



2022-2026

STRATEGIC PLAN

Community Services
Employment Training

www.cset.org

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A MESSAGE

Since 1976, CSET has served the residents of Tulare County as the Community Action Agency for our region. We are dedicated to fighting America's War on Poverty through innovative strategies, coalition building, education, and providing those in need access to vital resources.

Our mission is to inspire youth, families, and communities to achieve self-reliance through innovative pathways and collaboration. At CSET, we believe that everyone deserves to achieve the American Dream.

We are indeed living in unprecedented times. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Tulare County residents have faced incredible barriers, such as job loss, access to affordable housing, homelessness and so much more. CSET, with many of our partners, kept our doors open and came together to collaborate and meet the need for more services and expanded safe access to programs. We are proud to say that with inventive thinking and agile staff, we were able to keep our doors open and continue serving our community.

During this last year, our Strategic Plan Committee has analyzed regional data and gained feedback and ideas from our partners, supporters, and customers across Tulare County. Focus groups, community surveys, as well as local, county, state, and federal reports on the quality of life determinants have informed this plan, which will guide our work for years to come. We are pleased to share the results of our Strategic Plan committee's hard work. Thank you to the many people who support our mission and have made this work possible.



*- Mary Alice Escarsega-Fechner
Executive Director*

As a member of the CSET Board of Directors, I am proud to have been part of this process. Tulare County is a unique community and CSET is dedicated to raising the quality of life for everyone. Being part of this organization is a rewarding experience as we have the opportunity to connect with so many people who are directly affected by our work.

This Strategic Plan is the culmination of thousands of hours of research and hundreds of voices from the people we serve. These seven goals and objectives stated here will guide our work as we aim to provide the tools and resources necessary for Tulare County residents to thrive. We thank everyone who has provided their valuable input and time to this project. Our organization is better because of you. Thank you.



*- Gordon McClaskey
Chairman of the Board of Directors*



AGENCY INFORMATION

Services

FAMILY & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

- Senior Services
- Family Resource Centers
- Public Works & Urban Forestry
- Recycling Services
- Substance Use Prevention

HOUSING RESOURCES

- Utility Assistance
- Home Weatherization
- First Time Homebuyer Counseling
- Foreclosure Counseling
- Keep Your Home CA

FINANCIAL STRENGTH & EMPLOYMENT

- Employment Connections
- Volunteer Income Tax Assistance
- Bridge Loan Fund
- Supported Employment
- *Next Step*/Welfare to Work
- Biz Hub

YOUTH & YOUNG ADULTS

- Sequoia Community Corps
- John Muir Charter School
- TECH Connect
- #LEAD
- Youth@Work
- Youth Transitions

Departments

COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

CSET's Community Initiatives Department manages a variety of family development, senior support, and capacity-building programs. These programs promote community visioning, train community leaders, and strengthen the residential, business, and familial assets of local communities. Each program is designed to reduce the causes of poverty through strategies that unite residents and improve neighborhoods. Resources provided by the department include Senior Services, Family Resource Centers, Housing Support Services, Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA), and the Bridge Loan Fund. Community Initiatives is dedicated to the development of safe and prosperous Tulare County communities where youth, families, and businesses thrive.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

CSET provides workforce development services that help local businesses succeed by training residents of all ages find their path to good jobs. These services are funded by the Workforce Investment Board of Tulare County (WIB), Tulare County Health and Human Services Agency, Kings/Tulare Area Agency on Aging, and others. CSET provides career services through the Employment Connection – a proud partner of America's

Job Center of California Network. Businesses attend specialized workshops to speak with job seekers who learn about employment opportunities. Employment Connection services can pay partial wages for a customer placed at a local business, saving money for the business while the customer learns job skills. Youth gain work readiness and leadership skills, plan for college and careers, and gain valuable experiences through paid work-based learning and internships.

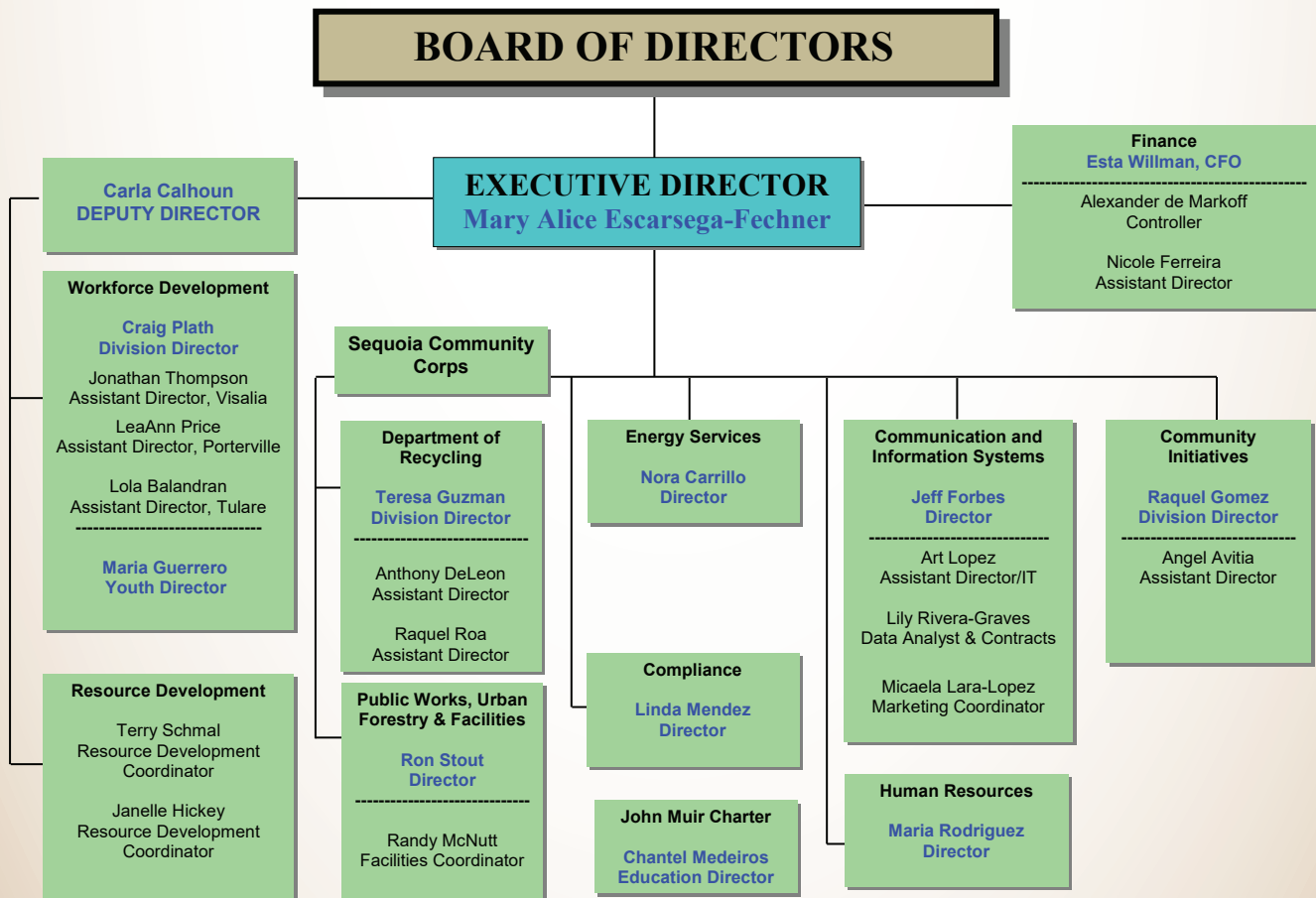
ENERGY SERVICES

Energy Services offers a range of programs that support families on their path to self-sufficiency. The Energy Assistance program provides utility bill payment assistance, while the weatherization program reduces heating and energy costs by installing energy efficiency measures in the home. Residents learn how to conserve energy and reduce utility costs. We are proud to offer programs that improve the health and safety of Tulare County families.

SEQUOIA COMMUNITY CORPS

The Sequoia Community Corps (SCC) offers vocational training in the trades of construction, home weatherization, urban forestry, recycling, electronic waste collection, oil collection, and recycling education. For more than 30 years, the SCC has provided more than 4,000 young adults in Tulare and Kings Counties with valuable job training and educational opportunities. Young adults, veterans, and individuals who have experienced homelessness find the support, skills, and opportunities to gain good work in a crew setting. The SCC also assists local governments, agencies, and businesses to meet critical community needs such as park development, recycling services, and natural resource conservation in local recreation areas.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



Introduction

As the Community Action Agency for Tulare County, CSET has provided access to crucial resources and tools for individuals to break the cycle of poverty. Since 1976, CSET has helped hundreds of thousands of local residents gain the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to achieve self-sufficiency. We serve to reveal the greatness that is in everyone by providing education and training, facilitating youth and community development, and creating jobs and resources. Our purpose is to reduce the causes of poverty. We envision healthy, prosperous and safe communities - communities where a good life can be found and native sons and daughters return to raise the next generation of Tulare County citizens.

This Strategic Plan recognizes the unique needs of our local residents, outlines our goals, and informs our work plan so we are most effective in our mission. In December 2020, CSET began the process of updating the Strategic Plan to set our course for 2022 through 2026. It includes new strategies to help residents and communities navigate the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and incorporates a renewed emphasis on social, racial, and gender equity. This Strategic Plan also addresses the impacts of climate change, such as the ongoing drought and dangerous wildfires, and access to technology to help bridge the digital divide, especially as CSET pivoted its own business operations and assisted students and families to adapt to distance learning. As we navigated the turbulence of this once-in-a-century pandemic, CSET continued to keep its doors open by quickly adopting new methods of operation and building on our strengths as a key community organization in Tulare County. These experiences strengthened our ability to meet future challenges with empathy, innovation, and creativity.

Throughout the year in 2021, the CSET Strategic Planning Committee has met regularly to conduct comprehensive research on the current needs of Tulare County residents. This research coincided with the creation of CSET's Community Action Plan (CAP). The CAP was developed by conducting a large-scale survey of CSET customers and community partners, which was distributed in English and Spanish. Additionally, a review of state, federal, and local reports on unemployment levels, poverty, crime, language, family structure, environmental issues, health outcomes, and many more quality of life factors provided important insights on the state of Tulare County. Finally, focus groups were held with community members and CSET stakeholders to gain firsthand accounts on how we can best help people meet their needs. All of this information was compiled in the CAP and has assisted the committee in updating the Strategic Plan.



The results of these efforts framed CSET's vision for meeting the changing needs of Tulare County residents. This plan will guide our organization as we develop programs and services that assist individuals reach self-sufficiency. We are honored by the participation of a wide cross section of customers, board members, community leaders, staff, and others who have made this plan possible.

This strategic plan is a living document, which will be revisited twice a year by the Board of Directors. Implementation will include refining specific annual goals for each department and tracking their progress until they are either completed or no longer reflect community needs.

Community Overview

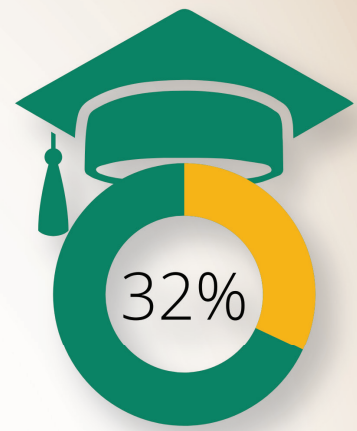
In Spring 2021, CSET conducted a thorough Community Needs Assessment and Community Action Plan, which guides the development of the 2022 – 2026 Strategic Plan Update. These documents provide important insight on the challenges and strengths of Tulare County, the community CSET has served since 1976.

Covering nearly 5,000 square miles in the agricultural heartland of the Central Valley, Tulare County is home to people from all walks of life, many of whom are faced with the challenges of persistently high poverty. Tulare County is home to 461,898 residents, with 65% identifying as Hispanic or Latino. Non-U.S. born citizens make up 22% of the population. Over half of the population speaks a language other than English at home (United States Census Bureau, 2019).

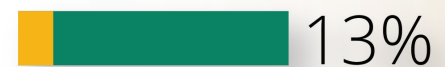
As of March 2021, the unemployment rate in Tulare County was 11.6%, much higher than the California state unemployment rate of 8.5%, and national rate of 6.6% (Employment Development Department of California, 2021). While every community in the United States has experienced a tremendous loss of employment opportunities due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Tulare County's unemployment rate rose up to 15% during the height of the pandemic (California Employment Development Department, 2021). This reflects the significant loss of restaurant, retail, and other customer service jobs affected by closures. Those who have suffered the most from the economic impact of the pandemic were already low- to very-low-income individuals.

The local median household income is \$49,687 – 28% less than the California state average. With intergenerational poverty affecting families across the county, residents rely on networks of local food banks, charitable distributions, and food stamps; 22% of households receive food stamps in comparison to the state average of 9% (American Community Survey, 2019). Many issues contribute to the problem of poverty such as completing high school education, obtaining vocational or job training, costs of higher education, transportation or access to vital resources, and the lack of affordable housing in the area.

The need for education and workforce development opportunities for the next generation is indicated by the number of children living in poverty. An estimated 44,633 children under the age of 18 are living below the poverty level in Tulare County, including 12,057 children under the age of 5 and 32,576 children ages 5 through 17. In addition, an estimated 26,476 adults ages 18 to 34 as well as 30,522



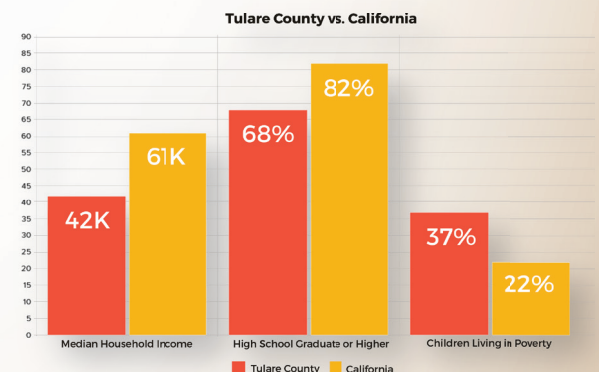
Adults without a high school diploma or GED in Tulare County



High school dropout rate in Tulare County



Agricultural jobs in Tulare County is nearly seven times that of the state and national averages



adults ages 35 to 64 are living in poverty. Finally, of those ages 65 years and older, 6,881 are living below the poverty level.

In Tulare County, our senior citizens are at an increased risk of the negative health effects of living in poverty due to a lack of job opportunities, illness, disability, or other serious factors which prevent them from obtaining the resources they need to survive. According to the California Association of Area Agencies on Aging, 40% of California's older adults do not have income to meet basic needs and 1 in 5 cannot afford to put food on the table. In Tulare County, CSET has experienced the needs of the elderly by operating eight senior centers throughout the County and providing thousands of nutritious home-delivered meals for those who are in need. In fiscal year 2020-2021 alone, CSET served more than 140,000 meals to Tulare County senior citizens facing food insecurity.

One of the biggest challenges faced by low-income individuals and families in Tulare County is housing costs; 53% of all residents do not own their home (American Community Survey, 2021). Households that are already struggling in California as a whole spend over half of their income on housing, more than twice the rate of households not living in poverty (United Way, 2019). Recent studies by the National Low-Income Housing Coalition estimate the state of California is experiencing a deficit of almost 1 million affordable and available rental homes for low-income individuals (NLIHC, 2021). With the many economic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, CSET found that those who have been most financially impacted are families who were already living at or below the federal poverty line.

Like many areas across California, Tulare County has experienced a steady increase of individuals experiencing homelessness. The Kings/Tulare Homeless Alliance (KTHA) reports a 61% increase in homeless individuals residing in the region since 2011 with a 22% increase since 2019. Of these individuals, 15% have children with them and 45% identify as Hispanic or Latino (Point in Time Report, August 2020). Due to the incredible numbers of jobs lost during the COVID-19 pandemic, these numbers may continue to rise. As of October 2021, in Tulare County alone, more than 48,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 were documented. While testing and vaccination rates are increasing, the economic impact of the pandemic on our community will be felt for a long time (California Governor's Office, May 2021).

Health is another major concern for residents in Tulare County, ranking as the 5th lowest in the state (53 out of 58) for overall health factors including healthy behaviors, clinical care, social and economic factors, and physical environment (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation 2020 County Health Rankings & Roadmaps). Tulare County's health outcome ranking has consistently been in the bottom eight California counties since 2016. Air quality has received an "F" grade from the American Lung Association every year since 1996, and is among the worst areas in the nation for unhealthy air. Obesity has continued to worsen since 2011, negatively affecting the health of more than 36.3% of Tulare County adults, which can lead to a multitude of additional negative health outcomes. The effects of climate change have had a tremendous impact on California as a whole, with over 7,000 wildfires occurring in the first nine months of 2021 (CalFire and US Forest Service YTD Wildfire Statistics, 2021). In the summer of 2021, people living in multiple rural communities were under mandatory evacuation orders due to the dangerous proximity of the fires.

Safety has generally improved in Tulare County. According to the State of California Department of Justice, violent crimes across Tulare County have decreased by 19% and property crimes decreased by 31% since 2010. Gang violence in Visalia has been on a steady decline since 2007 and continues to have less of an effect on the community as a whole (Visalia Police Department Annual Report, 2019).

This understanding of our community shapes the services we provide. Coupled with qualitative and quantitative data and feedback from customers, partners and staff, this data provides the foundational understanding of the communities we serve. The Strategic Plan is our guide for how to deliver needed services in an accessible and friendly environment. We will work with our staff, Board of Directors, and partners to consistently meet the programmatic needs of our community and support the infrastructure of our organization as we work together to help individuals, families and communities achieve self-reliance.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The culmination of CSET's strategic planning process identified seven priorities to address CSET's mission of inspiring our community to achieve self-reliance through innovative pathways and collaboration. These goals and objectives provide the framework for CSET to meet the nuanced needs of our customers while building a strong internal foundation.

GOAL 1

Provide the full range of coordinated services residents need to achieve self-sufficiency.

As the Community Action Agency for Tulare County, CSET's primary role is to provide low-income individuals and families the tools they need to become self-sufficient and escape poverty. These services are provided through four strategic areas: Workforce Development, Community Initiatives, Energy Services, and the Sequoia Community Corps.

Objectives

A. Increase availability of energy-efficiency programs for low-income families.

CSET's Energy Services Department will increase energy-efficiency programs in Tulare County such as home weatherization to reduce utility costs, and utility payment assistance for those who are struggling to cover their monthly bills.

B. Improve community spaces through community and conservation projects and provide environmental awareness and education.

The Sequoia Community Corps will contribute to safe parks and clean neighborhoods to improve the quality of life for community residents. These efforts will also provide vocational training for SCC participants and expand opportunities for vulnerable groups such as veterans and those experiencing homelessness to re-join the workforce.

C. Maximize access to resources and provide services that link education, job training, and career services for all ages and backgrounds.

CSET's Workforce Development Department and Sequoia Community Corps will increase economic opportunities for job seekers by providing access to quality education and paid training. These efforts will include information and access to education pathways, vocational training, work experience and internships, job placement, financial education and more for adults, senior citizens and young adults. CSET will continuously engage with businesses to ensure our training services reflect the skills required of local employers.

D. Increase resiliency through parenting support programs and provision of essential services.

CSET's Community Initiatives Department will facilitate parenting support programs and provide for the basic needs of families and senior citizens. These services will be provided through Family Resource Centers and Senior Centers located throughout Tulare County.

GOAL 2

Expand services to provide vital resources to vulnerable populations and underserved families.

CSET will identify and remove potential barriers that could hinder low-income individuals and families navigating a pathway toward self-sufficiency. CSET will regularly assess the ever-changing needs of communities to guide program development and implementation.

Objectives

A. Design and implement outreach strategies for reaching underserved populations in rural communities.

CSET will reach community members living in rural areas by increasing targeted outreach efforts, expanding virtual services, and partnering with other service providers. This work will include maintaining and deploying mobile outreach units to reach isolated populations, with a specific focus on smaller communities of Tulare County to ensure everyone can access CSET's vital resources.

B. Identify and validate service needs by engaging community members and customers in the evaluation of CSET programs and services.

CSET will solicit and analyze feedback from the communities we serve on a consistent basis. CSET will reach out to program participants, community partners, and staff to ensure the organization learns from the diverse voices impacted by our work. Tools will include customer service surveys, focus groups, and increasing engagement on social media.

C. Expand availability and accessibility of programs and resources by removing barriers to participation.

CSET will evaluate accessibility of programs and services to identify potential barriers and find solutions to overcome them. CSET recognizes the unique challenges faced by specific populations of our community such as senior citizens, individuals with disabilities, and immigrant families. CSET is dedicated to providing important information in multiple languages and offers virtual intake appointments for program enrollment, tax preparation services, job coaching, and other services when available. Additional efforts may include expanded office hours, mobile service offerings in rural communities, virtual programming, and other innovative ideas which provide convenient access for CSET customers, volunteers, and staff.



GOAL 3

Improve living conditions and quality of life for Tulare County residents.

Providing pathways to self-sufficient communities requires access to affordable housing, services to assist in housing and employing individuals who are experiencing homelessness, and services that assist individuals in developing assets.

Objectives

A. Increase access to safe and secure housing.

CSET will increase access to safe and secure housing through rent and mortgage assistance, emergency shelter assistance, and foreclosure counseling. To further increase stability for renters and homeowners, CSET will provide home weatherization, utility assistance, and linkages to other community resources such as low-income housing provided by our partners.

B. Strengthen homeless prevention and outreach programs.

CSET will strengthen homeless prevention efforts by participating in initiatives addressing homelessness, providing advocacy and education on needed services, and providing programs for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. Our internal referral system will be used to provide access to other services, such as employment training, to prevent individuals from falling into the cycle of chronic homelessness.

C. Provide asset development programs that lead to home ownership and business development.

CSET will encourage a culture of financial sustainability by investing in programming that fosters asset development for low-income individuals. These efforts will include entrepreneurship and small business training, first time homebuyer workshops, foreclosure counseling, and financial literacy workshops for youth and adults.

GOAL 4

Assist low income residents in becoming active stakeholders within their communities.

When residents are invested in their communities, their contributions benefit themselves and their neighbors, helping to lift everyone simultaneously while holding leaders accountable. Together these efforts create meaningful, long-term change and more equitable opportunities for all.

Objectives

A. Provide training and opportunities for youth and adults to develop leadership and advocacy skills.

CSET will equip local residents with the tools and skills to effectively navigate and participate in leadership roles and empower them to take ownership of their communities and become agents of change. High school students learn to prepare for college, rural residents gain the skills to participate in school boards and community meetings, and young people are prepared to address community challenges, such as homelessness.

B. Increase volunteer training opportunities.

CSET will provide volunteer opportunities for young people and adults to give back to their communities while gaining skills that contribute to their self-sufficiency. These opportunities will be made available through leadership programs, community service, the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program, and partnerships with local government.

C. Enhance parent engagement programs to empower parents to support their children's educational success.

CSET will train parents about how to effectively navigate the school system and increase their skills in advocating for their child's education. Supporting academic success can ensure that future generations thrive and end the cycle of poverty.

GOAL 5

Support long term sustainability by integrating systems and infrastructure that strengthen CSET.

CSET's ability to serve in a financially restrictive climate, update technology, and respond to the changing needs of the community are critical to the organization's success. A strong Board of Directors and solid community partnerships enhance our capacity to achieve results.

Objectives

A. Invest in technology infrastructure that secures agency and customer information.

CSET will invest in staff training and data protection protocols to ensure all sensitive data is properly protected.

B. Develop and implement innovative marketing strategies to promote mission and program awareness.

CSET will inform local community partners and customers of all CSET services. Multi-pronged marketing campaigns will advertise available services in English and Spanish. New strategies in social media marketing will be implemented to reach a wider age range and ensure diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging are afforded to all residents. Engaging our customers to become social media ambassadors and to participate in our messaging will ensure we reach young people, families, seniors, and other populations our programs serve. CSET will also employ these strategies to increase awareness of our impact on the community.

C. Enhance the use of data and metric-based evaluation of CSET's programs to inform its operations and goals.

CSET will demonstrate a person-centered/data-driven (PCDD) method that places the customer at the center of its operations and allows CSET to present measurable and demonstrable results of our activities. These data sets will inform CSET as we analyze program efficacy and develop future projects that will benefit our community, including program enrollment, program completion, and customer success. When data are shared across departments, staff members are equipped to refer customers to the full range of services available to them.

GOAL 6

Provide all staff with the needed tools and information to be successful.

Providing clear, consistent information across all departments on a regular basis will increase staff productivity and efficiency, and improve customer service. When staff members are equipped with needed technology and other resources, they are more effective, efficient, and provide a higher level of customer service.

Objectives

A. Continually improve internal communications to raise staff awareness of agency goals and resources.

CSET will consistently communicate and provide opportunities among departments to develop the knowledge staff members need to ensure participants receive access to all services that meet their needs. Through newsletters, social media posts, website updates, staff training on our internal referral process, and other methods, staff members will be well informed of agency goals and resources.

B. Provide staff development and training opportunities to ensure CSET has a diverse and culturally aware workforce.

CSET will provide training and support services for all staff members, encouraging a culture of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. These efforts will include identifying individual strengths and addressing areas for growth for individual staff members, as well as group trainings to increase performance, effectiveness, and collaboration, which leads to quality customer service and develops CSET's future leaders.

C. Foster staff productivity and efficiency through technology and other resources.

CSET will continuously update the technology and tools its teams and staff need to effectively carry out their job duties and meet program goals. CSET will improve its website to increase public accessibility and to be a robust source of information.



GOAL 7

Improve CSET's sustainability through increasing organizational capacity.

Since 1976, CSET has successfully served the low-income communities of Tulare County. This has been possible through a strong network of agency partners and dedicated individuals who are committed to improving the lives of low-income individuals and families. Poverty continues to create obstacles to achieving quality of life for all. CSET's ability to address these obstacles rests on continually enhancing our organizational capacity.

Objectives

A. Sustain effective board governance.

CSET will continually enhance agency governance through board recruitment to maintain a full board, prepare members to effectively participate through a comprehensive onboarding process, and provide ongoing training and opportunities to attend conferences. Productive board meetings will be supported through provision of regular fiscal and program data as well as timely legislative updates.

B. Bolster agency funding to ensure CSET meets the anticipated and emergency needs of the community.

CSET will continue to pursue new funding sources to diversify funding, obtain unrestricted funding, and improve the financial stability of the organization. By cultivating partnerships in the business community, pursuing new grant opportunities, expanding fee for service activities, and developing donor strategies, CSET strengthens the fiscal stability of the organization and our ability to serve the residents of Tulare County. CSET will seek unrestricted revenue to enable innovation to strengthen the organization and respond to community emergencies and natural disasters.

C. Develop and implement agency wide long-term evaluation systems to measure effectiveness of CSET programs.

CSET will develop metrics-based evaluation systems to measure the long-term impact of our programs and identify areas for improvement across the agency.

APPENDIX

Evaluation of Goals & Objective

The Strategic Plan is meant to be a living document that will be updated on a regular basis. It will also serve as a reference manual for new and existing staff to help them gauge their programs' progress as well as understand what is expected of them and why.

The Plan will be reviewed every 6 months by the Board of Directors, and annually by the Executive Director and staff for relevancy. If revisions are needed at any time, they will be made to reflect current needs and conditions.

Appendix A - Assessment of Needs

In spring 2021, the Strategic Planning Committee completed a needs assessment, gathering and analyzing data and information through a comprehensive process of surveys, focus groups, and detailed research of recent local, state, and federal sources. This appendix describes the components of the assessment process and summarizes the results of each activity.

COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDER SURVEY

Throughout April and May 2021 CSET administered an anonymous survey comprising three parts, which collected data on household status, feedback on how CSET is serving our customers, and the top five concerns of the community. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, CSET made considerable effort to encourage participants to complete the Community Action Survey online. The online surveys were available in English and Spanish, the primary languages spoken in CSET's service area, on CSET's website. The link to the online survey was sent to individuals of all ages, from youth in workforce development training and leadership programs to CSET partners, including school administrators and teachers, public sector organizations, community-based organizations, local businesses, and issue-based coalitions throughout Tulare County. Printed surveys were provided with meal delivery boxes to senior citizens participating in the Meals on Wheels program and picked up when completed.

Survey respondents were asked to rate CSET's progress in each of the 6 goals using a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "Strongly Disagree" and 5 being "Strongly Agree". A total of 356 surveys were completed, both online (n=237) and on paper (n=119). Of these, 15 were in Spanish and 341 were in English, with 44% of all respondents or families having participated in public social service programs in the last 2 years. The survey sample closely reflected Tulare County race/ethnicity populations; the county is composed of 65% Hispanics/Latinos and 61% of survey respondents identified as Hispanic/Latino. In addition, of the respondents to the Community Action Survey the largest racial/ethnic groups were identified as 23% White/Caucasian and 9% Multi-Race.

Of survey respondents, the two largest groups identified according to employment status as those who work full time (32 hours or more) and those who are unemployed (26%), followed by those who are not working due to being a student. Despite the majority of individuals in Tulare County working full-time jobs, the pervasiveness of the "working poor" remains rampant in our community.

The largest survey group by education completion was those with high school diplomas at 40% of respondents. The second highest group was those who have achieved a Bachelor's degree, at 18%. Thirdly were those with Associate's degrees, at 14% of respondents, a percentage that is reflective of the overall county's educational attainment data.

Of survey respondents, the two largest groups identified according to housing status as those who are homeowners (44%) and those who are renters (36%). Of survey respondents, 44.6% reported receiving public benefits in the last 2 years. This is a sharp decrease over CSET's last community needs assessment completed in 2019, in which 73% of respondents stated they had received public benefits such as Food Stamps, CalFresh, Medicaid/MediCal, TANF/CalWorks, Unemployment Insurance, Social Security Income, Social Security Disability Income, and WIC nutrition benefits.

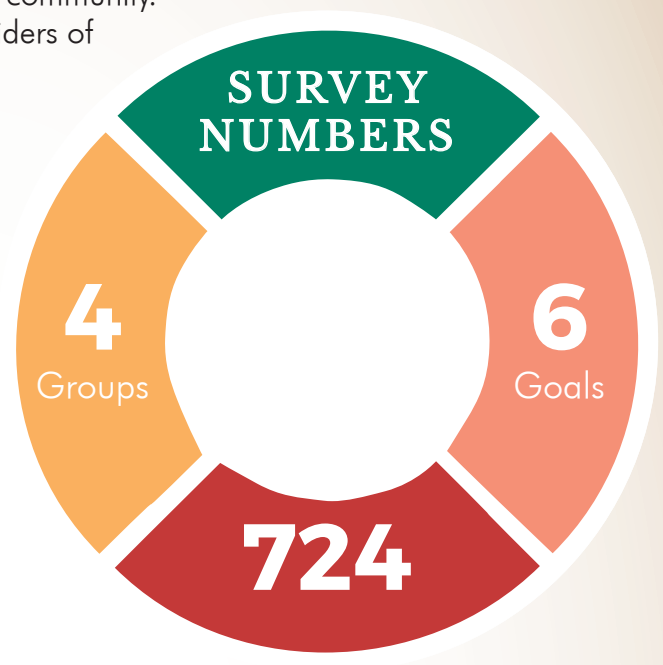
Surveys were administered to solicit feedback on how CSET is doing in relation to six goals, which reflect the National Performance Indicators for the Community Services Block Grant:

1. CSET helps low-income individuals become more self-sufficient.
2. CSET helps to improve the living conditions in which low-income individuals live.
3. CSET helps low-income individuals own a stake in their community.
4. CSET achieves partnership among supporters and providers of services to low-income individuals.
5. CSET has increased its capacity to achieve results.
6. CSET helps low-income individuals, especially vulnerable populations, achieve their potential by strengthening family and other supportive systems.

Survey participants also ranked the services most needed for different groups in Tulare County (seniors, youth, families, and the community overall). Services included after school programs, gang prevention, homelessness prevention, domestic violence counseling, computer classes, transportation assistance, volunteer opportunities, and improvements to our local parks, waterways, and trails. Respondents also had the opportunity to add in their own suggestions for needed services in the community that were not listed.

Key Survey Findings

CSET was pleased to receive such a high response rate to the survey, which provides important insight on how the community views our organization and the areas of highest need throughout Tulare County. This survey received 341 responses in English and 15 responses in Spanish, for a total of 356 completed surveys.



COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Overall, CSET was rated positively in our work, receiving the highest marks in our work to “help vulnerable populations achieve their potential by strengthening family and other support systems”. The majority of survey responses stated that CSET is effective in our work to:

- o Help low-income individuals become self-sufficient.
 - o Improve living conditions of low-income individuals.
 - o Work closely with partner and community organizations who provide services to low-income individuals.
 - o Help vulnerable populations achieve their potential by strengthening family and other support systems.
- To one question, “CSET does enough to help low-income individuals own a stake in their community”, “Agree/Neither” was the majority response, prompting reflection on how we might strengthen such programs.

The top 5 community concerns were reported as:

Community Concern 1: Parks, Waterways, and Trails: As a community that relies on agriculture as a significant part of our local economy, taking good care of our natural resources is an important part of life for all residents. Tulare County experiences very high rates of obesity and negative health outcomes, so creating more accessible green and safe spaces for our community to participate in outdoor activities is crucial to building a healthier place to live.

Community Concern 2: Community Service and Advocacy Groups: The need for community advocacy in Tulare County is an important issue to our respondents. Living in a high needs area with limited resources, our residents understand the power of working together to create change; residents desire opportunities to connect with one another for the betterment of their local neighborhoods and communities.

Community Concern 3: Increased Public Transit: Local respondents continued to identify the need for increased public transit in Tulare County. Living in a low-income and rural area without the availability of affordable public transportation can limit access to resources and jobs outside of the community in which they reside.

Community Concern 4: Life Skills Classes: Identified as the 4th most pressing concern of the community, and the top concern for local youth, respondents stated that there is a great need for life skills classes for local residents. CSET currently offers many such classes throughout the county, covering topics such as parenting, navigating the justice system, financial literacy, leadership, child abuse prevention, domestic violence prevention, healthy living, and more.

Community Concern 5: Employment Training and Job Skills: A foundation of CSET's mission for over 45 years, providing our community with employment training and job skills is one of our core capacities. In a community where the unemployment rate is more than twice the state average and three times the national average, the immediate need for workforce development is of utmost importance. All of the comments received provided valuable information for formulating the plan goals.

FOCUS GROUPS

Focus Groups CSET hosted several in-depth focus groups for special groups which have detailed knowledge of our current operations. These focus groups proved to be incredibly helpful as we analyzed how well we are currently meeting our mission as well as the opportunities for meeting the needs of our staff, customers, and community partners.

Separate focus groups were held for staff, CSET leadership, partner agencies, and participants. Each focus group lasted no more than 2 hours and followed a format that encouraged participation and honest dialogue. Topics for discussion were provided to all invitees prior to the scheduled focus groups to help them prepare their feedback.

Focus Group with Participants: On June 30, 2021 a focus group of Family Resource Center participants in the community of Earlimart was attended by 18 FRC program participants. These participants shared their feedback on how current programs are conducted and their suggestions for new services needed in the community. Earlimart is a small, rural community with few resources for youth and the desire for more afterschool enrichment activities such as sports or tutoring was stated by many of the participants. Minutes were taken to document all input received, which will be used in the next phase of the Strategic Planning process when each department will update their individual objectives and steps to achieve them.

Frontline staff members identified program participants who would be interested in participating in a focus group. On August 3, 2021, 16 participants attended, representing a range of programs including Sequoia Community Corps, #LEAD youth leadership, housing services, and workforce development. Participants shared their feedback on which programs and services are most needed yet hardest to get in Tulare County, what the most important needs for CSET to address are, what ways the community has experienced changes and how current needs are affected, how CSET may better address the topic of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in our work, and how to capitalize on communication strategies to reach more people. Minutes were taken to document all input received, which will be used in the next phase of the Strategic Planning process when each department will update their individual objectives and steps to achieve them.

In addition, this strategic plan reflects feedback received from participants during several community focus groups convened earlier in the year to inform our 2021 Community Needs Assessment. These sessions were held at the Tulare Adult School, Earlimart Rotary Club, and the Cutler-Orosi Family Education Center.

Focus Group with Staff and Supervisors: The Strategic Planning Committee asked management across all departments to nominate staff to contribute to the strategic planning process and in furthering the development of their leadership skills. On August 5, 2021 CSET convened 14 staff, representing the following departments: Community Initiatives, Communications & Information Services, Workforce Development (Adult & Youth), Energy Services, Finance, Sequoia Community Corps, Urban Forestry, and Senior Services. A second focus group for CSET Department Directors and Assistant Directors was held on August 26, 2021.

These CSET staff and supervisors focus groups provided feedback and offered suggestions for how to improve DEI in the agency and community, thoughts on which programs and services are most needed yet hardest to get in Tulare County, ideas on how CSET might best capitalize on communication opportunities, and changes our community is facing currently. Participants agreed that the findings from the Community Action Survey and Community Needs Assessment were accurate. Minutes were taken to document all input received, which will be used in the next phase of the strategic planning process when each department will update their individual objectives and action steps to achieve them.

Focus Group with Partner Agencies: On September 24, 2021, a final focus group was held to collect feedback from local partner agencies. CSET Executive Director Mary Alice Escarsega-Fechner hosted Tulare County, Family Healthcare Network, Self-Help Enterprises, City of Porterville, City of Visalia, ProYouth Heart, Tulare County Workforce Investment Board, United Way of Tulare County, and St. Paul's Church. Members of the Strategic Planning Committee were present to help facilitate the discussion and record feedback from participants on the work CSET is doing. Safety precautions were taken to protect staff and guests from COVID-19 during this in-person session.

These local partner agencies expressed many similar needs as in our previous focus group sessions. They identified bridging the digital divide, homelessness, housing affordability, and access to mental healthcare. Participants also shared their experiences in reaching customers who live in rural areas. Participants discussed the need to meet people where they are, identifying the pressing need of the labor market for new employees to fill industrial job openings and for industry professionals to teach and recruit potential staff who are willing to learn these specialized jobs. The desire for a centralized database was also discussed, providing a means for multiple agencies to enter and view services provided to shared customers.

CSET is grateful to all focus group participants who gave their time and energy to provide this valuable information as we update our Strategic Plan. The feedback and comments received are reflected in our goals and objectives. Overall, the feedback received from the partners took the form of objectives and action items that will also be used in the next phase of the Strategic Plan. Thanks to the investment of time and resources of our caring partners in this work, the quality of life in Tulare County is improving, but this trend will only continue if we commit to stay the course and maintain our presence in high-need communities. These efforts and the comprehensive community needs assessment provide the information and direction to meet CSET's Mission and Vision.

Thank you!

Additional comments provided strong objectives and courses of actions that will be used to finalize the Strategic Plan. Overall, this comprehensive needs assessment provided the information and direction for meeting CSET's Mission and Vision:

Mission

CSET inspires youth, families, and communities to achieve self-reliance through innovative pathways and collaboration.

Vision

We share a vision for communities and residents to gain the knowledge, skills and resources needed to achieve the American Dream. To achieve this vision, we commit ourselves to these core values:

We strive to assist residents regionally in improving their lives.

We create opportunities for children, youth, parents, and families to be competitive in an increasingly challenging economy.

We continue to strengthen our organization by developing internal leadership, embracing diversity, and maintaining integrity in every venture.

We seek partnerships with other agencies to provide the best possible services to our community.

WHERE COMMUNITY HAPPENS





CSET

Community Services
Employment Training

Where community happens.

www.CSET.org