

Town of Richmond
Request for Special Appropriations
Request for Fiscal Year: 2025

Organization's Name: COTS
Address: PO Box 1616
City, State, Zip: Burlington, VT 05402
Website address: www.cotsonline.org

A. GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Program Name: COTS General Operations Support

2. Contact Person/Title: John Michael Longworth, Grant Writer & Foundation Specialist
Telephone Number: 802-842-7402 x208
E-mail address: johnmichaell@cotsonline.org

3. Total number of individuals served in the last complete fiscal year by this program: During the past State Fiscal year we served 1,112 individuals including 308 children.

4. Total number of the above individuals who are Town residents: 3 including 1 child Please, attach any documentation that supports this number.
Percent of people served who are Town residents: 0.27%

5. Amount of Request: \$1,000

6. Total Program Budget: \$4,850,225.04 Percent of total program budget you are requesting from the Town of Richmond: 0.21%

7. Please state or attach the mission of your agency:

The Committee on Temporary Shelter (COTS) provides emergency shelter, services, and housing for people who are homeless or marginally housed in Vermont. COTS advocates for long-term solutions to end homelessness. We believe in the value and dignity of every human life, that housing is a fundamental human right, and that emergency shelter is not the solution to homelessness.

8. Funding will be used to:

Maintain an existing program Expand an Existing Program
 Start a new program

9. Has your organization received funds from the Town in the past for this or a similar program?

Yes-- \$1,000 in FY23, FY22, FY21, FY20, FY19

If yes, please answer the following:

a. Does the amount of your request represent an increase over your previous appropriation? If yes, explain the reason(s) for the increase. **No.**

b. Were any conditions or restrictions placed on the funds by the Selectboard? **No.** If yes, describe how those conditions or restrictions have been met.

B. PROGRAM OVERVIEW

1. Statement of Need: Identify the issue or need that the program will address (use statistical data to justify the need for the program). To what extent does this need, or problem exist in the Town of Richmond? This past state fiscal year, COTS served 3 individuals from the Town of Richmond, including 1 child.

In the National Low Income Housing Coalition's 2023 Out of Reach report, it is clear that there are no states within the US where an individual can work 40 hours per week at the minimum wage and afford a modest 1-bedroom apartment. In the greater Burlington area, renters must work an average of 72 hours per week at Vermont's current minimum wage to afford a one-bedroom apartment.

This year's report, also states that a Vermont worker would need to earn \$25.54 per hour to afford a two-bedroom apartment. In the greater Burlington area, workers would need to earn \$31.06 to afford a 2-bedroom apartment. This figure is known as the Housing Wage, the hourly wage a household must earn while working full time to afford a decent apartment at fair market rent, while spending no more than 30% of their income on housing expenses. This data from 2023 highlights the already challenging environment for low-income families trying to maintain safe and affordable housing.

The rental vacancy rate in Chittenden County is 0.4%, far behind the national average of 5.8%. Our region is more expensive than 96% of other Fair Market Rate areas in the United States. More than 7,500 local households, many working families with young children, allocate more than 50% of their income to housing costs, putting them one paycheck away from financial disaster.

The lack of supply in our area increases monthly rents, creating a crisis of unsustainability where previously secure renters and homeowners alike teeter on the verge of homelessness. Each year, through private funding and supportive case management, COTS helps hundreds of households avert the crisis of homelessness through prevention.

2. Program Summary:

a. Identify the target/recipients of program services. Specify the number of Town residents your program will serve during the fiscal year and explain the basis upon which this number is calculated. Indicate any eligibility requirements your program has with respect to age, gender, income or residence.

COTS serves families and individuals who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Based on the past two fiscal years of data, COTS estimates that we will serve approximately 5 to 15 or more residents of Richmond in the coming year. Our emergency shelter programs provide safe, temporary housing for those without a home, regardless of age, gender, income, or residence. Our homelessness prevention programs, which provide back rent to help people stay housed and security deposits to help those who are homeless get rapidly rehoused, have income limitations due to state or federal limits. Most assistance is targeted at households with extremely low incomes – 30% or less of the Area Median Income (under \$30,171 for a family of four in Chittenden County). A smaller amount of funding is available to very low-income households, those between 31 to 50% of Area Median Income (under \$50,285 for a family of four in Chittenden County).

b. Identify what is to be accomplished or what change will occur from participating in the program. How will people be better off as a result of participating in the program? Describe the steps you take to make the project known to the public, and make the program accessible and inclusive?

COTS seeks to end homelessness by: 1) providing emergency shelter, case management, and re-housing support to homeless adults and families so they can enter permanent housing for the long-term; and 2) preventing homelessness in the first place – by offering assistance to households on the verge of becoming homeless. People are better off because they have a safe, warm place to stay when they have nowhere else to turn, as well as intensive supportive services to help them move towards housing stability and independence. For those who risk becoming homeless, COTS gives them a chance to get back on their feet before losing their home.

To make sure that those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless know about our services, COTS partners with many organizations in Chittenden County to provide outreach and collaboration. These include agencies such as the Howard Center Street Outreach Team, the Joint Urban Ministry Project, Community Action, Salvation Army, and Safe Harbor Clinic, to name a few. To help address the specific needs of our guests and clients, COTS staff members also refer them to agencies such as the Community Health Centers of Burlington, Legal Aid, STEPS VT (domestic violence assistance), Voc Rehab, and the Department of Labor. COTS also works with a variety of faith-based institutions that offer referrals to people in need and provide donations for our work.

3. Program Funding:

a. Identify how Town funds, specifically, will be used (i.e., funds will provide “X” amount of units of service.)

Funding from the Town of Richmond, like other funding we receive from towns and cities in Chittenden County, will be used for general operating expenses. This support aids COTS in our efforts to assist approximately 1,500 people each year by:

- Offering day and night emergency shelter to vulnerable families and individuals;
- Providing homelessness prevention assistance to ensure that low-income households stay in their homes and out of shelter;
- Offering the services of supportive case managers to help individuals and families experiencing homelessness move out of shelter as quickly as possible;
- Providing transitional housing to assist people on their journey to permanent housing;
- Supplying permanent housing units that provide affordable, sustainable housing for individuals and families;
- Developing programs that meet the unique needs of homeless veterans and children.

b. List the other agencies to whom you are submitting a request for funds for this program and the amount requested. How would this program be modified should revenues be lost?

Every year COTS requests funds from all towns and cities in Chittenden County, except for three towns that have specifically told us that COTS does not fit under their process for discretionary funding. Of the towns we did submit requests to last year, 90% provided funding. This ranged from \$250 to \$20,000. In addition to the requests to cities

and towns, COTS also submits about 60 other proposals each year, including those to private funders, foundations, state agencies, and federal agencies. If revenues are lost for COTS programming, we may have to cut back on the number of people we can serve or the extent of the services we provide.

C. ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

1. Describe your agency's capability to provide the program including its history, previous experience providing this service, management structure and staff expertise.____

At a time when the nation's economy was stuck in recession and the unemployment rate was above 10%, a group of concerned citizens in Burlington set out to help those who had lost their homes and needed a safe, warm place to stay. On December 24, 1982, with temperatures well below freezing, COTS opened its doors with two volunteers on hand to welcome anyone who needed shelter. Over the past 40 years, the number of people facing the crisis of homelessness has increased, particularly among families. COTS has continually evolved, responding to emerging needs and demographic shifts, as well as proactively working toward long-term solutions.

COTS has 38 full-time employees and 8 part-time employees, as well as 13 temporary substitute staff. The organization is overseen by a Board of Directors comprised of 14 volunteer community members who meet monthly and provide expertise in various areas, including: legal, financial, development, human resource, property management, business, social work, and public relations.

Our new Executive Director, Jonathan Farrell has been with COTS since 2011 and has significant experience in this area. Our structure is divided into operations, human resources, development, and programs. COTS staff are hired based on specific areas of expertise, ranging from accounting to case management.

2. How will you assess whether/how program participants are better off? Describe how you will assess program outcomes. Your description should include: what (what kind of data), how (method/tool for collecting the data), from whom (source of data) and when (timing of data collection).

COTS utilizes a HUD HMIS (Homeless Management Information System)-compatible vendor, Foothold Technologies and a Web-based software program called AWARDS. AWARDS captures HUD-required data elements as well as services delivered, meetings with clients, outcomes, and has unlimited capacity to store paperwork in the client's virtual file cabinet. AWARDS enables us to analyze program specific data and outcomes, evaluate programs, and track and measure program results. We look at the number of households and people served, household demographics, reasons for needing assistance or becoming at-risk of eviction, and the type and amount of assistance received. In addition to implementation of this tool across programs, COTS has invested in ongoing training for our staff to provide more refined analysis and outcomes so we can monitor data in an efficient and timely way to produce more positive program outcomes.

COTS uses Results Based Accountability (RBA) in all of our programs, including the HRC. As such, we use performance accountability measures that focus on whether clients are better off as a result of our services. We examine the percentage of households that remain in housing three and six months post-assistance, as well as overall project recidivism rates. We track

referrals for mainstream benefits programs and to community partners for additional supports and services when appropriate.

From design to program development and implementation, COTS focuses on obtaining positive outcomes for our clients and has established the systems to measure our progress, continually assessing achievements and failures. Over the past 40 years, we have developed strong capacities in evaluation, planning, and resource management to ensure incorporation of best practices to help our clients achieve and maintain self-sufficiency.

3. Summarize or attach program and or service assessments conducted in the past two years.

COTS has numerous federal and state funders that require specific assessments of our programs. These vary depending on the funder. Several of our funders conduct the assessments or hire external evaluators, providing us with an impartial assessment of our programs. For example, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Office of Veterans Affairs are two of our largest federal funders. They conduct rigorous annual assessments of the programs they fund, including site visits. We are fully compliant with both agencies. The State of Vermont hires an independent evaluator to monitor progress of our Family Supportive Housing program and three similar programs in the state; the evaluator has completed their annual evaluation of the project, based on interviews with participants and outcome data submitted by COTS and partnering agencies, and concluded that the initiative is reaching its targets. We also have annual assessments for our programs funded by the United Way, including site visits conducted by community members serving on the United Way committees.

4. Does your organization have a strategic plan and a strategic planning process in place? **Yes** - If yes, please attach your plan.

The strategic plan should include a mission statement, goals, steps to achieve the goals, and measures that assess the accomplishments of the goals.

5. What is the authorized size of your board of directors? 16
How many meetings were held by the board last year? 12

I, the undersigned, confirm the information contained herein is accurate and can be verified as such. I understand and agree that if the requested funds are approved, the disbursement of funds are subject to all conditions established by the Richmond Selectboard.

Signature of Applicant



Date 10/2/23

John Michael Longworth, Grant Writer & Foundation Specialist
Print Name of Applicant and Title

COTS 2017 Strategic Plan Refresh

COTS Mission and Values

COTS provides emergency shelter, services, and housing for people who are without homes or who are marginally housed.

We believe:

in the value and dignity of every human life;

that emergency shelter is not the answer to homelessness;

that housing is a fundamental human right.

COTS Vision is a time and place when no one is homeless.

Strategic Plan Overview

This plan contains three strategic directions that were identified during COTS staff and board retreat in November of 2010 and refreshed in the summer of 2017.

The refresh acknowledges that three key directions that were developed in 2010 as part of our strategic have been extremely effective and can continue to provide critical guidance for the next few years to bring COTS closer to our vision of a time and a place when no one is homeless.

COTS Strategic Framework: Our Three Key Directions

I. Strengthen the Core: This strategic direction is focused internally. It ensures that our capacity is not overridden by our desire to serve. The overarching purpose of this goal is to ensure that COTS has the systems and resources available to effectively carry out our mission.

II. Reduce the Pressure: This strategic direction is focused on the clients we serve. The purpose of this strategic goal is to streamline the access to resources and engage our community partners in strengthening the system of care.

III. Build for the Future: This goal is to bring COTS closer to our vision of a time and a place when no one is homeless. We pursue this goal by working to expand prevention resources, housing opportunities, and creating new and innovative models for addressing homelessness.

Use and Implementation of Plan

This plan will serve as the broad framework from which annual work plans for each program and every employee will be developed each year. The expectation is that each board committee and all staff groups within COTS will review this document annually to begin developing their work plan and goals for the year. Ultimately, all departments, managers and staff will have performance evaluations that are

based, in part, on how well they progressed or achieved the goals identified in their annual work plan that are linked to the broader strategic directions outlined in this document. Focusing on specific goals (clearly linked to the strategic plan) during performance reviews will further instill the importance of focusing on results and continual improvement in our quality, effectiveness and efficiency.

I. Strengthen the Core

Objective 1: In order to ensure that COTS is providing the highest quality services with the most effective outcomes, we will undertake performance reviews of programs, development, and operations.

Program Outcome: Regularly assess our program evaluation framework to determine if it that draws upon national benchmarks and evidence-based best practices. This framework includes a quarterly review of process and performance outcomes and an annual program evaluation that summarizes the quarterly findings and flags significant trends and opportunities for quality improvement.

Operations Outcome: Review the tools, processes and procedures currently utilized to increase efficiency and effectiveness of our programs including the regular update of a technology plan, procedure manual, and protocol or storing and archiving data.

Development Outcome: Review and revise if needed a process for conducting an annual development audit to assess our performance against long-range development goals. These include targets for increasing gifts from major donors, corporations and the community.

Objective 2: COTS will continuously refine based on human resource best practice a comprehensive strategy to attract, retain, develop and reward a highly qualified staff, board, and volunteers who demonstrate excellence, innovation and quality.

Staffing Outcome: review and refine a comprehensive staff engagement process addressing annual agency needs, onboarding, communication, development and retention.

Board Recruitment Outcome: Review and refine a well-documented system for identifying and recruiting prospective board members to ensure COTS has the expertise at the leadership level to strengthen the organization.

Board Development Outcome: Review and refine a comprehensive plan that provides a thorough orientation, on-going support, and timely education to ensure maximum contribution at the governance level.

Objective 4: COTS will review and refine procedures that increase our accountability, improve financial planning, and significantly enhance our ability to steward our assets over the long term.

Outcome: Institute a more collaborative annual budgeting process, whereby annual planning includes and incorporates input from all programs

- Program goals
- Facilities master plan
- Operational needs
- Human Capital plan
- Fundraising/ development plan

Outcome: Review and refine a comprehensive investment policy.

II. Reduce the Pressure

Objective 1: To ensure a coordinated response to homelessness, convene an annual issue forum of continuum partners and a broad and diverse group community members (colleges, businesses, state and service sector) to solve a challenge or remove a barrier within our system of care.

Outcome: An annual community process will be in place for launching concerted initiatives to address specific barriers or opportunities that directly impact the homeless.

III. Build for the Future

This goal is to bring COTS closer to our vision of a time and a place when no one is homeless. We will pursue this goal by working to expand prevention resources, housing opportunities, and creating new and innovative models for addressing homelessness.

Objective 1: Over the next five years COTS will help to expand housing opportunities for homeless families.

Outcome: COTS will work with one or more community partners to create transitional housing for 10 families.

Objective 2: Increase homeless prevention resources for those facing evictions or foreclosures.

Outcome: Increase resources available for mortgage/rental arrears over 5 years.

Outcome: Increase by each year the number of households who retain their housing through grants and/or support from COTS.

Objective 3: Create diversified funding sources that creates an endowment and capital reserve.

Outcome: Sustainable funding that allows COTS to continue experimenting with new models and approaches for alleviating homelessness.

Objective 4: Leverage the scale and resources of Vermont to create national innovative models for moving beyond shelter.

Outcome: Over the next 5 years COTS will experiment with two new approaches to our current emergency shelter model.

Outcome: Expand our role as a fulcrum for bringing together unlikely resources and partners.

Objective 5: Increase public awareness about COTS work by developing a sophisticated communication strategy that will increase advocacy, opportunities and resources.

Outcome: Engage the full range of community creativity and innovation and generosity to address the complex needs of homelessness.

A COTS 'Build for the Future' Initiative

COTS is in the concept stage of creating a bridge into permanent housing for families who need time and space to practice life skills, are in recovery, or are rebuilding a damaged credit history.

There is an ever-increasing logjam in COTS emergency shelters as the housing market in our region becomes tighter and more expensive. Many families and individuals who are working every day, saving as much as possible, still can't move beyond shelter for lack of options they can afford without a federal housing voucher to subsidize their rents. Further, there are those who have the financial means to cover the rent but lack a positive credit or landlord reference and, subsequently, have no way to establish a new track record that will allow them to move beyond shelter.

COTS recognizes that our buildings are one of our greatest assets, and in an effort to adapt to the increasingly tight housing market in Burlington, COTS is exploring the feasibility of expanding housing options within our own portfolio of buildings. We are specifically looking at options at these four COTS-owned properties in Burlington: Main Street Family Shelter, Firehouse Family Shelter, St. John's Hall, and The Wilson Hotel/Waystation.

Thus far, we have contracted to architects to create concept drawings of how to add housing at each of these spaces. We also are researching – from a program perspective – how each potential opportunity could benefit our guests, looking at data, trends, and other national models.

Summary: All of these efforts hinge upon our success in increasing our capital and operating reserves.