

STRATEGIC PLAN

2023



**SHELTERFORCE**

# C O N T E N T S

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## **SHELTERFORCE**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Shelterforce would be a household name for those who have a direct or indirect interest in the eradication of injustices prevalent in housing and community building.**

*Shelterforce*, a nonprofit news organization with a 49-year history, has an incredible opportunity to grow over the next decade. Led by a dynamic and visionary CEO/publisher, alongside a nationally respected CEO/editor-in-chief, our organization is supported by a robust board committed to driving our mission forward, *Shelterforce* already has national recognition among community development professionals and reaches a wide range of professionals who work in the housing sector.

In a world with endless access to resources, *Shelterforce* would be a household name for those who have a direct or indirect interest in the eradication of injustices prevalent in housing and community building. Our robust platform would feature a multimedia center of information where users experience the convenience of picking from menus of content to find what is best suited for their needs at that time—from accessing in-depth articles to support legislation, to researching how people organized in the '70s, to a quick explanation of gentrification or redlining for first-year college students. We would meld rigorous accountability journalism with first-person storytelling and activist-serving explanatory journalism. This collection of trusted information would also serve as a place of community where hard discussions would continue to grow: from virtual to pop-up in-person conversations, communities of color would hear the hidden voices of their local leaders being elevated.

To grow into that future, *Shelterforce* will need to strengthen its base, build revenue, and build reach. By investing in a development director, *Shelterforce* will build the capacity to grow its individual and major donors, quadrupling total revenue in this area over the next five years. Donors will respond to the terrific story *Shelterforce* has to tell, if they are only asked.

Meanwhile, with the support of a marketing associate, *Shelterforce* will create products designed to attract new readers and listeners who work in or adjacent to the housing sector such as those in finance, public housing, and tenant activism. And the organization will offer services to support itself and key stakeholders, including editorial consulting.

These efforts will build *Shelterforce's* revenue and reach. But *Shelterforce* has the opportunity to do even more. We are at a moment when housing has become a top three issue for the general public. By creating strong partnerships with national and regional news outlets that are hungry for the kind of research and analysis *Shelterforce* can offer, *Shelterforce* will be able to leverage its strengths into a national presence.

The next five years will see *Shelterforce* mature into a powerful national platform for research and dialogue that brings us closer to our vision of realizing a just society where everyone lives in an equitable, thriving community.

# SHELTERFORCE



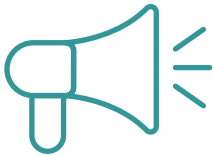
## VISION

*Shelterforce's* vision is to realize a just society where everyone lives in an equitable, thriving community.



## MISSION

*Shelterforce* uses the power of journalism to inspire, inform, and hold accountable all those working toward more just, equitable, and thriving communities where every person has a place to call home.



## TAGLINE

*Shelterforce*: Essential Reporting on Affordable Housing

## PILLARS OF SHELTERFORCE

**Audience  
Development**

**Revenue  
Generation**

**Partnership**

*Shelterforce* uses the power of journalism to inspire, inform, and hold accountable all those working towards more just, equitable, and thriving communities where every person has a place to call home.

# SHELTERFORCE

## STRATEGIC GOALS

1

*Shelterforce* will expand our core audience by 25% within five years, reaching more people and a larger range of housing and community development professionals.

2

*Shelterforce* will diversify our sources of income to grow our budget by 35% to \$1.25M within five years through a major donor program and an enhanced fee-for-service program.

3

*Shelterforce* will become nationally recognized for our in-depth coverage of issues related to affordable housing, inclusive communities, and housing justice.

# METHODOLOGY

The goal of strategic planning is to support an organization in growing from where it is to where it can best flourish and make an impact. The first step of a strategic planning process is thus to assess where an organization is: what it does well and where it can improve.

We began by asking those basic questions of *Shelterforce's* stakeholders. Working with *Shelterforce's* CEO/publisher, CEO/editor-in-chief, and Strategic Planning Board Committee, we came up with a list of 85 stakeholders representing these groups: staff, board, funders, experts and advocates, CDC and CDFI administrators, tenant organizers and activists, peer news organizations and journalists, academics, government employees. We sent all of these 85 stakeholders a 9-question survey and conducted 28 in-depth interviews. In addition, we sent a slightly modified version of the survey to *Shelterforce's* readers and received 239 responses.

Using information gathered through these surveys and interviews, and with additional landscape research, we mapped *Shelterforce's* current and potential audience and created a SWOT. These materials were then brought to a Strategic Planning Task Force created by the *Shelterforce* board. The Strategic Planning Task Force met biweekly for three months to consider possible strategic directions and to design a strategic planning retreat.

A strategic planning retreat was held on Monday, February 13 for 21 participants, including the *Shelterforce* staff, board, and task force members. The focus of the retreat was to review the task force's recommendations and to develop specific objectives for achieving strategic goals. This report, which was in turn reviewed and edited by the Strategic Planning Task Force, is the outcome of that retreat.

85

STAKEHOLDERS  
SURVEYED

28

IN-DEPTH  
INTERVIEWS

239

READER  
RESPONSES

# FINDINGS

Surveys and interviews of *Shelterforce* stakeholders resulted in three key findings:

- 1 Do more of what you already do well.** Stakeholders do not want the organization to make a fundamental change in its core content.
- 2 Widen audience for your stories through new products.** Across all respondents we found a strong consensus that *Shelterforce* needs to broaden its audience and develop more ways to deliver the great content it already has.
- 3 Develop a stronger brand.** One consistent finding was the *Shelterforce* brand promise is unclear. 56 percent of readers and 25 percent of key stakeholders identified *Shelterforce* as a housing resource. 32 percent of readers and 25 percent of stakeholders identified *Shelterforce* as a community development resource.

The SWOT analysis—based on these surveys but also on landscape analysis into peer publications—revealed similar threat and opportunities:

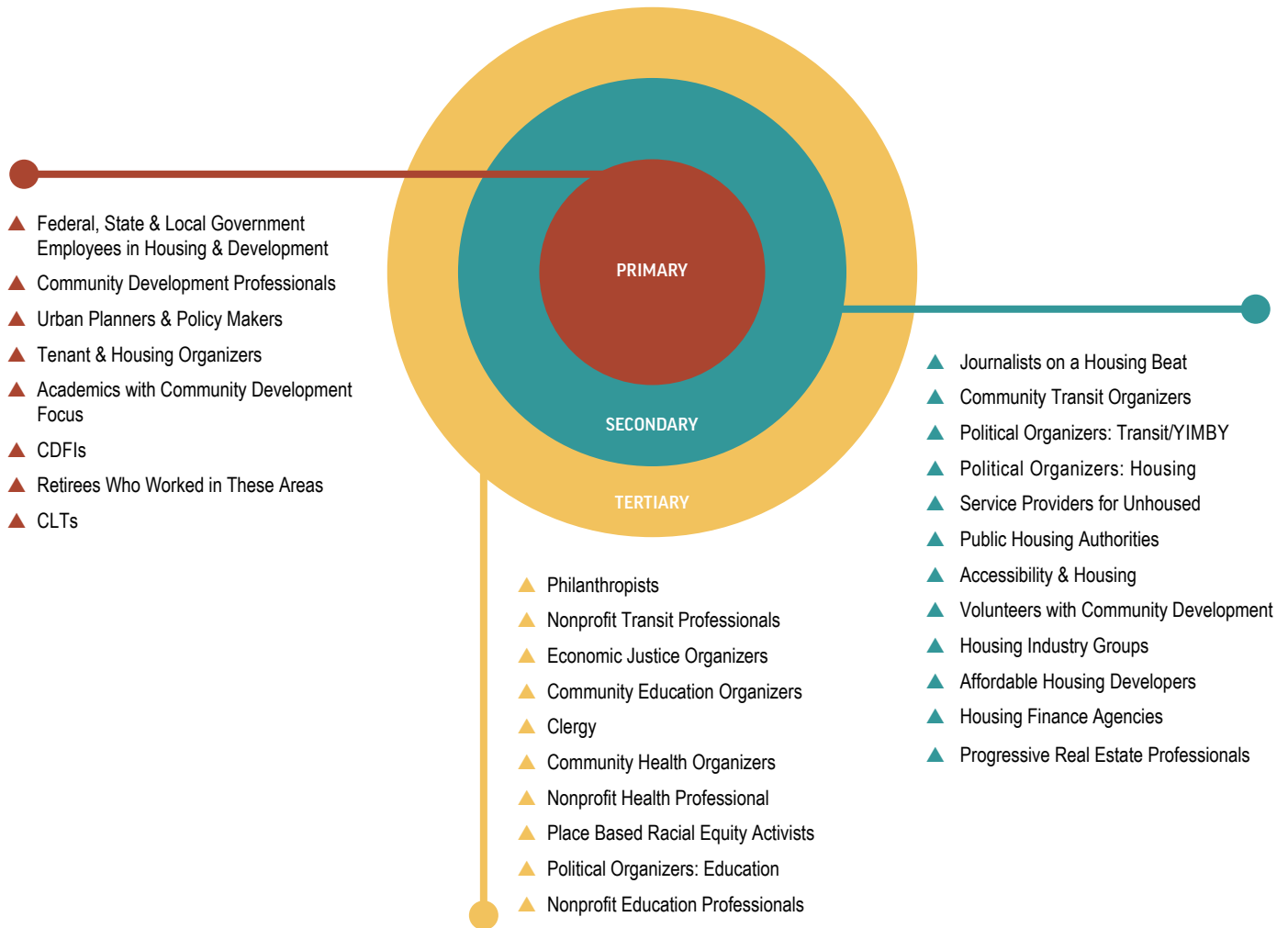
|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>STRENGTHS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Core editorial is strong</li><li>■ Well-known and loved in community development world</li><li>■ Enthusiastic, happy staff and board</li></ul>                              | <b>WEAKNESSES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Insufficient funds for editorial and marketing initiatives</li><li>■ Not seen externally as being interested in partnerships or collaborations</li></ul>                                 |
| <b>OPPORTUNITIES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Opportunity to become a key player in national conversations</li><li>■ Potential opportunity to grow revenue through new editorial products, such as webinars</li></ul> | <b>THREATS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Lack of strong branding</li><li>■ Lack of clear understanding of potential audiences</li><li>■ Timeframe narrowing to become a key player in the national conversation on housing</li></ul> |

# 1

## STRATEGIC GOAL

*Shelterforce* will expand our core audience by 25 percent within three years (from 50K to 65K uniques per month and 14K to 17K newsletter readers), reaching both more people and a larger range of housing and community development professionals.

## TARGET AUDIENCE





## WEBINAR

|                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <b>Description</b>                | Start up a webinar designed to reach core readers and create brand awareness for selected groups in our secondary tier. Format: Guest interviews   |
| <b>Goal of initiative</b>         | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Deepen reach to core readers</li> <li>2. Brand awareness for our secondary tier</li> </ol>   |
| <b>Start date</b>                 | Soft-launch July 2023, with a start date of November 2023. Start quarterly and eventually increase frequency.  |
| <b>Implementation</b>             | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify 1—3 “in-kind” sponsors</li> <li>2. Identify topics for the first four webinars</li> <li>3. Identify staff to run the webinars</li> <li>4. Roll out marketing 2 months prior to first webinar</li> </ol>   |
| <b>Marketing channels</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Self-Owned (Website, Newsletter)</li> <li>■ Paid Facebook and LinkedIn</li> <li>■ Comped Newsletters/Social of Webinar Guests</li> <li>■ Comped Newsletters/Social of Partners</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Cost</b>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Staff time—current editorial staff and new marketing associate</li> <li>■ \$600 for paid Facebook ads (first six months)</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Revenue</b>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Seek new sponsor to offset cost</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Metrics to measure success</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 500 sign-ups per webinar by January 2024</li> <li>■ List of 2,000 uniques by 6/2024</li> <li>■ 20% of sign-ups are in target expansion audience (survey)</li> <li>■ Convert 50 sign-ups per webinar to newsletter sign-ups: 400—600 newsletter sign-ups/year</li> </ul> |

## LINKEDIN PRODUCT

|                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <b>Description</b>                | Develop a weekly LinkedIn post focused with a voice designed for that segment—incorporate webinar into Initiative 1 webinar series on a quarterly basis.   |
| <b>Goal of initiative</b>         | Increase reach to professionals  |
| <b>Start date</b>                 | Roll out January 2024  |
| <b>Implementation</b>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Assign a reporter to write weekly post</li> <li>■ Identify 1-3 partners/sponsors (in-kind)</li> <li>■ Goal is to develop a <i>Shelterforce</i> Academy on LinkedIn</li> </ul> |
| <b>Marketing channels</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Self-Owned (Website, Newsletter)</li> <li>■ Paid LinkedIn</li> <li>■ Comped newsletters/Social of partners</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Cost</b>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ \$12,000 for P/T reporter/fellow</li> <li>■ \$600 in LinkedIn ads for first six months</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Revenue</b>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Seek new \$12,000 sponsor to offset cost</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Metrics to measure success</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Grow LinkedIn by average of 100 new followers/month</li> <li>■ Convert 50 LinkedIn followers to subs/month</li> <li>■ Goal: 600 new newsletter signups/year</li> </ul>        |



## VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

|                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| <b>Description</b>                | Put on a 1-2 day virtual conference for professionals.  |
| <b>Goal of initiative</b>         | Increase reach to professionals   |
| <b>Start date</b>                 | Hold conference in Spring 2025  |
| <b>Implementation</b>             | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. In Spring 2024 use surveys and focus groups to determine focus of conference</li> <li>2. Summer/Fall '24 develop program and identify partners, sponsors and 2-3 "celebrity" speakers</li> <li>3. Winter '25 launch registration page; finalize program; market program</li> <li>4. Spring '25 hold conference</li> <li>5. Summer '25 survey and email attendees</li> </ol> |
| <b>Marketing channels</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Self-Owned (Website, Newsletter)</li> <li>■ Partner newsletters/Social</li> <li>■ Paid Facebook</li> <li>■ Earned media (interviews pre conference)</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Cost</b>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ \$500 Enterprise Zoom license</li> <li>■ Staff time (will include new marketing associate)</li> <li>■ \$250 in paid media</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Revenue</b>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ \$30,000 in ticket sales (assume avg. ticket \$60; 500 sold)</li> <li>■ \$7,500 in sponsorship</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Metrics to measure success</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 500+ people to attend virtual conference</li> <li>■ Convert 30% of attendees to newsletter subs</li> <li>■ At least 5 pieces of earned media</li> </ul>  |

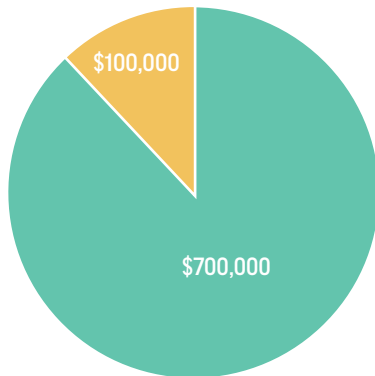


# 2

## STRATEGIC GOAL

*Shelterforce* will diversify our sources of income to grow our budget by 25% to \$1M within three years, making initial investments in marketing and development staff. With these investments, *Shelterforce* will be able to grow to \$1.25M within five years.

*Shelterforce* 2022 Revenue



- ▶ *Shelterforce* currently raises \$700,000 from foundations and corporations, but only \$100,000 from all other income sources.
- ▶ It is critically important that *Shelterforce* diversify these income sources in order to be sustainable and to grow.

The main opportunity for that growth lies in two areas:

1  
Donor Program

2  
Fee for Service: Editorial Consulting

## DEVELOP MAJOR DONORS

|                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| <b>Description</b>                | Major donors are those giving over \$500/year. Most news nonprofits are sustained by major donors.  |
| <b>Goal of initiative</b>         | Develop a donor program with an emphasis on major donors  |
| <b>Start date</b>                 | Immediately   |
| <b>Implementation</b>             | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 6/23 begin sending quarterly emails to all donors</li> <li>2. Call any donor who has given more than \$250—see if they have interest in giving more</li> <li>3. Run newsletter names through a donor search program; send those individuals a special email</li> <li>4. Develop a series of three donor campaigns: Newsmatch (Nov), Spring (Mar) and Summer (Aug)</li> </ol>                    |
| <b>Marketing channels</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Self-Owned (Website, Newsletters)</li> <li>■ Partner newsletters/social</li> <li>■ Paid Facebook</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Cost</b>                       | \$75,000 FT Development Director  |
| <b>Metrics to measure success</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Increase total amount donated:                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2022: \$40K from 500 donors (\$80 average)</li> <li>2023: \$53K from 600 donors (ten \$500 donors)</li> <li>2024: \$74K from 750 donors (\$14.5K from major)</li> <li>2025: \$100K from 900 donors (\$25K from major)</li> <li>2026: \$125K from 1000 donors (\$50K from major)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |

## EDITORIAL SERVICES

|                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| <b>Description</b>                | <i>Shelterforce</i> will develop a suite of editorial services, editorial consulting and research, editing and publishing services, and resource curation.  |
| <b>Goal of initiative</b>         | Develop a significant revenue source with a net profit over \$100K per year   |
| <b>Timeline</b>                   | Immediately   |
| <b>Implementation</b>             | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. By 6/23 identify 20 prospects</li> <li>2. By 8/23 create biz and marketing materials (proposal, contract, web page, pitch deck)</li> <li>3. By 10/23 pitch prospects</li> <li>4. Hire necessary freelancers for projects</li> </ol> |
| <b>Cost</b>                       | \$50,000 for part-time marketing associate, freelancers   |
| <b>Revenue</b>                    | Develop grants, forge partnerships, and create partnerships based on Shelterforce's journalistic expertise  |
| <b>Metrics to measure success</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 2023: 2 projects, \$5K in net revenue</li> <li>■ 2024: 6 projects, \$30K in net revenue</li> <li>■ 2025: 10 projects, \$100K in net revenue</li> </ul>   |

# 3

## STRATEGIC GOAL

*Shelterforce* will become nationally recognized for our in-depth coverage of issues related to affordable housing, inclusive communities, and housing justice.

Each strategic goal supports the others. *Shelterforce* will see a raised profile from its webinars, LinkedIn posts, and conference, and even from its client work. In addition to these efforts, however, *Shelterforce* has the opportunity to gain earned media by building partnerships.



## REPORTING PARTNERSHIP

|                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| <b>Description</b>                | <i>Shelterforce</i> will collaborate on reporting partnerships with other news organizations.   |
| <b>Goal of initiative</b>         | Gain earned media from working with news partners   |
| <b>Timeline</b>                   | Immediately   |
| <b>Implementation</b>             | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify 10 prospective partners</li> <li>2. Engage in conversation on possible projects</li> <li>3. Start small—copublishing, for example</li> </ol>   |
| <b>Cost</b>                       | Staff time  |
| <b>Revenue</b>                    | Develop new journalism grants based on partnership  |
| <b>Metrics to measure success</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Join at least 2 partnerships in 2023-24</li> <li>■ Aim for 4 partnerships in 2024-25</li> <li>■ Republication of 10+ stories in new venues</li> <li>■ 5+ references to <i>Shelterforce</i> in national media by 2025</li> <li>■ Social proof: donors mention national attention</li> </ul> |





# 5-YEAR BUDGET PLAN

This budget contains the assumptions for the initiatives in the plan. These numbers may and should change as the plan is implemented. The financial goal is first, to diversify income, creating significant revenue from donors and earned income; and second, to bring the budget to a sustainable \$1.2 million per year.

Please note that the budget assumes enough profit in 2026 that *Shelterforce* will be able to add \$100,000 to reserves. The organization should continue to see a net profit from 2028 forward, such that the organization will be able to add meaningfully to its reserves in subsequent years.

|                   | 2024               | 2025               | 2026               | 2027               | 2028               |
|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| <b>ASSETS</b>     |                    |                    |                    |                    |                    |
|                   | —                  | \$61,655           | \$141,080          | \$32,780           | \$15,555           |
| <b>REVENUE</b>    |                    |                    |                    |                    |                    |
| Corporate         | \$245,000          | \$245,000          | \$245,000          | \$245,000          | \$245,000          |
| Foundation        | \$680,000          | \$740,000          | \$600,000          | \$650,000          | \$650,000          |
| Donors            | \$54,500           | \$87,500           | \$130,000          | \$172,500          | \$220,000          |
| Earned            | \$50,000           | \$70,000           | \$105,000          | \$140,000          | \$175,000          |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>\$1,039,800</b> | <b>\$1,142,800</b> | <b>\$1,080,500</b> | <b>\$1,208,000</b> | <b>\$1,290,500</b> |
| <b>EXPENSES</b>   |                    |                    |                    |                    |                    |
| Wages             | \$873,000          | \$938,000          | \$952,000          | \$1,088,000        | \$1,100,000        |
| Fundraising       | \$6,000            | \$6,000            | \$7,000            | \$7,000            | \$7,500            |
| Admin             | \$99,145           | \$119,375          | \$129,800          | \$130,225          | \$150,700          |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>\$978,145</b>   | <b>\$1,063,375</b> | <b>\$1,088,800</b> | <b>\$1,225,225</b> | <b>\$1,258,200</b> |
| <b>Balance</b>    | <b>\$61,655</b>    | <b>\$79,425</b>    | <b>(\$8,300)</b>   | <b>(\$17,225)</b>  | <b>\$32,300</b>    |
| <b>Net Profit</b> | <b>\$61,655</b>    | <b>\$141,080</b>   | <b>\$132,780</b>   | <b>\$15,555</b>    | <b>\$47,855</b>    |