



## Strategic Plan (2026-28)

---

### Overview

The Grace House board of directors approved a contract with Zabinski Consulting, LLC in August 2025 to facilitate a strategic planning process. Executive Director Ron Oleheiser and Planning Committee chair Lorna Mix identified key stakeholders whose input would be solicited to provide perspectives about the effectiveness of the organization's role in the community.

In early September, focus group meetings were convened: Grace House staff members (without the executive director present) in one, and board and committee members in the second session. Both groups reviewed the results of a survey of their peers in which participants were asked to identify the organization's internal strengths and weaknesses as well as external opportunities and threats.

Surveys of key Grace House stakeholders were conducted online from late September to early October. Community leaders were surveyed (including members of the boards of the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce, United Way of 1000 Lakes, the Itasca County Family YMCA and the Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation), as well as elected representatives from the Itasca County board of commissioners and the Grand Rapids city council. People representing the area's faith community were surveyed, as were people working for social services agencies and educational institutions in Itasca County and the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe. Finally, with the assistance of Cara Oakland (Continuum of Care coordinator), input from the lived experiences of current and former Grace House residents was collected during an afternoon focus group session.

The Grace House Planning Committee met twice in October/November to review the feedback from the environmental scan summary, identify strategic initiatives, and draft an action plan. This document is the product of that work.

## Strategic Initiatives

- A) Manage the process of recruiting and hiring a new executive director, including communicating with all key stakeholders (staff, volunteers and community supporters) and reviewing all current staff roles and responsibilities.
- B) Design a creative volunteer resource plan to recruit and appreciate volunteers to meet the variety of ongoing roles and short-term project needs.
- C) Re-energize relationships with area churches to support the Grace House mission.
- D) Develop a strong messaging plan to communicate Grace House's story.
- E) Evaluate the potential for growing and delivering services in Itasca County, including:
  - a. Explore the potential for offering revenue-generating services;
  - b. Consider partnerships with allied organizations (i.e., Itasca County Family YMCA, animal shelters, area veterinarians);
  - c. Assess the options for long-term sustainability.
- F) Develop a plan for funding and building a warming shelter.
- G) Maintain strong community relationships for Grace House during the leadership transition process.
- H) Review the staff compensation, recognition and retention system.
- I) Participate in developing community housing initiatives.

## Action Plan

**A) Manage the process of recruiting and hiring a new executive director, including communicating with all key stakeholders (staff, volunteers and community supporters) and reviewing all current staff roles and responsibilities.**

| Action Steps                                                         | Lead                | Deadline      |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| 1. Develop job description.                                          | Hiring Committee    | December 2025 |
| 2. Advertise job opening.                                            |                     | December 2025 |
| 3. Screen candidates.                                                |                     | February 2026 |
| 4. Interview candidates.                                             |                     | February 2026 |
| 5. Develop job offer, including compensation package and start date. |                     | February 2026 |
| 6. Present finalist recommendation for full board approval.          |                     | February 2026 |
| 7. Gather employee feedback about the state of the organization.     | Executive Committee | December 2025 |
| 8. Prepare summary for review by board and staff.                    |                     |               |
| 9. Prepare position review recommendations for board consideration.  | Ron Oleheiser       | December 2025 |

**B) Maintain strong community relationships for Grace House during the leadership transition process.**

| Action Steps                                                                                  | Lead                                   | Deadline        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Prepare news release announcing new executive director's hiring.                           | New executive director & Ron Oleheiser | March-June 2026 |
| 2. Introduce new executive director to the community via media interviews.                    |                                        |                 |
| 3. Host 'meet & greet' events for new executive director with key local and regional leaders. |                                        |                 |

**C) Develop a strong messaging plan to communicate Grace House's story.**

| Action Steps                                                                                                       | Lead                                           | Deadline         |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. Prepare an 'elevator speech' for use by board and staff to provide updates on hiring process.                   | Executive Committee                            | December 4, 2025 |
| 2. Task new executive director and new Communications Task Force to develop an organizational communications plan. | Executive director & Communications Task Force | January 2027     |
| 3. Update the website.                                                                                             |                                                | December 2027    |

**D) Review the staff compensation, recognition and retention systems.**

| Action Steps                                                                                | Lead               | Deadline      |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| 1. Executive director conducts thorough review of staff compensation & recognition systems. | Executive director | December 2026 |
| 2. Recommend updates, as needed, to board of directors.                                     | Executive director | December 2026 |

**E) Develop a plan to fund and build a warming shelter.**

| Action Steps                                                                                              | Lead                                 | Deadline    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| 1. Convene a task force of interested parties to prepare a plan for providing temporary warming shelters. | Program director & outreach director | April 2026  |
| 2. Identify site location and funding options.                                                            | Task force                           | August 2026 |
| 3. Prepare a draft operations plan and budget.                                                            | Task force                           | August 2026 |
| 4. Present plan to prospective funders.                                                                   | Task force                           | August 2027 |
| 5. Implement plan once funding is secured.                                                                | Community alliance                   | 2028        |

**F) Design a creative volunteer resource plan to recruit and appreciate volunteers to meet the variety of ongoing roles and short-term project needs.**

| Action Steps                                                                             | Lead                  | Deadline      |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| 1. Create a narrative description of Grace House's varied volunteer roles.               | Senior staff          | December 2026 |
| 2. Use the narrative to recruit new volunteers.                                          | Volunteer coordinator | December 2026 |
| 3. Clearly identify & assign volunteer coordinator duties to a Grace House staff person. | Executive director    | December 2026 |

**G) Re-energize relationships with Itasca area churches to support the Grace House mission.**

| Action Steps                                                | Lead          | Deadline   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|------------|
| 1. Convene a task force of local pastors.                   | Jim Crecilius | April 2027 |
| 2. Recruit former board members to form Outreach Committee. | Jim Crecilius | April 2027 |
| 3. Create outreach plan and timeline.                       | Jim Crecilius | April 2027 |
| 4. Provide periodic updates to board of directors.          | Jim Crecilius | 2028       |

**H) Evaluate the potential for growing and delivering services in Itasca County, including:**

- Exploring the potential for offering revenue-generating services;
- Considering partnerships with allied organizations (i.e., Itasca County Family YMCA, animal shelters, area veterinarians);
- Assessing the options for long-term sustainability.

| Action Steps                                                                         | Lead                  | Deadline     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| 1. Task the Executive Director with developing a plan for long-term sustainability.  | Executive Director    | January 2027 |
| 2. Create a Development Committee to assist in developing long-term funding options. | Board                 | January 2027 |
| 3. Present plan for board review and approval.                                       | Development Committee | June 2027    |

**I) Participate in developing community housing initiatives.**

| Action Steps                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Lead                                    | Deadline |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|----------|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Engage with Continuum of Care and other local and regional housing partners.</li><li>2. Participate in community zoning discussions to eliminate restrictions for developing affordable housing options.</li><li>3. Position Grace House as the community advocate to provide housing for homeless people in our area.</li></ol> | Executive director and leadership staff | 2028     |

Approved by the Board of Directors: December 9, 2025