

STRATEGIC PLAN

GREATER ERIE COMMUNITY
ACTION COMMITTEE

2026-2028



GREATER ERIE COMMUNITY ACTION COMMITTEE

Helping People. Changing Lives.

LETTER FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Dear GECAC Board Members, Staff, and Community Partners,

I am pleased to share the Greater Erie Community Action Committee (GECAC) Strategic Plan for 2025–2028. This plan reflects a year of listening and learning from our Community Needs Assessment (CNA), internal data, individual conversations during my transition as CEO, meetings with program directors and funders, and a Leadership Retreat that included a SWOT analysis and a “How Might We” design sprint.

Together, these efforts gave us a clear picture of what we must do inside the organization and with our community. Internally, we must strengthen and diversify funding, modernize operations and “open the front doors” of GECAC, support and retain a high-performing workforce, hold ourselves accountable for results, and invest in marketing and public awareness. Externally, the CNA calls us to focus on housing and utility relief, access to living-wage jobs and job training, transportation, health and behavioral health, senior services, and poverty.

This plan is organized around two pillars: Internal Capacity & Organizational Excellence, and Community Impact & Priority Needs. Each goal includes specific outcomes and timelines, aligned with the ROMA cycle so we can plan, act, measure, and adjust in a disciplined way.

I am grateful to our staff and leaders for their honesty in naming challenges and their creativity in offering solutions, and to our board and partners for their guidance and advocacy. This document is a roadmap, not a finish line. We will revisit it regularly, report on our progress, and adapt as conditions change.

Thank you for your partnership as we continue helping people and changing lives in Erie County.



Education



Aging



Workforce



Housing

Dr. Benjamin D. Wilson
Chief Executive Officer



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Mission:

The Greater Erie Community Action Committee will eliminate poverty in Erie County through empowerment, education, and community partnership.



Vision:

Empowering the community to foster a better life for all.

Planning Process & ROMA Framework:

This Strategic Plan was developed using the Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) cycle and aligns with the Community Needs Assessment (CNA) and Community Action Plan (CAP). Together, these documents demonstrate continuous use of the ROMA cycle:

Assessment: The CNA (2024–2028) identifies the causes and conditions of poverty and priority needs in Erie County, drawing on CAP60 data, external reports, surveys, and stakeholder feedback.

Planning: This Strategic Plan and the Community Action Plan translate those needs into goals, strategies, and community needs.

Implementation: Division-level work plans (Workforce, Aging, Housing & Energy, Youth, etc.) define how programs will carry out these strategies.

Achievement of Results: The plan identifies outcomes and indicators that will be tracked annually.

Evaluation: Leadership and the board review progress, adjust strategies, and feed learning back into the next CNA and planning cycle.

This plan reflects extensive input from:

- GECAC Leadership Retreat (August 2025): Directors and managers completed a SWOT analysis and identified key organizational priorities.
- CEO Transition 1:1 Sessions (December 2025–2026): Individual conversations with leaders and staff surfaced themes about culture, systems, and needed change.
- Program Director Meetings: Each program director met at least twice during the year with the CEO/leadership to review performance and CNA-linked needs.
- Survey Results from GECAC Staff
- Design Sprint & “How Might We” Exercise: The Leadership Team conducted a design sprint focused on funding, front doors, staffing, change, and marketing, generating practical ideas and priorities.

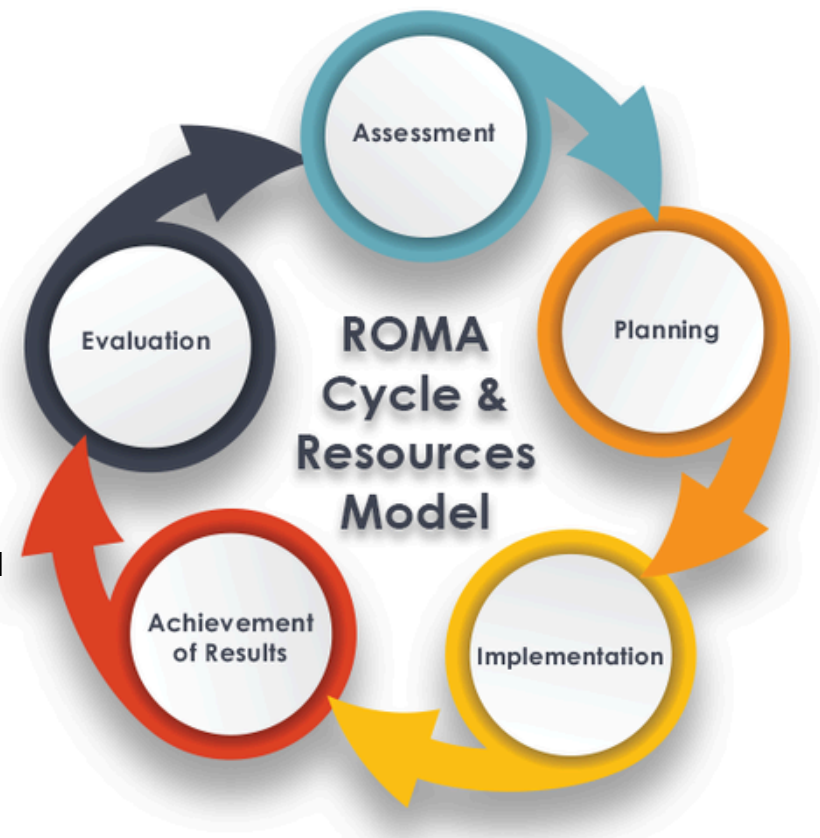
Combined, these inputs ensure that this Strategic Plan is data-informed, staff-informed, funder-informed, and community-informed.

ROMA Methodology and Planning Approach

GECAC's Strategic Plan is grounded in the **Results-Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) cycle**, a continuous performance management framework used across Community Action to ensure our work is driven by evidence, focused on measurable results, and continuously improved. ROMA follows a clear cycle: Assessment, Planning, Implementation, Achievement of Results, and Evaluation. This approach helps us connect community needs to agency priorities, track progress, and make data-informed adjustments over time.

This Strategic Plan integrates two core planning components within the ROMA cycle. **First**, our Community Needs Assessment (CNA) serves as the primary Assessment tool, providing a clear picture of local conditions, priority needs, and the underlying factors impacting individuals, families, and the broader community. **Second**, this Strategic Plan, together with **GECAC's Community Action Plan** represents the Planning phase by translating assessment findings into organizational priorities, goals, strategies, and expected outcomes.

Moving forward, GECAC will operationalize this plan. Throughout the plan GECAC understands that this cycle is ongoing and aims to ensure that our planning remains responsive to emerging needs, accountable to results, and aligned with our mission of helping people and changing lives.



GECAC Staff Survey Results and Analysis 2024

In February 2024, GECAC administered two staff retention surveys to better understand the factors that influence employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention:

- **A Staff Retention Survey with 75 responses from employees across departments, with a majority from the Aging department.**
- **A Senior Management Retention Survey with 47 responses focused specifically on staff perceptions of senior management.**

These surveys provide a snapshot of strengths to build upon and gaps that must be addressed as GECAC moves into the next phase of its strategic plan.



GECAC Staff Survey Results and Analysis 2024

Staff Perceptions of Supervisors vs Senior Management

Survey responses indicate consistently high confidence in immediate supervisors:

These findings suggest that frontline and mid-level supervisors are a critical strength for the organization and represent a key leverage point for communicating change, supporting staff, and implementing retention strategies.

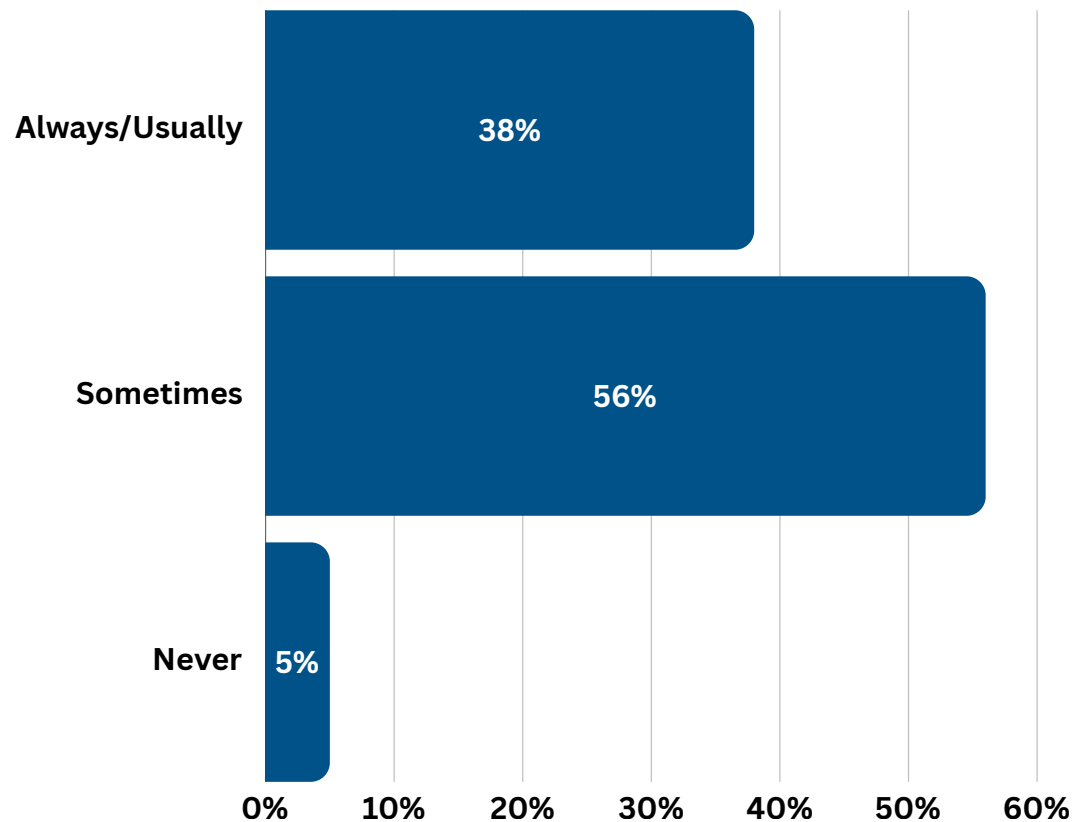
Item	Leader Type	% “Always/Usually”
Communicates effectively	Direct Supervisor	85%
Communicates effectively	Senior Management	29%
Provides constructive feedback	Direct Supervisor	81%
Provides constructive feedback	Senior Management	31%
Overall effectiveness/confidence	Direct Supervisor	89%
Overall effectiveness/confidence	Senior Management	42%

GECAC Staff Survey Results and Analysis 2024

Staff Feeling Informed About GECAC Overall

While staff feel well-informed at the program and supervisory levels, many feel less connected to the overall organization and senior leadership:

Below reflects a **communication and visibility gap** at the organizational level, even while relationships with direct supervisors remain strong.

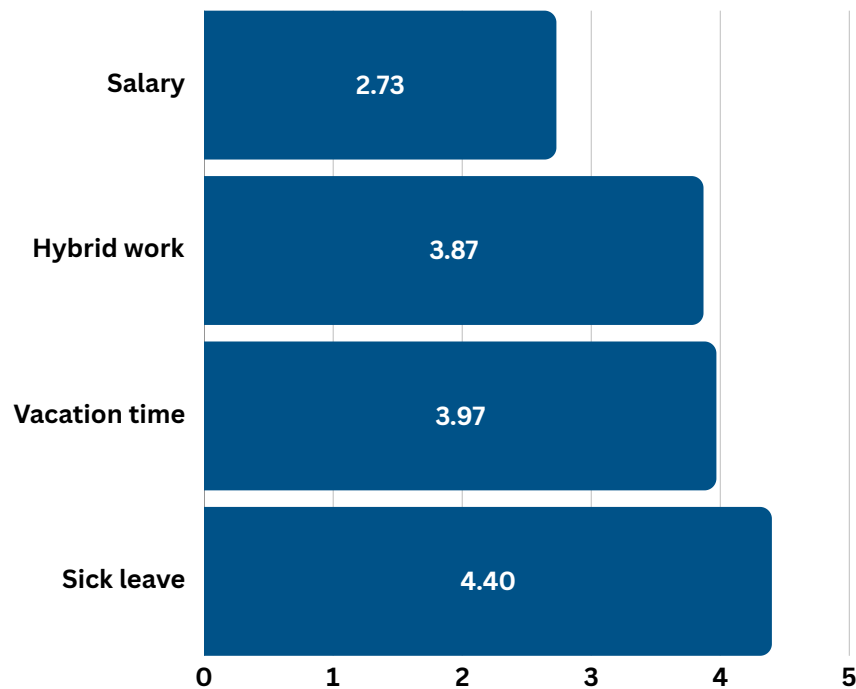


GECAC Staff Survey Results and Analysis 2024

Importance and Satisfaction Ratings for Benefits

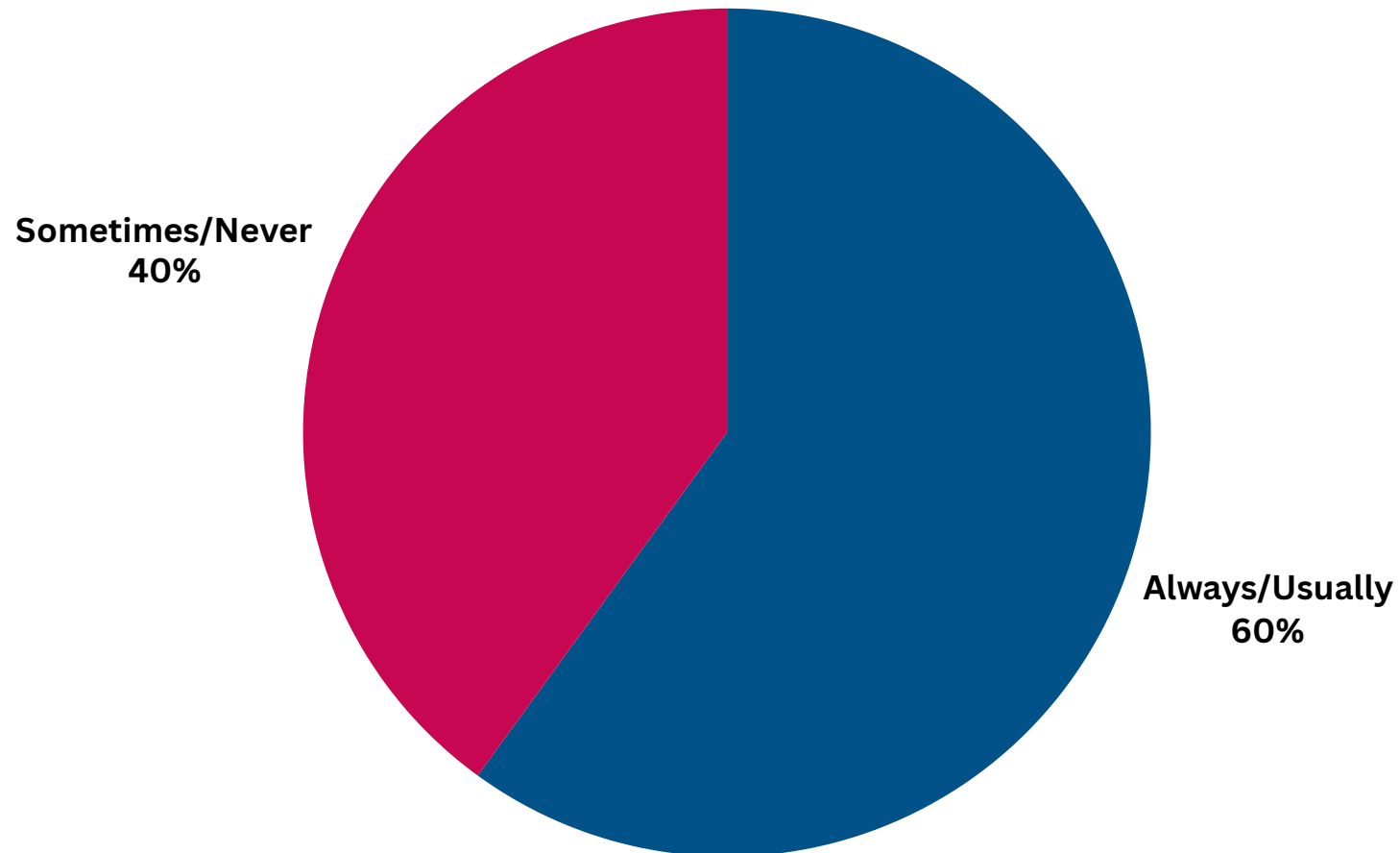
These findings show that leave policies and hybrid options are perceived as organizational strengths and can be highlighted as part of GECAC's value proposition as an employer. Hybrid work benefits receive a 3.87 out of 5 average rating. Vacation time is rated positively, and 96% of staff report that it is easy to get vacation or personal time when requested.

Satisfaction Ratings (1–5 Scale)



**GECAC Staff Survey Results and Analysis
2024**

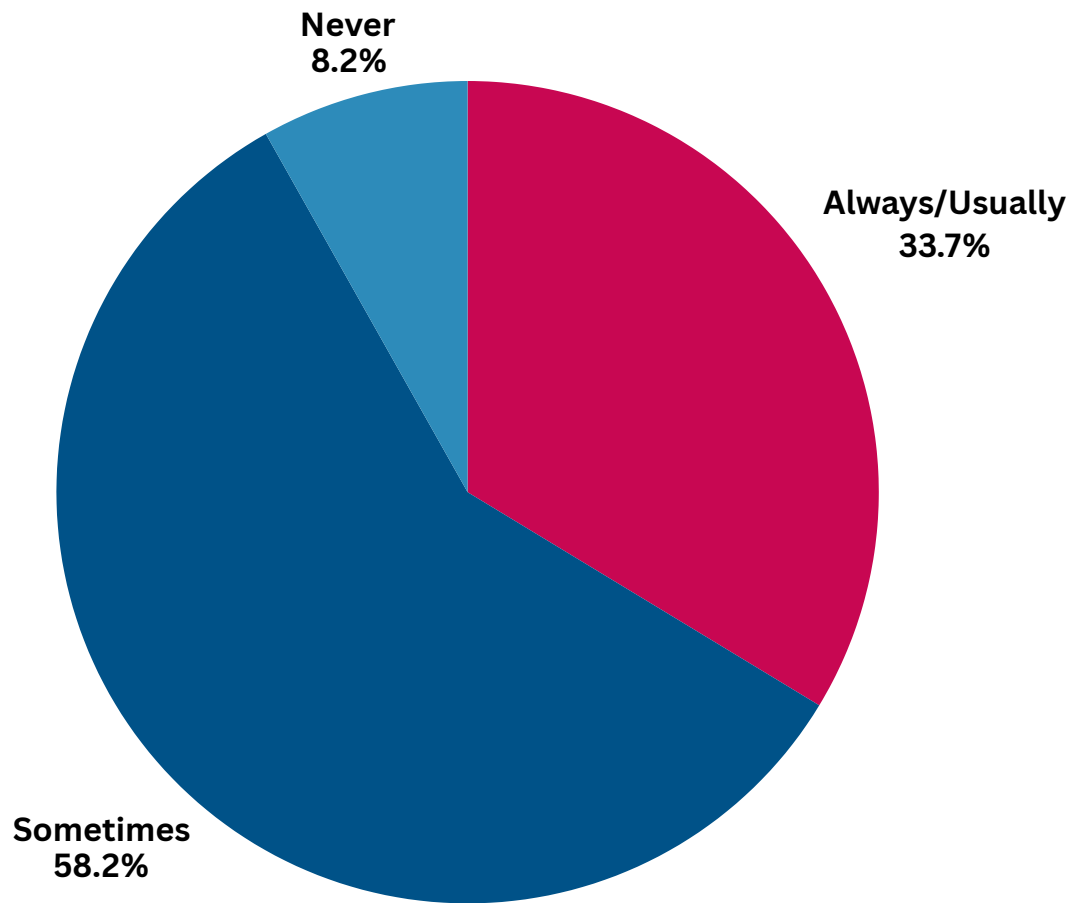
Feeling Valued as a Member of the GECAC Team



GECAC Staff Survey Results and Analysis 2024

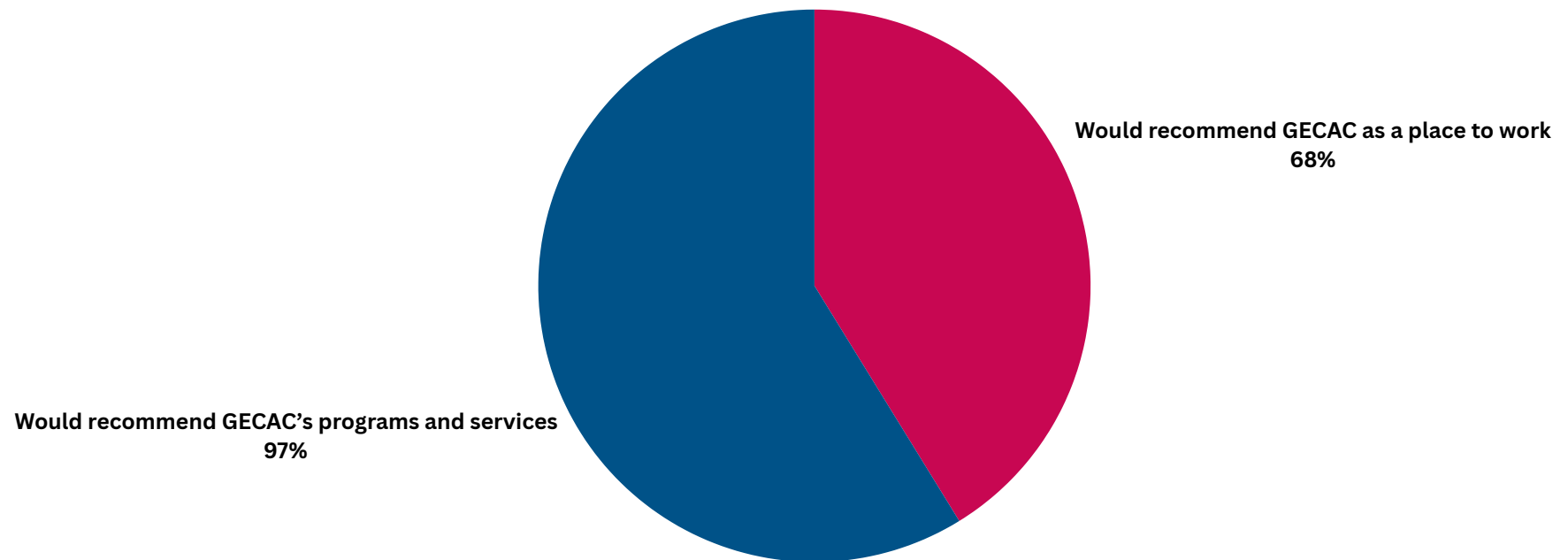
Growth, Promotion, Training, and Job Security

This suggests the need to clarify career pathways, promotion criteria, and professional development opportunities, and to communicate more clearly about job stability where possible.



GECAC Staff Survey Results and Analysis 2024

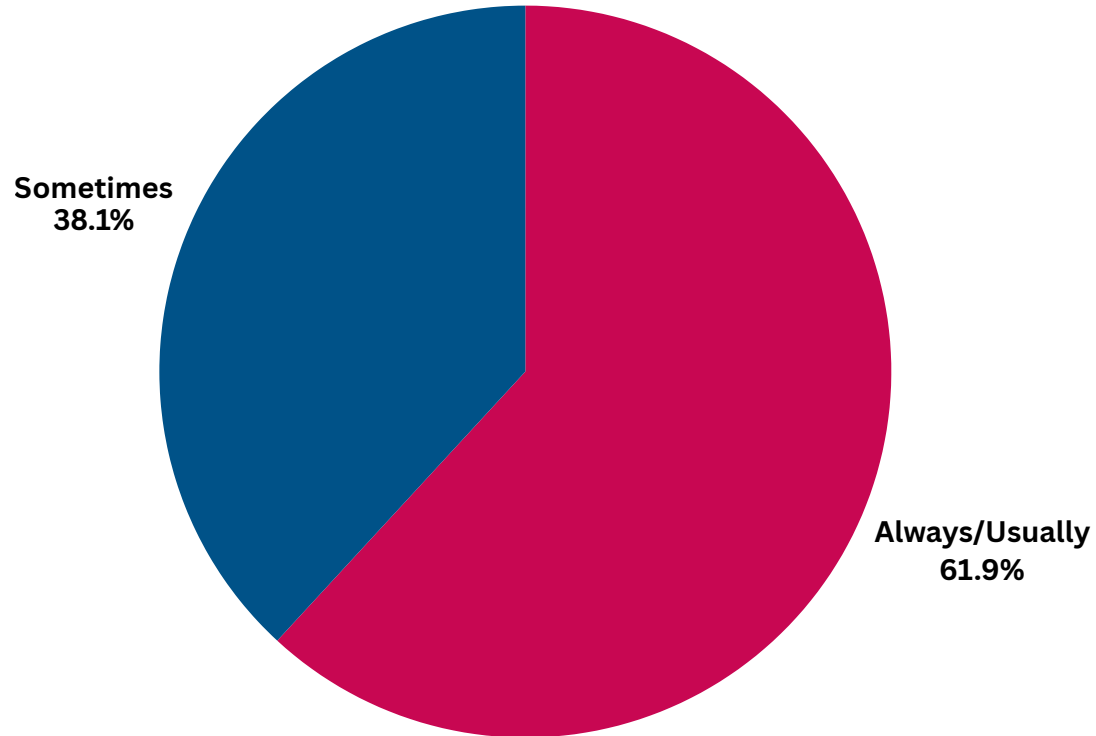
Recommendation Gap: Workplace vs Services



GECAC Staff Survey Results and Analysis 2024

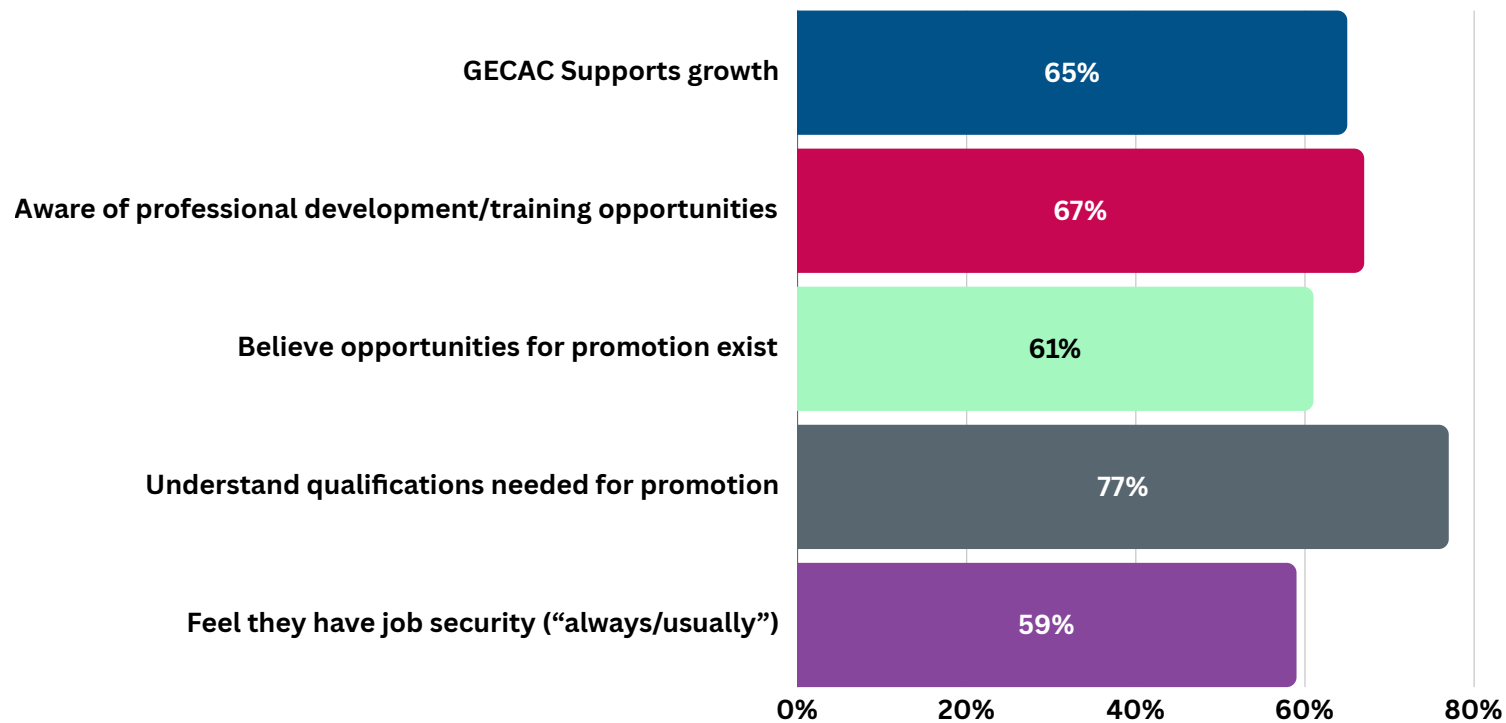
Workload, Overwhelm, and Stress

Workload is a top stressor, many staff feel overwhelmed, and there is strong interest in more flexible work schedules.



GECAC Staff Survey Results and Analysis 2024

Growth, Promotion, Training, and Job Security

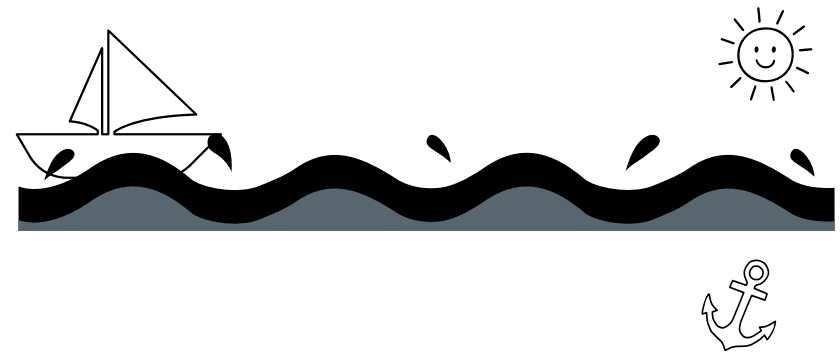


Sailboat Activity

As part of our leadership retreat with supervisors, we used a “sailboat and anchor” activity as a visual and interactive way to assess GECAC’s current state. In this exercise, the sailboat represents the organization. Items placed above the waterline reflect what is going well and moving us forward. Our strengths, successes, effective practices, and emerging opportunities that are creating momentum. Items placed below the waterline, attached to the “anchor,” represent the issues, barriers, and challenges that may be slowing our progress, draining our capacity, or keeping us from fully achieving our mission.

This activity gave supervisors a structured but approachable way to share their perspectives. Rather than only focusing on problems or staying at a high level, the sailboat visual encouraged honest conversation about both what we want to preserve and what we need to change. Supervisors identified concrete examples of what is working (e.g., strong team collaboration, dedicated staff, effective programs) alongside specific anchors (e.g., communication gaps, unclear processes, limited resources, outdated systems).

The following presents the results and analysis from this sailboat and anchor activity. These reflections summarize what supervisors identified as key strengths that are propelling GECAC forward, as well as the primary “anchors” that may be holding the organization back. The themes that emerged from this exercise provide valuable insight into our current operations, culture, and systems, and they serve as a foundation for the strategic priorities outlined later in this plan.



Sailboat Activity

What's going well "Wind in our Sail"

- Do our best to keep good people
- Look at the work and not the person
- People are willing to ask for help
- We are purposeful, intentionally building a team at GECAC
- Knowledgeable, experienced staff
- Dedicated staff
- Employees have a passion for their positions
- New CEO's position and skill set
- Staff who want to succeed
- The community needs us
- We support each other – my problem is the agency's problem
- Great program directors who are passionate about their teams and programs
- Strong leadership
- GED lab
- Having a strong affiliation with CAAP
- Mission and outcome-focused, client-focused
- Flexibility for staff
- New CEO
- Starting to look forward and not back
- Dedicated staff
- Highly visited website
- A majority of clients are happy with their caseworker
- Board President
- Lots of clients
- We use limited resources to the fullest extent
- Planning
- Open to community programs
- Open to options
- Advocate for those who can't advocate for themselves
- Asking people what they see, feel, and desire
- Working together / teamwork
- Respecting others, their work, and their knowledge
- Employees are encouraged to offer their own ideas and suggestions
- Providing client services
- Keeping clients and staff safe
- Spending funds efficiently
- Letting staff know that they are appreciated
- Communication
- Staff awareness
- Working with GEEDC
- Benefit package
- Teamwork
- Outreach (improving)
- Agency promotion (better, but not where we want it to be)
- Camaraderie outside of work – people actually care about their co-workers

Sailboat Activity

“Anchors Holding GECAC Back”

- Being respected by stakeholders
- Resource-rich funding, facilities, and programs
- Improving our status in the community
- Looking back and not forward
- Relationships with people of power
- Technology
- Keeping current
- Competitive salaries
- Community engagement
- Working with like-minded partners and agencies
- Becoming more relevant in the community and with funders
- National and statewide partners
- Organizing for the future

Sailboat Activity

Strengths – “Wind in Our Sails”	Areas to Improve – “Anchors Holding Us Back”
Dedicated, passionate, knowledgeable staff	Being more respected by stakeholders
Strong sense of teamwork, support, and camaraderie	Improving status and visibility in the community
Staff who want to succeed and care about clients	Becoming more relevant to funders
Strong leadership (CEO, Board President, program directors)	Strengthening relationships with people in positions of power
Mission- and outcome-focused; client-centered services	Building and deepening local, statewide, and national partnerships
The community clearly needs our services; lots of clients	Increasing community engagement and agency promotion
Culture of asking for help, sharing ideas, and respecting others	Securing more resource-rich funding, facilities, and programs
Ability to stretch limited resources efficiently	Providing more competitive salaries
Strong affiliation with CAAP and partnership with GEEDC	Modernizing technology and staying current
Highly visited website and improving outreach	Organizing for the future (structure, systems, long-term planning)
Commitment to keeping clients and staff safe	Letting go of “looking back” and fully embracing a forward-focused mindset

Sailboat Activity

What's going well (the "Wind in the Sails")

From these responses, the major strengths are:

People and culture:

- Repeated emphasis on dedicated, passionate staff.
- Strong sense of teamwork, mutual support, and respect (**"my problem is the agency's problem," "working together," "camaraderie outside of work"**).
- Staff feel encouraged to share ideas and are asked what they see, feel, and desire.

Leadership and direction:

- Strong positive perception of the new CEO and Board President.
- "Strong leadership," "great program directors," and "planning" all show confidence in the leadership structure.
- Perception that the agency is beginning to look forward and not back, signaling movement toward a more future-focused culture.

Mission and impact

Clear conviction that the community needs us and that staff are advocates for those who can't advocate for themselves. Many clients are happy with their caseworkers, and there are "lots of clients," which speaks to reach and relevance.

Operations and infrastructure strengths

- Knowledgeable, experienced staff and a strong affiliation with CAAP.
- GED lab, strong benefits, safety for clients and staff, and efficient use of limited resources.
- Communication, staff awareness, and collaboration with GEEDC.
- A highly visited website indicates good visibility and an access point for the community.
- In short: Our internal engine is strong—people, culture, and mission commitment are clearly the biggest assets propelling the "boat" forward.

Sailboat Activity

“Anchors Holding GECAC Back”

From these responses, the major areas are:

External perception and credibility

“Being respected by stakeholders,” “improving our status in the community,” and “becoming more relevant ... with funders” show concern about how GECAC is seen from the outside.

“Agency promotion (better, but not where we want it to be)” and “outreach (improving)” point to marketing, visibility, and storytelling gaps.

Relationships and partnerships

“Relationships with people of power,” “working with like-minded partners and agencies,” and “national and statewide partners” highlight the need for stronger, more strategic partnerships—locally, statewide, and nationally.

This connects directly to funding, influence, and long-term sustainability.

Resources, funding, and compensation

“Resource-rich funding, facilities, and programs” and “competitive salaries” show a need to match strong talent and mission with adequate resources.

Staff feel they stretch “limited resources to the fullest extent,” but there is a desire to move beyond scarcity toward stability and growth.

Technology and staying current

“Technology” and “keeping current” signal a need for modern tools, systems, and ways of working.

This likely affects efficiency, staff workload, data, and the agency’s image.

Future-readiness and strategy

“Organizing for the future” and “looking back and not forward” (as something to fix) show that staff want more clarity around long-term direction, structure, and priorities.

The fact that “starting to look forward and not back” appears on the “doing well” suggests progress has begun, but it’s not yet fully realized.

Sailboat Activity

Trends and themes across the activity

Pulling it all together, some clear themes emerge:

- People are our greatest strength.
- Staff see themselves as dedicated, passionate, supportive, and proud to work at GECAC. The culture of caring—for clients and for each other—is a major asset.
- Leadership momentum is real, but still in motion.
- The new CEO, Board President, and program directors are recognized positively. There's a sense that leadership is helping the agency "start looking forward," but staff also know more work is needed to fully organize for the future.
- We're mission-strong but resource-strained.
- Staff feel deeply connected to the mission and know the community needs GECAC. At the same time, they're very aware of limitations around funding, salaries, technology, and facilities.
- External perception and influence lag behind internal quality.
- Inside the boat: strong culture, strong mission, strong people. Outside the boat: concerns about how respected, visible, and "relevant" GECAC is with stakeholders, funders, and partners.
- Desire for strategic alignment and modernization.
- Themes around technology, keeping current, organizing for the future, and building partnerships all point to a strong desire for modernization and strategic alignment—connecting the internal strengths to a clearer, more powerful external presence.

Sailboat Activity

The sailboat activity confirmed that GECAC's greatest strengths are our people, our culture, and our commitment to mission. Staff consistently described GECAC as a place with dedicated, passionate, and knowledgeable employees who care deeply about their work, their clients, and one another. There is a strong sense of teamwork and mutual support, **"my problem is the agency's problem,"** and an environment where employees feel encouraged to offer ideas and be part of something bigger than themselves. Participants also highlighted confidence in the new CEO, Board President, and program directors, and recognized that GECAC is beginning to look forward rather than back.

Staff see our mission and outcome-focused approach, our reputation for quality client services, our strong affiliation with CAAP, and the ability to stretch limited resources as key drivers of impact in a community that clearly needs us.

At the same time, the activity surfaced several **"anchors"** that could hold the organization back if not addressed. Staff expressed concern that, while we are internally strong, we are not always seen externally with the same level of respect, relevance, and visibility by stakeholders, funders, and community partners.

There is a strong desire to **strengthen relationships with people in positions of influence; deepen local, statewide, and national partnerships; and enhance outreach, promotion, and community engagement so that GECAC's story and value are better understood.**

The leadership team also identified the need for more resource-rich funding, competitive salaries, modern technology, and updated systems to fully support the work. Finally, staff emphasized the importance of organizing for the future—continuing to clarify strategic direction, structure, and priorities so that our internal strengths, leadership momentum, and mission commitment are aligned with a clear, forward-looking path.

Sailboat Activity

Word Cloud Themes

Things we are doing well as an agency “Wind in our Sail”

Things we need to work on “Anchors Holding us Back”



Design Sprint – “How Might We” (HMW) Exercise

As part of GECAC’s planning and continuous improvement efforts, the Leadership Team conducted a Design Sprint focused on internal challenges and opportunities. The core activity was a “How Might We” (HMW) exercise. Leaders took difficult issues—funding, front doors, staffing, change, marketing, and culture—and reframed them as opportunity-oriented questions and ideas.

Why Is This Detailed Section Included?

This appendix is included to document the voice of the GECAC Leadership Team and to show how their day-to-day experience directly shaped the strategic priorities in this plan. Rather than only presenting high-level themes, the HMW section captures the actual ideas, concerns, and opportunities identified during the Design Sprint.

By sharing these details, GECAC is:

Demonstrating transparency in how leadership is thinking about change and improvement.

Providing a clear bridge between everyday operational challenges and strategic priorities.

Creating a baseline for future planning, accountability, and progress tracking, so staff, the Board, and partners can see where ideas started and how they evolve over time. The themes and ideas below directly inform the goals and outcomes in this Strategic Plan.

Priority Themes from the HMW Exercise

Across all HMW responses, several major themes emerged as top priorities for GECAC:

1. Funding & Financial Sustainability
2. “Front Door” Access & Customer Experience
3. Organizational Change, Agility & Strategic Focus
4. Staff Performance & “Problem Employees”
5. Employee Retention, Compensation & Workplace Culture
6. Marketing, Public Awareness & Community Relationships
7. Communication & Internal Culture
8. Policies, Procedures & Infrastructure

Design Sprint – “How Might We” (HMW) Exercise

Detailed “How Might We” Ideas by Theme:

1. Funding & Financial Sustainability:

- How might we increase visibility with County, State, and Federal partners so that GECAC is top-of-mind for new funding opportunities?
- How might we simply make more contacts with available funding sources, including possibly adding staff whose main role is to pursue funding?
- How might we find opportunities where funds already exist, such as health-related funding streams that align with our work?
- How might we look for more unrestricted funding and avoid over-reliance on restricted funds, to give GECAC flexibility to innovate and respond to emerging needs?
- How might we locate grants, do fundraisers, and solicit donations as a coordinated, ongoing strategy rather than one-off efforts?
- How might we increase overall funding sources to stabilize programs and support growth?
- How might we find a dedicated grant writer—someone whose main job is to find grants and other funding opportunities so leadership can focus on strategy and operations?
- How might we create a written funding strategy that clearly defines what we want to do, how much it costs, and the goals and strategies to secure the needed resources?

2. “Front Doors” & Customer Experience:

- How might we simply open and unlock the front doors, recognizing that infrastructure for safety and security is already in place?
- How might we identify and solve the basic and in-depth problems related to the front doors, including signage, flow, and customer experience?
- How might we use a hands-on app or digital intake system to streamline how people are welcomed and connected to services?
- How might we make the front desk area more welcoming and safe, while also keeping the front doors open to show that GECAC is accessible and ready to serve?
- How might we treat the opening of the front doors as a visible, ongoing practice, reinforcing accessibility rather than making it a one-time change?

Design Sprint – “How Might We” (HMW) Exercise

Detailed “How Might We” Ideas by Theme:

3. Organizational Change, Agility & Strategic Focus:

- How might we work together and fully engage in change, instead of resisting it or delaying important decisions?
- How might we come together as a team to bring the agency into the 21st century, including updating technology, processes, and internal systems?
- How might we be more forward-thinking, anticipating needs and opportunities rather than only reacting to crises?
- How might we act more quickly on needed changes, while still maintaining compliance and appropriate oversight?
- How might we follow a clear strategic plan of priorities, with defined goals and regular reporting, and make this a true priority by holding people accountable?

4. Staff Performance, Accountability & “Problem Employees”:

- How might we continue to support managers and staff who are working through the disciplinary process, recognizing performance challenges as a “team problem” and not just an individual problem?
- How might we resolve staff issues more decisively, including being willing to separate from employees who refuse to change or do not meet expectations?
- How might we avoid placing people in positions for which they are not qualified, in order to protect program quality and agency reputation?
- How might we be more flexible with pay when appropriate, especially to attract and retain strong performers in critical roles?
- How might we follow up on issues with clear documentation, ensuring consistency, fairness, and transparency in the disciplinary process?

Design Sprint – “How Might We” (HMW) Exercise

Detailed “How Might We” Ideas by Theme:

5. Employee Retention, Compensation & Workplace Culture:

- How might we tell staff more often that they are doing a great job, and share successes across the agency?
- How might we consider ways to provide 3% COLAs to staff in programs that cannot currently afford them but whose performance clearly deserves recognition?
- How might we keep up with trends and be leaders in new ways of supporting staff and good team members?
- How might we remind staff that they may not always know both sides of the story, encouraging empathy, patience, and trust in leadership processes?
- How might we create a more positive environment overall, working intentionally on salary and benefits to make them more competitive over time?
- How might we incorporate more fun and team-building activities for staff, while also reducing micromanagement so people feel trusted and empowered?

6. Marketing, Public Awareness & Community Relationships

- How might we provide the Marketing department with a real budget, including allocated funding to execute a full communications plan?
- How might we “toot our own horn” more effectively, using impact statements, success stories, and tools like hashtags (#success) to show our value?
- How might we market according to the strategic plan, setting goals, creating a marketing budget, and giving clear direction on what to target?
- How might we continue to build and re-establish community relationships, recognizing that this must be an ongoing effort, not a one-time push?
- How might we coordinate and work more intentionally with local leaders, including elected officials, business leaders, and partner organizations?

Design Sprint – “How Might We” (HMW) Exercise

Detailed “How Might We” Ideas by Theme:

7. Communication & Internal Culture:

- How might we be open, upfront, and proactive in educating staff about decisions, changes, and the reasons behind them?
- How might we improve communication so it is more positive across the agency, and not dominated by negativity?
- How might we stop negative gossiping and replace it with constructive feedback, problem-solving, and direct communication?

8. Policies, Procedures & Infrastructure:

- How might we rewrite finance policies to better reflect current practice, compliance requirements, and the strategic direction of the agency, while supporting more efficient and transparent operations?



Strategic Plan and Goals

Strategic Framework:

GECAC's historic strategic themes—Education, Employment, Collective Impact, and Operations—remain relevant and are now organized under two overarching pillars:

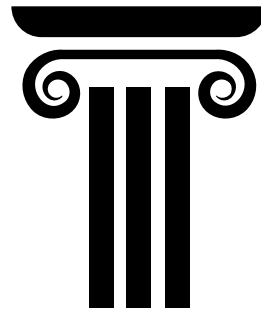
Pillar A – Internal Capacity & Organizational Excellence – Focus: Internal systems, people, culture, funding, and operations (driven by SWOT and HMW).

Pillar B – Community Impact & Priority Needs – Focus: Housing, jobs, transportation, health, seniors, youth, and equity (driven by the CNA).

Each pillar includes Strategic Goals, Key Outcomes, and Timeframes (2025–2028).

The following sections (Pillar A and Pillar B) include detailed Strategic Goals, Key Outcomes, and Timelines as previously outlined. You can continue to use the prior full version or paste the remaining goals below this section as needed.

Pillar A:



**Internal Capacity & Organizational Excellence –
Focus: Internal systems, people, culture, funding, and operations
(driven by SWOT and HMW)**



PILLAR A – INTERNAL CAPACITY & ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

GOAL A1 – STRENGTHEN FUNDING & FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Rationale: Leadership identified funding as a top priority: limited unrestricted funds, flat-funded programs, and heavy reliance on restricted grants constrain salaries, retention, and innovation.

Key Outcomes (by 2028):

1. Diversified Revenue & Unrestricted Funds

- By **December 2026**, develop and board-approve a **written funding and development strategy** that:
 - Sets targets for **unrestricted revenue**,
 - Identifies key **County, State, Federal, corporate, and philanthropic** opportunities, and
 - Defines roles for staff, CEO, and Board in relationship-building.
- By **December 2027**, increase unrestricted revenue by **at least 25%** over the 2024 baseline.
- By **December 2028**, secure at least **three new multi-year funding sources** (public or private) aligned with CNA priority areas.

2. Dedicated Resource Development Capacity

- By **June 2026**, determine the feasibility and job design for a dedicated **Development / Grants position** whose main job is to identify and pursue grants and other funding.
- If feasible, hire and onboard this position by **December 2026**.

3. Stronger Visibility with Funders

- Beginning in **2026**, conduct at least **two strategic funder outreach meetings per quarter** (County, State, Federal, philanthropic, or corporate).
- By **December 2027**, GECAC will be actively participating in at least **three regional or statewide funding/advocacy coalitions** that align with CNA priorities.



GOAL A2 – BUILD AND RETAIN A HIGH-PERFORMING, SUPPORTED WORKFORCE

Rationale: Staff salaries, retention, and accountability were identified as major internal barriers. Leaders emphasized the need for recognition, competitive pay, better communication, and reduced micromanagement.

Key Outcomes (by 2028):

1. Competitive and Transparent Compensation

- By **June 2026**, complete an **external compensation study** (third party) based on updated job descriptions and Erie labor market data.
- By **December 2026**, adopt a **revised salary structure** for core positions and set a plan for phased implementation tied to funding availability.
- Beginning in **2026**, **plan for an annual COLA** (Cost of Living Adjustment) within budget constraints, with a specific strategy to address programs that historically cannot afford COLAs.

2. Retention & Work Environment

- By **May 2026**, develop a **written Retention and Recognition Plan** that includes:
 - Annual recognition events and spot awards,
 - Non-monetary perks (flexibility, dress-down days, etc.),
 - Clear communication about career pathways and professional development.
- Starting in **2026**, maintain an **annual staff satisfaction survey**; by **2028**, improve overall job satisfaction scores by **10%** over the 2025 baseline.
- By **December 2027**, reduce turnover in critical departments (e.g., Finance, Older Adult Protective Services) by **15%** compared to 2024–2025 averages.

3. Work-Life Balance & Flexibility

- By **June 2026**, finalize and communicate a **Work-from-Home / hybrid policy** that balances service needs, equity, and work-life balance.
- By **December 2027**, implement at least **two new work-life strategies** (e.g., enhanced vacation accrual, flexible schedules, or wellness initiatives), based on staff feedback.



GOAL A3 – STRENGTHEN STAFF ACCOUNTABILITY, ROLE CLARITY & PERFORMANCE

Rationale: Leaders called out “problem staff,” inconsistent accountability, and outdated job descriptions, evaluations, and handbooks as barriers to quality and morale.

Key Outcomes (by 2028):

1. Clear Roles & Expectations

- Within **12 months of plan adoption (by 2027)**, develop and implement **job description templates** for major position categories (e.g., caseworkers, coordinators, managers).
- Ensure that **100% of job descriptions** are aligned with **current contracts, program requirements, and agency expectations by December 2027**.

2. Aligned Evaluations & Feedback

- Within **12 months of plan adoption**, update **employee evaluation forms** to tie directly to job descriptions and program/agency outcomes.
- Beginning in **2026**, ensure that **at least 95% of staff receive an annual evaluation on time**, with documentation of strengths, areas for growth, and goals.

3. Policy & Handbook Modernization

- By **December 2026**, complete a **full revision of the Employee Handbook** to reflect current practices, technology, and hybrid work.
- By **December 2027**, revise the **Supervisor Handbook** and provide training to all supervisors on performance management, documentation, and progressive discipline.

4. Accountability Culture

- Beginning in **2025**, incorporate **accountability expectations** (e.g., use of data, follow-through, teamwork) into leadership performance reviews.
- By **2027**, reduce unresolved performance issues (e.g., repeated corrective actions without resolution) by **25%**, as measured by HR tracking.



GOAL A4 – MODERNIZE OPERATIONS, FRONT-DOOR EXPERIENCE & INTERNAL SYSTEMS

Rationale: Internal challenges include outdated systems, program silos, and a perception of being “slow to change.” The design sprint stressed “open the front doors,” improve intake, and update finance and HR systems.

Key Outcomes (by 2028):

1. Front Door & Intake Experience

- By **January 2026**, implement a **clear policy and practice for opening and unlocking the front doors**, consistent with safety and security requirements.
- By **April 2026**, redesign the **front desk and lobby experience** (signage, layout, scripts, and materials) to be more welcoming and accessible.
- By **December 2027**, pilot and evaluate at least **one digital or app-based intake tool** that supports whole-household assessment and cross-program referrals.

2. Finance & Administrative Systems

- By **April 2026**, complete key system upgrades (e.g., payroll, HRIS, MIP Cloud) and ensure staff are trained.
- By **December 2027**, **rewrite core finance policies** to align with updated systems, funder requirements, and internal controls.

3. Cross-Program Collaboration

- By **December 2027**, establish at least **two cross-division workgroups** (e.g., Housing & Workforce; Aging & Health) to address CNA priorities using a whole-household approach.
- By **December 2027**, increase **internal referrals between programs by 20%** over the 2024 baseline, as tracked in CAP60 or other systems.



GOAL A5 – ELEVATE MARKETING, BRANDING & COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

Rationale: The SWOT and HMW exercises highlighted that GECAC’s work happens “behind closed doors” and that many in the community are unaware of what GECAC does. Marketing capacity and budget are limited.

Key Outcomes (by 2028):

1. Marketing Strategy & Budget

- By February **2026**, finalize a **GECAC Marketing & Communications Plan** aligned with this Strategic Plan and CNA priorities.
- Beginning in **FY 2026**, dedicate a specific **annual marketing budget** line and increase it incrementally through 2028 as revenue allows.

2. Visibility & Storytelling

- Beginning in **2026**, publish at least **one positive media piece per month** (TV, radio, newspaper, podcast, or partner newsletter).
- Increase social media activity by **20% per quarter** until GECAC reaches an average of **at least 5 posts per week** by **December 2026** **and** maintain or grow from there.
- By **2027**, develop and promote at least **five impact stories per year** linked to CNA priority areas (housing, jobs, seniors, youth, etc.).

3. Community & Leader Engagement

- Beginning in **2026**, ensure that GECAC leaders participate in at least **one community or professional event per month** (presentations, panels, community meetings).
- By **April 2026**, re-establish or deepen **formal partnerships with at least 10 key community organizations or systems** (e.g., health systems, schools, employers, transportation providers) around shared CNA priorities.



GOAL A6 – STRENGTHEN ROMA, DATA USE & BOARD OVERSIGHT

Rationale: GECAC has strong ROMA alignment but needs clearer documentation of trainer involvement, board oversight of data, and ongoing staff training.

Key Outcomes (by 2027):

1. ROMA Trainer & Documentation

- By **December 2026**, formally document engagement with a **ROMA-certified trainer (or equivalent)**, including dates, agendas, and participants.
- Maintain these materials on file and reference them in the CAP/Strategic Plan narratives.

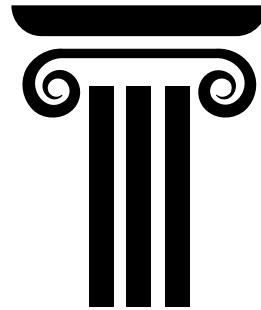
2. Board Use of Data

- Beginning in **2026**, provide the board with at least **one formal data presentation per year**, summarizing CNA, CAP, and Strategic Plan outcomes.
- Ensure that the board minutes document:
 - Approval of the Community Action Plan,
 - Annual review of CNA/CAP/Strategic outcomes, and
 - Any program or strategy changes based on data.

3. Staff Training & Data Literacy

- By **December 2026**, provide at least **one data refresher training annually** for relevant staff (CAP60, COPOS, fiscal, and program leads).
- By **2027**, increase the percentage of staff who report feeling “confident” using data for planning and reporting by **20%** over the 2025 baseline (via staff survey).

Pillar B:



The CNA identified several priority needs for 2024–2028. GECAC’s community-facing goals are organized around these areas, in alignment with its historic themes of Education, Employment, Collective Impact, and Operations.

**Community Impact & Priority Needs
(CNA-Driven)**



GOAL B1 – EXPAND ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING & UTILITY RELIEF

CNA Priority: Affordable Housing & Utility Relief

Key Outcomes (by 2028):

1. Housing Stability Supports

- By **December 2026**, increase the number of households receiving rental, mortgage, or utility assistance through GECAC by **15%** over the 2024 baseline.
- By **December 2028**, maintain at least **80% housing stability** (no eviction or homelessness) at 6 months after assistance for households tracked in CAP60.

2. Partnerships & Advocacy

- By **December 2026**, formalize **at least three partnerships** with housing providers, landlords, or legal aid organizations to coordinate referrals and eviction prevention.
- By **2027**, participate in **at least two local or regional housing/utility coalitions** to advocate for policy and funding changes.



GOAL B2 – INCREASE ACCESS TO LIVING-WAGE JOBS & JOB TRAINING

CNA Priority: Living-Wage Jobs & Job Training Access

Key Outcomes (by 2028):

• Training & Job Placement

- Annually (2025–2028), provide job readiness, skill-building, or credential programs to at least 150 individuals per year.
- By December 2027, ensure that at least 70% of program completers secure employment or advance in employment within 6 months.

• Employer Partnerships & Sector Strategies

- By December 2026, build formal partnership agreements with at least 20 employers across key sectors (manufacturing, health care, logistics, etc.) to create pathways for GECAC clients.
- By 2027, co-design at least two sector-based training or Earn & Learn models tied to local employer demand.



GOAL B3 – ADVANCE TRANSPORTATION EQUITY (URBAN & RURAL)

CNA Priority: Transportation Equity

Key Outcomes (by 2028):

1. Navigation & Supports

- By **December 2026**, incorporate **basic transportation assessment** into GECAC intake and case management for at least **75% of new clients**.
- By **2027**, increase the number of clients receiving transportation-related supports (bus passes, mileage assistance, coordination) by **20%** over 2024 levels.

2. Systems-Level Collaboration

- By **December 2027**, formalize partnerships with **at least one regional transportation authority** and **two community partners** to address gaps in transportation for seniors, workers, and families.



GOAL B4 – IMPROVE ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE, MENTAL HEALTH & SUBSTANCE USE SUPPORTS

CNA Priority: Healthcare Access, Mental Health & Substance Use Response

Key Outcomes (by 2028):

1. Screening & Referral

- By **December 2026**, embed **basic health, mental health, and screening questions** into at least **three major GECAC programs** (e.g., Aging, Workforce, Housing).
- By **December 2027**, ensure **timely referrals** to appropriate health/behavioral health partners for at least **75% of clients** who screen positive for significant needs.

2. Partnerships & Co-Located Services

- By **2027**, establish **at least two formal partnerships** with health or behavioral health providers to co-locate or coordinate services at GECAC sites or community hubs.



GOAL B5 – STRENGTHEN SENIOR SERVICES: NUTRITION, SOCIAL ISOLATION & CAREGIVER SUPPORT

CNA Priority: Senior Services

Key Outcomes (by 2028):

1. Nutrition & Daily Living Supports

- By **December 2026**, maintain or increase the number of seniors served through nutrition and in-home supports by **10%** over 2024 baseline (funding dependent).

2. Social Isolation & Engagement

- By **December 2027**, launch at least **two new or expanded initiatives** aimed at reducing social isolation (e.g., senior center programming, volunteer visitor programs, digital inclusion).
- Track and aim to improve **self-reported social connection** among participating seniors by **15%** over baseline surveys.

3. Caregiver Support

- By **2028**, expand caregiver support (education, respite, navigation) to reach **at least 100 caregivers per year** across Erie County.



GOAL B6 – REDUCE CHILD POVERTY & EXPAND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

CNA Priority: Child Poverty Reduction & Youth Engagement

Key Outcomes (by 2028):

1. Academic & College/Career Preparation

- By **December 2026**, sustain or expand Upward Bound and other youth programs to serve **at least 100 youth per year**, with a focus on low-income and first-generation students.
- By **2028**, maintain **high school graduation rates of 90% or higher** among youth in long-term GECAC academic support programs.

2. Youth Leadership & Engagement

- By **2027**, create or expand at least **one youth advisory or leadership council** to inform GECAC services.



GOAL B7 – ADVANCE EQUITY ACROSS RACE, GENDER, AGE & DISABILITY

CNA Priority: Equity

Key Outcomes (by 2028):

1. Equity Lens in Programs

- By **2027**, use this tool to review at least **three major programs** for barriers and disparities and implement at least **one improvement per program**.

2. Data & Reporting

- Beginning in **2026**, disaggregate key program outcomes by **race, gender, age, and disability status** where feasible.
- By **2028**, use these data to reduce identified disparities in at least **two priority areas** (e.g., access, completion, or outcomes).



IMPLEMENTATION & TIMELINE SUMMARY (HIGH-LEVEL)

Below is a simplified summary of when major areas will be addressed.

- **2026**

- Formalize ROMA trainer engagement and documentation
- Begin annual ROMA/data presentations to the Board
- Launch annual staff satisfaction survey
- Maintain monthly media presence and increase social media activity
- Begin implementing “open front door” practices within safety standards
- Approve Funding & Development Strategy
- Complete compensation study and updated salary structure
- Finalize Work-from-Home/hybrid policy
- Complete Employee Handbook revision
- Finalize Marketing & Communications Plan and dedicate annual budget
- Integrate health/mental health screening into select programs
- Expand job training and employer partnerships per CNA priorities

- **2027**

- Revise Supervisor Handbook and train supervisors
- Launch or expand digital intake/app pilot and measure impact
- Reduce turnover in key departments; improve satisfaction scores
- Increase unrestricted revenue and donor engagement
- Implement equity screening for key programs and begin disparity reduction work
- Strengthen transportation, housing, and senior service collaborations

- **2028**

- Evaluate all Strategic Plan goals and outcomes
- Document progress and lessons learned for the next CNA and Strategic Plan
- Prepare and present a final ROMA-aligned summary to the Board and community

Appendix A: GECAC SWOT Analysis

The following SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis was developed by the GECAC Leadership Team during the August 14, 2025 retreat. Participants included senior leaders and key managers from across the agency. This appendix captures the internal and external factors shaping GECAC's work and provides important context for the strategic goals outlined in this plan.

Strengths:

- Strong organizational culture and mission alignment
- Employee commitment and passion for clients; staff are proud of the work and feel GECAC is a great place to work.
- Strong sense of agency community and teamwork; people generally want to come to work.
- Leadership and governance
- New CEO with a clear vision and a strong leadership team that works well together and has the best heart for the agency.
- Board is becoming more active in advocacy and support and is engaged in strategic conversations.
- Reputation, reach, and relationships
- Longstanding name recognition and reputation in the community; GECAC is well known and trusted, especially among seniors who rely on services.
- Relationships with elected officials and staff who serve on other boards strengthen GECAC's influence and connections.
- GECAC serves the entire county and has touched thousands of people.
- People and workplace
- Staff are, for the most part, caring, passionate, and committed to "helping people, changing lives."
- Good salaries and a strong benefits package; employees feel they are treated well and have a voice.
- Flexibility and remote work options support work-life balance.
- Programs, services, and resilience
- Broad program portfolio with the ability to maintain services even when key staff leave.
- Whole-agency intake and an "open front door" approach help connect clients to multiple services.
- Operations, technology, and innovation
- Commitment to compliance and policy, and to training supervisors and employees.
- Movement toward technology adoption (paperless processes, AI tools) to increase efficiency and free staff time.

Appendix A: GECAC SWOT Analysis

Strengths Cont:

- Funding base and partnerships
- Government funding and multiple funding “buckets” provide a stable base.
- Existing strategic partnerships, including corporate partners, with strong potential to grow these relationships.
- Plans to open and refurbish the RB Wiley Learning Center as a visible asset and community hub.

Weaknesses (Internal Challenges):

- Change management and organizational mindset
- Slow to change; “we used to do it like this” and “living in the past” mentality.
- Lack of significant change over the past 10 years has limited adaptation and growth.
- Systems, processes, and structure
- Outdated payroll/HR system and some fiscal policies and procedures need updates.
- Siloed programs and “islands of knowledge” rather than a fully integrated, whole-household approach.
- Staff in some areas are not aware of what other departments are doing.
- Culture and management practices
- Concerns about micromanagement, negative gossip, and pockets of negativity.
- “Not my job” mindset persists in some areas, even as others step up to help outside their roles.
- Risk of burnout as staff overextend themselves to meet growing needs.
- Talent and HR risks
- Challenges with retaining good employees in a competitive environment.
- Mixed messages around compensation (real compensation limitations vs. perception that salaries and benefits are good).
- Visibility, outreach, and development capacity
- Work is often done behind closed doors and is not visible to the broader public or professional community.
- Lack of robust outreach and education to professionals and community partners.
- Limited communications/development capacity; the board is not especially wealthy or deeply connected for fundraising.
- Funding flexibility

Appendix A: GECAC SWOT Analysis

Weaknesses (Internal Challenges):

- Not enough unrestricted funding and underfunding in some programs.
- Internal frustration with relying on leftover funds rather than planned, strategic allocations.
- Facilities and security
- Some locations may lack adequate security; buildings and physical assets need ongoing investment and attention.

Opportunities:

- Outreach, education, and advocacy
- Get teams out into the community to do more outreach, education, and relationship-building.
- Continue improving relationships with community leaders and partners; use GECAC's voice as a visible advocate ("bully pulpit") on poverty and equity issues.
- Strengthen advocacy with funding sources and potential new partners.
- Growth in unrestricted and diversified funding
- Expand individual, corporate, and philanthropic giving to reduce reliance on restricted funds and grants.
- Leverage GECAC's reputation, impact stories, and strategic partnerships to build a stronger donor base and more unrestricted revenue.
- Technology and innovation
- Further adoption of AI and other technologies to streamline processes, improve data use, and enhance client experience.
- Continue moving toward paperless systems and smarter workflows to free staff capacity.
- Program and service enhancements
- Expand wellness and mental health opportunities for clients and potentially staff.
- Use whole-agency intake and cross-program collaboration to better serve entire households rather than just individuals.
- Brand, storytelling, and mission refresh
- Update and sharpen the mission statement and messaging to better reflect who GECAC is today.
- Make the agency's impact more visible so the community understands that GECAC is still active, still needed, and still reliant on community support and donations.

Appendix A: GECAC SWOT Analysis

Opportunities Cont:

- Talent development and succession
- Build on staff feedback and engagement tools, supervisor training, and leadership development.
- Use cross-training and succession planning to strengthen bench strength and reduce single points of failure.
- Physical assets and locations
- Multiple locations, including the RB Wiley Learning Center, can be leveraged as community anchors for services, events, and partnerships.

Threats (External Risks):

- Funding environment and competition
- Loss of previous funding and ongoing risk of funding cuts.
- Decrease and uncertainty in federal funding; underfunding of programs and lack of long-term stability.
- Nonprofits competing for limited dollars; other agencies vying for the same grants and donors.
- Public perception that tax dollars already fund this or that grant funding means no need to donate.
- Labor market and workforce pressures
- Competitive job market makes it harder to recruit and retain qualified staff.
- Rising expectations for pay and benefits across the sector.
- Policy, regulatory, and compliance pressures
- HIPAA and other compliance requirements are complex and resource-intensive.
- Growing cybersecurity threats.
- The broader political climate and uncertainty around federal priorities create risk for anti-poverty and aging programs.
- Public perception and awareness
- Community lack of knowledge about what GECAC does; some people think the agency is closed.
- Negative reviews, misinformation, and gossip can undermine reputation.
- What GECAC does is not perceived as “sexy,” making it harder to attract donors.
- Demand vs. capacity
- Increasing needs in the community may outpace available resources.
- Staff burnout risk increases as demand grows faster than capacity.

Greater Erie Community Action Committee



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