhanced services and seek charitable/philanthropic support for these services using a “prospectus” approach