

## Renewing the Vision: 10 steps towards Focusing Social Ministry at your Parish

*It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.  
The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,  
it is beyond our imagination. (Bishop Ken Untener)*

Among the biggest challenges of social ministry are getting it started in the Parish and keeping it working and vibrant once it exists. The needs of all of our communities are deep, and in many places, they are increasing; every individual presenting a crisis and every issue causing injustice in our community and world compels a response from our Parishes. When faced with so many challenges it becomes difficult to put our finger on where to start, what to do, and, sometimes more importantly, what to put on hold.

The social mission is a part of a Parish's life as a community of faith. In the Diocese of Richmond, we evaluate our communal activities in Word, Worship, Community, and Service, seeking to continually evaluate and enhance our activities in all areas to become increasingly vibrant and Gospel focused communities. Social Ministry, the Parish's expression of service to the community and the world, should draw the members of the parish into deeper relationship with one another and into deeper relationship with God as they give of themselves for others, for their communities, and for the world.

This packet outlines a process for getting parish social ministry started in a way that builds off **your** vision for what the parish can be, it will guide you through a process of getting to know the needs of your community, determining what your Parish can do to respond, and provide guidance in helping the parish to continue the process of planning for the future through evaluation. If social ministry is already an active part of your Parish's life, undertaking this process can help to expand, reinvigorate, and evaluate your efforts. Either way, it will help your parish build an infrastructure that will support social ministry over the long run. This process includes 10 steps:

1. Seek approval from Parish Leadership to begin a focusing process for Social Ministry at your Parish.
2. Convene a team of Parish members who are willing to be a part of the focusing process for social ministry.
3. Review and discuss foundational social ministry materials, such as *Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish* by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, to create a common understanding of the purpose of parish social ministry among the group.
4. Assess the social ministry needs, wants and capacity of your parish.
5. Based on the group's understanding of social ministry and the intersection of social ministry needs, wants and capacity, write (or review) the mission and vision statements for social ministry at your parish.
6. Write a set of manageable goals and specific tasks that can be realistically completed with the identified capacity in one year to support the mission and vision.
  - Establish an understanding for each goal of what will indicate success, and how you will track progress.
7. Seek *approval* from the Parish Leadership for the mission and vision statements, goals and tasks of parish social ministry.
8. Assign responsibilities and create a system of accountability using an organizational chart.
9. Track your progress and publicize your success to the Parish using acceptable methods of communication.
10. Analyze and learn from your results, adjust the vision if necessary, reevaluate community needs, wants, and capacity, and establish a new set of goals.

In the next pages, we will review each one of these steps in more detail.

## **Step 1: Seek the blessing of Parish Leadership to begin a focusing process for parish social ministry.**

In the parish, you need to seek the approval of the pastor, parish administrator, parish council, pastoral associate, or other identified leadership before beginning a process of assessing social ministry in your Parish in the hopes of beginning, growing, or streamlining it. Volunteering your time to start this process may come as a relief to your Parish's leadership who have been hoping to get social ministry started but have lacked the time and capacity to make it happen. It may also be met with skepticism by overworked Parish leaders hesitant to take on more.

You will need to emphasize why the Parish should go through this process. The focusing process will determine how your Parish can bring to life the words of *Communities of Salt and Light*, "Effective social ministry helps the parish not only do more, but be more – more of a reflection of the gospel, more of a worshipping and evangelizing people, more of a faithful community."<sup>1</sup>

Another important reason for starting by talking with Parish Leadership is that effective parish social ministry is not isolated from other facets of parish life. The insights and support of your Parish's leaders will be critical in integrating social ministry into Parish life in a way that helps the Parish community see the vital connection between all aspects of Parish Life: Word, Worship, Community, and Service. Focusing, expanding, streamlining, evaluating, or re-invigorating Social Ministry will help the Parish improve its capacity for Service, which can, in turn, help the Parish to live the Gospel it proclaims, the liturgy it celebrates, and strengthen itself as a community of faith.

When asking for blessing to go through the process, be prepared to:

- Speak to the purpose of parish social ministry and *how* it reinforces other facets of parish life. This will be especially important if parish social ministry is new to your parish.
- Answer questions about the process including: who will be involved or will be invited to be involved in the refocusing efforts and when the pastor or pastoral council's input will be sought in the formal process, e.g. during the step where the group will be assessing needs, passions and capacity.
- Seek their input. They may have suggestions on how the process is designed or a person who will add a helpful perspective to the focusing group.
- Speak to how this effort will interact with all that is going on in the parish. Be aware of all that the parish has going on.

How you deliver the message will help to determine its success. Be respectful of the time, talent and faith of the people in the room who, like you, believe in contributing to their parish as a way of discipleship.

If the pastor or parish council decides not to give you their blessing to go forward with this process at this time, find out why. There are legitimate reasons why a parish is not in a place to support this process. Be open to hearing those. Be open to being a part of efforts that may help to ready the parish for this process.

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<sup>1</sup> (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1994)

**Step 2: Convene a team of parish leaders who are willing to be a part of the process.**

The purpose of the focusing group is to imagine the possibilities of social ministry and determine how to make those possibilities an effective, vibrant reality in your parish. The group will produce or redesign the mission and vision statements, goals, tasks and organizational structure for parish social ministry.

Even if there is a Parish Social Ministry Committee at the parish, it will be important to create a special group to be a part of the process, even if it draws heavily from the committee. They are not signing up to be a part of a standing committee.

As you invite people to be a part of the group, you will want to consider the following:

- The group should consist of around 8 people
- The group should be:
  - Representative of the diversity of your parish,
  - Interested in parish social ministry,
  - Skilled in strategic or pastoral planning, and
  - Knowledgeable of and connected in the parish and community.

**Be specific when you invite your potential team members: a volunteer's time is their most precious resource!**

1. Set up a timeline for the process to share with potential team members
2. Share how the focusing process will work.
3. Set meeting dates with Start **and** end times: promise (and intend) to stick to them.

**Step 3: Come to a common understanding of the purpose of parish social ministry.**

At the beginning of the process, learn more about parish social ministry to get ideas about how your parish can best care for people who are poor and vulnerable and work for justice as an expression of their love for God.

Review and discuss key documents about parish social ministry, such as:

- *Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish*, USCCB
- *Parish Social Ministry: A Vision and Resource* Catholic Charities, USA
- *Parish Social Ministry: Strategies for Success*, Tom Ulrich
- *Becoming a Community of Salt and Light*, Peggy Prevoznik Heins

OSM's Staff are ready and available to assist you as you identify resources for review; they are also available to come and meet with your focusing team and facilitate a discussion about what Parish Social Ministry can look like.

Visit parishes with flourishing social ministry efforts, and ask questions about what they did to get started,

Consider the reactions and insights of the group. At the end of this process, you will want to have a common understanding of parish social ministry and why it is important.

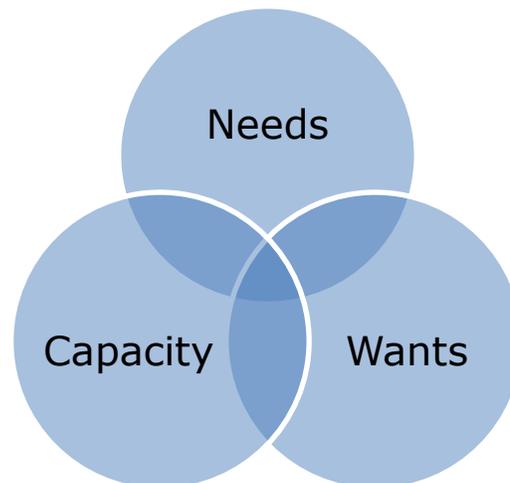
**See Appendix II for a discussion guide for *Communities of Salt and Light*. Consider using it to help guide and focus your conversation.**

#### **Step 4: Assess the social ministry needs, wants and capacity of your parish.**

The needs of all of our communities are deep, and in many places they are increasing; every individual presenting a crisis and every issue causing injustice in our community and world compels a response from our parishes. When faced with so many challenges it becomes difficult to put our finger on where to start, what to do, and, sometimes more importantly, what to put on hold. A parish cannot do everything. However, if it uses its gifts wisely and believes in what it is doing, a parish can effectively do social ministry.

The key to effective social ministry is to find the intersection of community needs, and the wants and capacity in and of the parish.

- “Needs” represent the assaults on life and dignity in our communities and world. They are the unmet needs of people who are poor, suffering, and vulnerable within our parish families, our communities, and the world.
- “Wants” represent the problems that parishioners and/or Parish leadership want to see addressed. It is critical to determine the wants of the parishioners because social ministry will rely on their support and effort in order to prosper.
- “Capacity” is more than financial resources; it represents the time, talent, and treasure of a parish. It assesses what gifts and resources a parish can devote towards social ministry. Your Parish may have 10 immigration attorneys as part of the family who would be willing to devote time for pro – bono cases. Your parish may have an unused plot of land that could be developed into a community garden. Look at your resources – financial, facilities, expertise, time, etc. You may be blessed with more than you think!



There may be an endless list of needs – there may be an equally long list of wants. Your parish’s capacity may also surprise you. This does not mean that you should rush out and tackle all the needs and wants with all the capacity that you have. This will lead to burn-out, duplication of effort, and inefficiency.

The Parish should begin by focusing on the community needs that correspond to what parishioners and parish leadership want to see addressed, for which there is the capacity to respond. As in the picture above, the circles representing need, want and capacity are much larger than the area of intersection between the three circles. In this way, you should choose efforts for which there is a need, which the parish wants to address, and has the capacity to respond.

**[See Appendix III For Ideas on How to determine Community Needs, Wants, and Capacity](#)**

**Step 5: Based on intersection of social ministry needs, wants and capacity, write (or review) your mission and vision statements for social ministry at your parish.**

A mission statement briefly communicates the essence of parish social ministry to the parish community and to those it serves. It states:

- *who we are*
- *what we do*
- *what we stand for*
- *why we do it*

A vision statement describes a compelling image of what the parish social ministry can become. A vision statement:

- *touches on values and hopes.*
- *communicates what we want to be*
- *is real attainable and believable*
- *can be translated into actions*
- *can be implemented over time.*

Sometimes it is helpful to develop these two statements during two different meetings. At the first meeting, review the common understanding of Parish Social Ministry your team came to in Step 1. Now, have everyone fill out the worksheets in Appendix IV; then, discuss.

Stay within your established time constraints and end the conversation after having someone commit to draft a mission statement then a vision statement based on the sharing of the group for the next meeting. At your next meeting, review and adopt the statements.

It is often useful to designate a facilitator, not a member of the group, to both facilitate the discussion and to draft the statements. OSM Staff are here to assist in this part of the process. Don't hesitate to contact us!

**See Appendix IV for Mission and Vision Statement Worksheets.**

**Step 6: Write a set of manageable goals and specific tasks that can be realistically completed with the identified resources in one year to support the mission and vision.**

Bring the mission and vision statements together with the information that you gathered about the needs, wants and capacity of your parish to create a list of goals. Each goal should have a corresponding list of steps (tasks and strategies) that when completed or implemented, will achieve the goal. To each step, assign an expected date of completion, and an estimate of the amount of funds and people needed to achieve it. Write reasonable goals that can be completed in *one year*.

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|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Goal:</b>             |                               |
| Step 1:                  |                               |
| Due Date:                | \$\$/Ppl Needed:              |
| Step 2:                  |                               |
| Due Date:                | \$\$/Ppl Needed:              |
| Step 3:                  |                               |
| Due Date:                | \$\$/Ppl Needed:              |
| Step 4:                  |                               |
| Due Date:                | \$\$/Ppl Needed:              |
| <b>Goal Complete By:</b> | <b>Total \$\$/Ppl Needed:</b> |

**Step 6b: Establish an understanding, for each goal, of what will indicate success, and how you will track progress.**

As gratifying it is to cross things off lists, Parish Ministry is about more than completing a set of tasks. Your team should come to a common understanding of how each goal is contributing towards your mission and your vision for Parish Social Ministry, and how you will measure success. If your goal is to establish a parish food pantry to assist people experiencing food insecurity in your community, a recommended consideration is to think about how the goal will engage the parish to meet the needs of the community.

In measuring your results, you might take into consideration not only the establishment of the pantry, stocking its shelves, and having 2 people available 3 days a week to distribute food. Track how many members of the community are engaged in providing for the pantry and how many people in need you are serving. If your pantry gets set up through the efforts of 3 people in a parish of 500 families, and serves 2 people every month for 1 year in a neighborhood where 48% of families live in poverty, have you really been successful in mobilizing the Parish to meet the needs of the community?

Spend time thinking about what kind of data you want to collect in relation to each goal. Good information will help to strengthen and build on current efforts when it's time to evaluate the ministry.

**See Appendix V for a Goal worksheet**



**Step 7: Seek approval from the parish leadership for the mission and vision statements, goals and tasks of parish social ministry.**

Return to your Parish's leadership with your plan. The purpose of seeking their approval at this stage is not to seek input on it. You are asking them to approve it. Their approval may be contingent upon a change or two, but the design portion of the process has been completed.

### **Step 8: Create a leadership structure responsible for on-going coordination of parish social ministry.**

Once your plan has been approved, you will need people who will be responsible for overseeing the implementation of the plan and for carrying out the specific tasks that you have identified. Depending upon the size of your parish, these may be different people.

The people who will take responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the plan will be your leaders. These leaders often form a Parish Social Ministry Leadership Team or Committee. Through their effort and coordination, the committee makes it possible for a Parish to provide an organized, effective service to the community that engages the Parish community and helps it develop deeper relationship with Jesus.

Make sure that each Goal in your plan and each identified step becomes an assigned responsibility for one member of your Parish's Social Ministry Leadership Team. Steps and goals may be carried out collaboratively by members of the Team and with other folks from the Parish, but someone should be tasked with making sure that each step and each goal is accomplished.

Parish Social Ministry Leaders:

- Plan, Implement, Assess – Provide vision and direction to the social ministry work of the parish by facilitating the strategic planning process of determining needs, allocating resources and setting priorities.
- Open Lines of Communication – Facilitate communication and collaboration between social ministry and the pastor, pastoral council, other church ministries and the parishioners, e.g. designate a liaison to the parish council or keep up a column in the bulletin.
- Bring People Together – Convene the social ministry leadership for the purpose of planning, leadership development, spiritual rejuvenation and celebration.
- Develop New Leadership – Invite new people to share their talents through parish social ministry and help them to develop the skills they need to succeed.
- Deal with Crisis Situations – While most situations can be anticipated and dealt with during normal operations, some situations will require special attention of leadership, e.g. responding to a disaster in the community

Giving care to designing this step will help keep your parish social ministry efforts running smoothly over the long run.

**Step 9: Track your progress and publicize your success to the Parish using acceptable methods of communication.**

Using the method that your Focusing Team established in Step 6, record data! While not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts, it's important to keep track of what you're doing for future planning and to keep your community in the loop.

Format your information in an accessible way and make it available to the members of your community and publically celebrate your success! There's no better way to get more people involved in Social Ministry than to show the whole parish what joy and energy comes from effectively implementing Social Ministry.

Make sure that your Parish's leadership is on board for how you plan to publicize your results. If possible, report your efforts and accomplishments during Sunday announcements, on the Parish web site, with a quarterly bulletin insert, or at a table during coffee and donuts after mass. If your Parish has a monthly newsletter or email network, ask about getting some space to communicate your results and provide contact information so that members of the parish can be in touch - information can prompt questions. Questions prompt invitations. Invitations promote participation. Greater participation will enhance your Parish's ministry of service to the community and the world.

Invite feedback and ask people to provide comments and to evaluate what you are doing. If possible, design an evaluation form for each of your efforts, and have parish members and service recipients provide responses. Make sure that your questions will help you in an ongoing effort to evaluate the success of your ministries.

**Step 10: Analyze and learn from your results, adjust the vision if necessary, reevaluate community needs, wants, and capacity, and establish a new set of goals.**

Much like Step 2, convene a group of individuals that can help you to evaluate the past year and to make sure that you are on track to achieve your vision. This maybe the same team that helped you in the process of Focusing your ministry. This may be the Social Ministry Leadership Team that is helping you to coordinate and execute your plan.

Gather all the data that you have collected and organize it under the relevant goals. Ask the group the following goals:

- What did we learn this year?
- Did we succeed in implementing our plan?
  - Why or why not?
- Did we collect relevant information?
- Does our data tell us anything?
- Did we overextend ourselves?
- What do we do very well?
- What do we need to do better?
- Did we move closer to achieving the vision that we developed for our Social Ministry?

Re-evaluate you're the community needs and the wants and capacity of your Parish.

- Has anything changed?
- Is there anything that might change in the coming year?
- Will these changes affect our Social Ministry?
- Did opportunities arise for collaboration with other parishes or ecumenical organizations?

Return to Step 6 and begin writing goals for the coming year. Be sure to plan for effective data collection, and to revise your data collection strategy if the information you collected wasn't helpful. With a new set of goals, return to your Parish leadership for their approval.

With a year of success under your belt, lessons learned during implementation, a strategy for collecting relevant information, and a new plan in hand, you're ready to get back to work and in doing so, mobilizing your parish to serve as Salt and Light to your community and the world.



### **Appendix I: Bibliography**

Sider, R. P. (2002). *Churches that make a Difference*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. (1994).

*Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish*. Washington DC:  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Lustig, Rachel (2010). *Our Parish Can Make a Difference*. Catholic Charities, USA.

## **Appendix II – Discussion Guide, *Communities of Salt and Light***

### **General:**

How do your current ministries fit into this framework?

What new ideas does this framework give you for ministry at your parish?

How can the information provided here help you in planning for future Social Ministry activities?

### **Anchoring Social Ministry: Prayer and Worship**

Social ministry should be based on and incorporated in prayer, worship and liturgy. How can your parish include Christ's call to conversion, service and working for justice in their liturgy? In prayer or bible study?

### **Sharing the Message: Preaching and Education**

Social Ministry is not the responsibility of one group, how can you make sure that all parish leaders are well informed about Catholic Social Teaching so they can incorporate it into their ministries?

It is our call to teach and foster Catholic Social Teaching to everyone in our parishes. How can you make sure that Catholic social teaching is included in all formation and catechesis activities?

### **Supporting the "Salt of the Earth": Family, Work, Citizenship**

The parish is not the only place where people are called to live their faith. How can you encourage and support people to live their faith by practicing Christian values at home with their families?

In their work place? In their communities?

### **Serving the "Least of These": Outreach and Charity**

What opportunities can you offer parishioners and community members to volunteer their time, talent and treasure?

What are some effective ways to get parishioners and community members involved in outreach and charity?

### **Advocating for Justice: Legislative Action/ Creating Community: Organizing for Justice**

How can you get information to your parishioners about public policy?

What are some opportunities you can give parishioners to take action in public life to help change community and legal systems that affect the poor and vulnerable?

How can you involve your entire community in taking action?

### **Building Solidarity: Beyond Parish Boundaries**

How can people here connect to people in other lands?

What are some opportunities you can offer to our parishioners to act in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in foreign lands?

## **Appendix III: Needs – Wants - Capacity**

### **Determining Needs**

To assess need and injustice, begin by reviewing census data of the area. Consider factors related to housing, employment, income, and education. In which of these areas are the issues more pressing than in the rest of the state or across the country. For example, you may find that the percentage of high school graduates is lower relative to the rest of the state or the country.

Next, consult experts on poverty in your community. Experts can be found in community organizations that are working to address need and injustice, like Catholic Charities. There are a few things you will want to learn from the experts: does their experience reinforce the information that you have found on the Census data, what do they see as missing, where are the gaps in the system, what barriers are preventing people from realizing their potential. For example, there may be food pantries in the area, but transportation may not be available to make them accessible to people who need them.

### **Determining Wants**

Determining your parish's social ministry wants will identify what the parish wants to see changed. The wants of the parish will be based off of the opinions of parishioners. The only way to determine this is to ask them. The information could be sought through a survey or a focus group. Be sure to seek input in a concerted way from the pastor and pastoral council.

*See next page for a sample survey.*

### **Determining Capacity**

Determining your parish's social ministry capacity will identify all the resources that the community could use or work together with. You will want to consult the parish staff or the pastor and brainstorm ideas to answer these questions:

- What is the budget for parish social ministry?
- What staff or volunteer support do you have?
- What are two or three physical assets of your parish available for your use?
- What is the parish good at?
- What groups of people do you connect with in your community or in the broader Catholic Church?
- What organizations have something in common with your parish?
- What signs have you seen lately of God's grace in the world?

Once you have determined the needs, wants and capacity, you will want to find the areas of overlap between the three. You will want to look at them creatively, drawing on the unique perspective of everyone in the group to see how the needs, wants and capacity come together. Determining this will form the foundation of your vision and mission statements, goals and tasks.

### Parish Social Ministry Issue Survey

As disciples of Christ Jesus, who came to “bring glad tidings to the poor,...to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord”, our parish is reviewing our efforts to care for the poor and vulnerable and work for justice (Luke 4: 18-19). Your insights into the community are an invaluable part of this process.

On this sheet, you will find a list of some commonly expressed problems in a community. Review the list and check the problem areas that you feel exist in our community. Add any that are not listed. At the bottom of the paper, please write those three problems that you think are the MOST critical.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loneliness                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Mental Illness                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unemployment                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Day Care (access, cost or quality)    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Substance Abuse                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Education (cost or quality)           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Health Care (access, cost or quality) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Discrimination / Racism           | <input type="checkbox"/> Vocational Training                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Housing (access, cost or quality) | <input type="checkbox"/> Hunger                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pollution / Climate Change        | <input type="checkbox"/> Safety / Violence                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disrespect for Human Life         | <input type="checkbox"/> Other:                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of Recreational Facilities   | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Abuse (spouse, child or parent)   | _____  |

What are the three MOST critical needs?

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|----|--|
| 1. |  |
| 2. |  |
| 3. |  |





**Appendix V: Goal Worksheet**

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| <b>Goal:</b>             |                               |
| Step 1:                  |                               |
| Due Date:                | \$\$/Ppl Needed:              |
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| Due Date:                | \$\$/Ppl Needed:              |
| <b>Goal Complete By:</b> | <b>Total \$\$/Ppl Needed:</b> |

Key Indicators of Success (e.g. Community participation, individuals/families served):

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

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| <b>Goal:</b>             |                               |
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| <b>Goal Complete By:</b> | <b>Total \$\$/Ppl Needed:</b> |

Key Indicators of Success (e.g. Community participation, individuals/families served):

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

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| Step 4:                  |                               |
| Due Date:                | \$\$/Ppl Needed:              |
| <b>Goal Complete By:</b> | <b>Total \$\$/Ppl Needed:</b> |

|                      |                             |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>Total Budget:</b> | <b>Total People Needed:</b> |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|

Key Indicators of Success (e.g. Community participation, individuals/families served):

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_