

Footsteps Strategic Plan 2022–27

JUNE 2022

Prepared for
Footsteps

Prepared by
Informing Change



Footsteps Strategic Plan Executive Summary

JUNE 2022

Footsteps' new five-year strategic plan lays out several pathways to guide the organization's growth from 2022 into 2027. Footsteps Board and staff began the strategic planning process in Summer 2021 by updating the organization's Theory of Change. In April 2022, after reviewing stakeholder input collected through surveys, focus groups, and interviews, the Board and staff identified seven priorities for their work.

Some priorities address the possibilities of new areas of work, and others express the organization's commitment to improvements and greater depth in existing services, based on stakeholder input. Several Footsteps services and program areas are not on this list of strategic priorities but continue to be critically important for achieving the organization's mission; their absence from this list simply means they will have less complex or less urgent development arcs in the next five years.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR FY 2023–FY 2027

Strengthen member services.

1. Scale In: Build capacity to meet the needs of members
 - 1A. Re-establish basic services to individuals post-COVID
 - 1B. Strengthen clinical services
 - 1C. Strengthen family justice and services infrastructure
2. Learn from pandemic experiences and redesign a mix of virtual, digital, and in-person services to offer exiters¹ within the metro NYC area and in other parts of the US.
3. Create a sense of belonging for all members
4. Increase the cultural competency of potential collaborators and partner organizations

Address long-standing unmet needs in housing and youth services.

5. Define and develop a feasible approach to provide housing for members in need
6. Explore options for serving youth

Build member leadership

7. Develop a robust pipeline of leaders with lived experience (i.e., those who grew up ultra-Orthodox) for increased engagement within Footsteps and in external community leadership roles

¹ There is no one term to encompass everyone on a journey that is, by definition, about breaking free from labels and fulfilling individual plans. For purposes of strategic communications, we will use the term "exiters" for now. It is up to individuals whether to call themselves exiters, OTD (Off the Derech/Path), Frei (Yiddish for "Free"), X-O, formerly ultra-Orthodox, or something else.

PRIORITIES WILL DRIVE PROGRESS TO INTENDED OUTCOMES

The seven priorities will drive organizational progress to the near- and long-term outcomes in Footsteps' Theory of Change.

Program Outcomes

To be advanced through all of the Strategic Priorities (1A, 1B, 1C, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7):

- Members develop a stronger, authentic, and more integrated sense of self
- Members gain tools for independence and financial stability, including employment and education, to reduce likelihood of poverty or housing insecurity
- Members establish new relationships and peer support
- Court cases of members seeking child custody advance to fair, compassionate resolutions
- Some exiters take on leadership, advocacy, and creative roles in the broader community

Communications Outcomes

To be advanced through Strategic Priorities 3, 4, and 7:

- Potential members learn about services and programs and gain a sense of hope
- Increased public conversation, nuanced understanding, and acceptance of those leaving ultra-Orthodoxy
- Informed discourse about the clash of modernity and fundamentalism
- More individuals express support for Footsteps and contribute financially
- State and local officials have a better understanding of issues affecting members' struggles for self-sufficiency

Systems Outcomes (achieved through partnerships with others)

To be advanced by Strategic Priorities 1C, 4, and 7:

- Ignite incremental change within ultra-Orthodox communities to make circumstances better for those who remain as well as those who choose to leave
- Reform laws, policies, and social/cultural norms to reduce obstacles for those who leave (e.g., family court, schools, sexual abuse)
- Increase public funding and support for people as they exit ultra-Orthodox communities

Please refer to the full Strategic Plan document and appendices for more details, including a summary of stakeholder input, budget estimates, infrastructure considerations, and annual benchmarks.

Footsteps Strategic Plan 2022–27

INTRODUCTION

About Footsteps

Footsteps exists to support, affirm, and advocate for exiters (individuals and families who have left or are contemplating leaving) of ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities in their quest to lead self-determined lives. Its constituents consist of these exiters and their families who are the direct beneficiaries of Footsteps services but may also include the Jewish community and the public more generally, in regard to awareness and education campaigns and systems-oriented change work.

In 2003, Malkie Schwartz founded Footsteps—originally a monthly support group for formerly ultra-Orthodox individuals—after leaving her Lubavitch community to pursue a college education. The organization grew to address the complex, intersecting needs of those seeking to leave ultra-Orthodox communities, including social, emotional, economic, and legal support. In 2010, Lani Santo became CEO of Footsteps and expanded the organization from a 3-person start-up to an established 501(c)(3) with nearly 30 staff, a program center in Manhattan with satellite programs in Rockland and Brooklyn, and some remote services across North America. In her tenure, Footsteps also began to communicate and convene with sister organizations around the world.

Today, Footsteps provides essential services as well as access to resources and networks for exiters—primarily in the greater New York area, but increasingly nationally—for whom the challenges and sense of isolation are great and the resources scarce. The COVID-19 pandemic has also contributed to Footsteps' emerging national profile as exiters from across the US access remote services. Through its work and advocacy, Footsteps seeks to create conditions that support the agency and independence of exiters. In recent years, Footsteps has seen coverage in major secular publications like *The New York Times*, and in the Netflix documentary “One of Us.” Footsteps has also collaborated with peer organizations, including legal assistance partners and Moishe House. Due to increasing interest and need, Footsteps has oriented towards rapid organizational growth in recent years and increased funding from individual donors as well as foundations.

Footsteps ultimately aims to achieve a world in which all who choose to leave insular religious communities can live self-determined lives, have the resources to flourish, and achieve the educational and cultural acclimation that they have defined as the foundation for a richly integrated life.

How Footsteps Achieves Its Mission

Footsteps supports exiters who wish to lead self-determined lives by providing a range of individual services and group activities. Program areas and services include:

- *Clinical Supports*: Peer support groups and 1:1 therapeutic counseling and identity development
- *Economic Empowerment*: Career and educational counseling, educational and vocational scholarships, and crisis funding for acute financial needs
- *Family Justice*: Legal referrals and support with custody assistance
- *Community Engagement*: Social and cultural events and connections to build community
- *Field Building*: Coalition work with partner organizations across the globe, microgrants and opportunities that support exiter leadership

In addition to our program services, Footsteps also has a dedicated communications staff working to increase public awareness and understanding about those who leave ultra-Orthodox communities, including sharing first-hand stories of members in public media and ensuring accurate media depictions. Footsteps builds partnerships with other organizations whose work supports the Footsteps mission and the self-determination efforts of its individual members. For more information about Footsteps strategies and the outcomes they support, refer to the summary of the Footsteps Theory of Change (Appendix A).

About This Strategic Plan

With Footsteps' last strategic plan completed in 2016, a new plan was needed to set priorities for the next five years. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic both disrupted Footsteps' usual operations and revealed potential new options for expanding Footsteps' offerings virtually.

Informing Change began by working with Footsteps staff and board to develop an updated Theory of Change for the organization by drawing on past strategic planning materials and organizational documents. The consultant team interviewed 19 knowledgeable board, staff, and advisors and conducted a series of three workshops with Footsteps' board members and staff to draft and finalize the document. Informing Change then gathered information about ultra-Orthodox exiters and their needs, both from Footsteps members through two focus groups and a member survey, as well as from potential Footsteps members in a community survey. Two focus groups were conducted with Footsteps staff and two more with donors. The findings from the surveys and focus groups were discussed at a daylong staff and board convening on April 11, 2022. Based on the board members' discussion about strategic directions and short- and longer-term goals for the organization, Informing Change developed this plan. For more information about the data collection methods that informed this plan, refer to Appendix B.

III. FOOTSTEPS' CURRENT POSITION

Situation Analysis Spring 2022

Footsteps has experienced an increased demand for its services and remains the leading domestic organization holistically serving this specific population. During the pandemic restrictions in 2020 and 2021, Footsteps had to adapt its methods for providing its participants with counseling, emotional support, educational and vocational guidance, and social activities. Requests for emergency financial support increased as members who had lost jobs or faced reduced work schedules struggled to pay rent and purchase food. As the organization emerges from the pandemic's grip, it is committed to re-establishing in-person services and events, identifying future needs for physical gathering spaces, and learning from their experiences to test ways to deliver their services via digital and virtual platforms.

Overall, from Informing Change's perspective, Footsteps in the year 2022 is in a position of strength. There is demand for its services, both from new members and from those who received services over past years but continue to depend on the organization for support groups and a sense of community. Members report that they are satisfied with the services they receive, and the organization has a rich bank of member success stories as evidence of the organization's impact. The organization has been financially stable and is supported by a diverse set of funders. Interest from foundations has increased in recent years, and the number of individual donors continues to grow. The organization is led by an active Board of Directors that has engaged with an updated Theory of Change and has affirmed the strategic priorities expressed in this plan. Both Board and staff have strong, skilled leadership at the helm, and both groups include good representation of the constituency it serves, ensuring that discussions are informed by voices of those with lived experiences.

The organization's biggest opportunity, and biggest challenge, is growth—how to grow, at what pace, in what direction, and at what cost. Answering these questions of organizational growth are at the heart of this strategic plan. The organization has seen a continuous pattern of high demand for its services and events from members and potential members. Demographic analyses of ultra-Orthodox communities in the New York Metro area imply there will be increasing numbers of young adults exiting from those communities in the coming years. Footsteps' current staffing level is stretched thin over a wide range of services. Many exiters who approach Footsteps for assistance have urgent needs for counseling, support groups, and access to emergency funds. This urgency creates additional demands on personnel and office systems. To the organization's credit, many members continue to participate in groups and events after their initial crisis-driven needs abate, finding support and community to fill the absence of the families and support systems they left behind. However, as more and more cohorts of veteran Footsteppers journey into mainstream urban and suburban life, their needs for information and support evolve, presenting Footsteps' leaders both with questions about how much and what kinds of programming to offer, and about how best to support and draw upon the wisdom of exiters as they become leaders in their own right.

While most nonprofit service providers typically find themselves within a rich ecosystem of other organizations doing similar or complementary work in their field, Footsteps is a leader in a burgeoning field of a few organizations responding to the varying needs of exiters in the United States and in the world. As awareness of the exiter population and its needs grows, Footsteps has been pleased to see organizations like Freidom, YAFFED, and Unchained at Last emerge to enrich the landscape of support for and advocacy on behalf of exiters in the U.S. As Footsteps has matured, its staff have identified other organizations and movements that serve populations with needs similar to exiters (e.g., refugees, those exiting other religious fundamentalist communities), and it sees opportunities to increase its connections with and learn from such organizations.

At the same time, rapid growth can put pressure upon the strongest of organizations and Footsteps is no exception. This is particularly true as the period of rapid growth was followed by the challenges and tragedies of the COVID-19 epidemic, intensifying the strain on Footsteps staff. Among the public, awareness about exiters and their needs is still quite low. Only a small number of individuals and organizations possess adequate knowledge and cultural competency to deliver “next stage” support for exiters as they stabilize their new lives. Furthermore, Footsteps itself must make decisions about how to handle its growing and diverse membership.

Key Points From Stakeholder Data

All stakeholders value Footsteps as a member-centric organization and are skeptical of any change in approach that might shift that focus. In particular, all stakeholder groups prefer Footsteps' advocacy to empower members and lift up their voices, rather than take stands on issues on members' behalf. Members may be more likely to see Footsteps as a community first and service organization second, compared to other stakeholders, but in general, stakeholders all value the same core qualities of Footsteps: its community-building, its lifesaving support services, its emphasis on choice and self-determination, and its reputation as a leader in the field in terms of expertise, longevity, and quality.

Stakeholders acknowledge inherent tensions in the core values that make Footsteps exceptional. For instance, Footsteps faces the ever-present challenge of promoting self-determination and choice even when members may make choices that Footsteps or even other members disagree with. Members and staff also notice increasing tension between Footsteps' mission of encouraging freedom and its role as a service organization in making members feel safe, which includes navigating tensions sparked by varying perspectives on religion, identity, and politics. Footsteps must also balance the urge to maintain its model of providing responsive direct services to individuals in crisis with staff frustration at lack of preventative

or systemic interventions—as stakeholders generally believe that acute service provision should remain a priority over more systems-level interventions.

Stakeholders are also cautious about expanding Footsteps' role into systems change out of concern that the organization may be spread too thin even in its current activities. Mental health services—described by some members as “lifesaving” and essential to Footsteps' mission—can sometimes be inaccessible or uneven in quality, especially when considered how great and how consequential the need. Stakeholders believe that all of Footsteps' services are essential to serving their unique and diverse client base, and that all of these services must be high-quality, without sacrificing staff's own mental well-being. While partnerships and referrals could theoretically help fill this gap, members are much less satisfied with external referral services, compared to those provided in-house, suggesting more training and quality monitoring are necessary in order to fully operationalize this solution.

Infrastructure Strengths and Gaps

Coming into the strategic planning process, Footsteps leaders are evaluating how to scale the organizational infrastructure to keep pace with recent program growth, knowing that there will be continuing growth in service in the near future. Current capacity for high-level organizational management functions, such as planning, talent development, and developing organizational culture, has been affected by staff vacancies and the general upheaval of routines due to the pandemic. Additionally, the leadership team, like all organization managers this year, must juggle new approaches to managing staff and operating programs in hybrid workspaces (simultaneously in-person and remote). The organization collects and manages adequate data for program monitoring and reporting but is ready to step up the data management function to provide more useful ongoing learning for program improvement.

One of Footsteps' assets is its dedicated staff, who are passionate about the organization's mission. The diverse team includes many individuals who left ultra-Orthodox communities. Maintaining a smoothly functioning workplace while serving people in crisis, where all staff feel safe and supported, requires intentional work. Continuing attention to the work culture will be critical as the organization navigates the strategic priorities in this plan.

Footsteps is financially stable and has a board-designated reserve fund. Fundraising capacity is currently diminished to some degree due to staff vacancies and the reassignment of some development functions to other staff, including the CEO. Given the anticipated growth of the organization, the staffing structure for fund development and other administrative functions will need to expand in coming years.

IV. FOOTSTEPS' FUTURE

Strategic Priorities for FY 2023–FY 2027

The Board's Strategic Planning team, in partnership with Informing Change, reviewed findings from the data collection and facilitated conversations to guide future priorities over the coming five years. The resulting list of seven priorities is described below, and a proposed, high-level, calendar for putting them into action can be found in Appendix B. The list comprises two interrelated clusters: one of service to members, the other of exploration and pilot projects.

Stakeholder feedback emphasizes both the ongoing need for high quality, culturally competent, clinical services and community-building, and deep appreciation for these services among members. However, current staffing is insufficient to meet the need, and because there are gaps in the quality and competence of services offered by Footsteps partners, **the first cluster of strategic priorities aims to strengthen and build upon the organization's solid track record of providing holistic and member-responsive services.** Footsteps will do this in several ways, including: bringing on board additional clinical services staff,

building technological and case management infrastructure, continuing to offer some services virtually, and helping organizational partners in other agencies better help exiters by expanding cultural awareness and competency trainings.

The second cluster of strategic priorities focuses on careful consideration of ways the organization might begin to address some long-standing and potentially life-threatening unmet needs in housing and youth services. Because members have indicated that they put nearly all emergency financial assistance that Footsteps offered them into trying to secure shelter, staff have begun exploring ways to expand the organization's ability to help members achieve a greater degree of housing security, and Board members agree it is worthy of deeper exploration.² Additionally, staff receive calls from young people under the age of majority who are at risk of self-harm, injury from others, or both. Some exiters, who themselves work with Footsteps, experienced danger as youth from remaining within their ultra-Orthodox communities. Therefore, the Board has decided to endorse investigating options for, and the feasibility of, serving youth under 18.

Developing and investing in training and support for **leaders of lived experience (i.e., those who grew up ultra-Orthodox)** constitutes a final strategic priority that crosscuts several of the others. A growing corps of exiter-leaders can both expand the organization's capacities to serve its members directly and help build out the landscape of culturally competent partners and potential collaborators in the broader community.

These strategic priorities have been identified and articulated for the purpose of guiding the organization toward growth and change; some priorities address the possibilities of new areas of work, and others express the organization's commitment to improvements and greater depth in existing services, based on stakeholder input. Several Footsteps services and program areas are not on this list of strategic priorities but continue to be critically important for achieving the organization's mission; their absence from this list simply means they will have less complex or less urgent development arcs in the next five years.



1. Scale In: Build Capacity to Meet the Needs of Members

This strategic direction focuses near-term attention on services to members. There are three components: addressing the gaps or delays in Footsteps services that occurred due to the pandemic, strengthening clinical services (counseling), and expanding Family Justice services with staffing and appropriate infrastructure (e.g., management, technology):

- ❖ 1A. Re-establish basic services to individuals post-COVID
- ❖ 1B. Strengthen clinical services
- ❖ 1C. Strengthen family justice and services infrastructure

2. Based on learnings from the pandemic, redesign a mix of virtual, digital, and in-person services that will enable Footsteps to serve exiters within the metro NYC area and determine the scope of services available to members living in other parts of the US.

During the pandemic, Footsteps staff devised new ways to offer services and engage members, learning a lot in the process about the pros and cons of virtual services compared with in-person services. For example, the remote offerings allowed members living outside of the metro NYC area to participate in events and

² New York City ranks as the most expensive place to live in the United States in 2022, with rents averaging \$3k per month (<https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-city-rankings/most-expensive-cities-in-the-us>).

support groups. As the world absorbs and applies lessons about virtual and digital services, Footsteps too will not just fall back into past habits but will seek best practices to inform its program offerings.

3. Actively Examine and Improve How Footsteps Creates a Sense of Belonging for All Members

Footsteps is committed to meeting the needs of a diversity of members and creating a sense of belonging for all members, while also promoting a safe environment for those attending our events. However, findings from the member and nonmember surveys confirm what staff have observed for several years: a small but significant number of exiters characterize Footsteps as philosophically too different or extreme, particularly in relation to gender/sexuality, religion, and politics. The perception that Footsteps has an agenda favoring certain types of members has alienated some members and could potentially affect Footsteps' reputation as a place that aims to welcome anyone in need. Footsteps staff are not surprised at this dynamic, given the diversity of member backgrounds, personal and political beliefs, and social norms. In addition to rethinking its events and gatherings, Footsteps intends to seek expert assistance in dealing with the tension that often exists in communities between diversity and a sense of inclusion. The organization's communications arm will complement these efforts by examining and adjusting internal messaging, while also working to broaden the number and range of public institutions that understand and welcome the plurality of identities and experiences of exiters.

4. Increase Cultural Competency of Potential Collaborators and Partner Organizations

Footsteps recognizes that to expand the availability of services and support for exiters, whether Footsteps members or not, there needs to be an expanded number of organizations and individual professionals with the cultural competency to understand the backgrounds, experiences, and needs of exiters. To build this field of potential collaborators, partner organizations, and knowledgeable individual professionals, Footsteps has recently begun to provide training and coaching. Footsteps intends to deepen this work, first locally, and then nationally to other cities that have expressed interest in having similar services to what is available in the New York Metro area.

Examine and Address Unmet Needs

5. Define and Develop a Feasible Approach To Provide Housing for Members in Need

Housing is an immediate essential need of someone who leaves an ultra-Orthodox community. Footsteps' support in this area has been limited for numerous reasons. As a group, the Board and leadership staff believe the organization needs to address this need more directly, but to start with an examination of options.

6. Explore Options for Serving Youth

Footsteps currently refers youth under the age of 18, seeking services, to other youth-serving organizations. The organization would like to carefully consider whether and how it can better support this age group, and then to develop a thoughtful plan with expert advice and adequate funding to ensure success, whether by direct services, partnerships with other organizations, or both. The first step will be research and study.

Increase and Support Exiter Engagement and Leadership

7. Develop and Support a Robust Pipeline of Leaders of Lived Experience for Increased Engagement Within Footsteps and in External Community Leadership Roles

Creating a pipeline of leaders who grew up ultra-Orthodox (i.e.: are of lived experience) has numerous benefits. First and foremost, it benefits the leaders themselves as they build a network of support, while also gaining critical skills around resilience and self-advocacy; second, Footsteps will benefit from our community's leaders being connected and collaborating to serve the community and from more people who can serve as cultural translators and public educators about the nuances of the journey out of ultra-Orthodoxy; third, the communities and organizations receiving leaders of lived experience will benefit from their unique perspectives, talents, and networks; and last, potential members, who are still living in their ultra-Orthodox communities and may be considering leaving, will benefit from understanding the diverse experiences of folks who have left, pushing back against the terrifying and false narratives they might be hearing within their insular communities, to empower them to envision a self-determined life.

At present, Footsteps has limited support for developing member leadership and does not have a formal system of training, support, and investment in growing the number of individuals taking on leadership roles within and beyond the organization.

To see how the strategic priorities align with the organization's near-term and long-term outcomes, see Appendix C (Footsteps Strategic Priorities Aligned with Outcomes).

TARGET BENCHMARKS FOR TRACKING PROGRESS FY 2023–FY 2027

The following list of key benchmarks for each strategic priority will assist with monitoring progress on this strategic plan and identifying areas that need additional planning or resources or an adapted approach.

1. Scale In: Build Capacity To Meet the Needs of Members

A. Re-Establish Basic Services to Individuals Post-COVID

YEAR	QUARTER	BENCHMARKS
Year 1 (FY 22–23)	Q1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure that annual goals include plans for balancing in-person and remote offerings (groups, events, and 1:1 counseling)• Readjust hybrid support groups and 1:1 counseling• Communicate changes, as needed, to members
	Q1–4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Redefine and/or re-establish support programs that were scaled up or back during COVID (e.g., member retreat, crisis funding scale back, FCF re-structure)• Continue to refine COVID safety guidelines for member engagement
	Q1–4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Return to offering in-person groups and services in accordance with public health guidelines• Return to offering large in-person events indoors (i.e., member retreat), public health guidance permitting

B. Strengthen Clinical Services

YEAR	QUARTER	BENCHMARKS
Year 1 (FY 22–23)	Q1	Develop, plan, and raise funds to fill existing vacancies, and increase staff training and networking opportunities
	Q1	Fill staff vacancy
	Q3	Develop staffing plan for years 2–3
	Q1–4	Enhance clinical approach; internal processes to align with best practices and member needs, with attention paid to new member experience and intake process
Year 2 (FY 23–24)	Q1–3	Expand and restructure the clinical team; enhance internal processes and policies to meet member needs
	Q1–4	Continue to enhance clinical approach; internal processes to align with best practices and member needs, with attention paid to new member experience and intake process

C. Strengthen Infrastructure To Support Family Justice and Family Services

YEAR	QUARTER	BENCHMARKS
Year 1 (FY 22–23)	Q1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan and fundraise Assess need for legal fund development and expand as needed and as possible
	Q1	Stabilize staffing through bringing on program manager and increasing time for Senior Legal strategist
	Q2–4	Develop coordinated services for parents and families across the organization
	Q3–4	Assess caseload, internal case management processes, and tracking systems and implement improvements as needed
	Q1–4	Strengthen partnerships in NY/NJ
	Q3–4	Recruit new partners in NY/NJ
	Q1–4	Educate & increase visibility at 2 legal education events, either Continued Legal Education events or at a family law conferences
	Q4	Rebrand the program under a new name that encompasses mental health supports, legal services, legal reform, and community building programs for parents and their children
Year 2 (FY 23–24)	Q1–4	Expand family programming in collaboration with community engagement team (i.e.: family retreat, family friendly groups at satellite locations Brooklyn and Rockland)
	Q1–4	One or two media spotlights for member Family Justice stories
	Q2	Bring on additional social worker to support parents
	Q3	Assess standing of Family Justice & Family Services new management structure, internal processes, legal fund, legal reform and programming; adapt as needed for FY25 workplan
	Q3–4	Assess status of partnerships in NY/NJ & feasibility of expanding referrals outside of NY/NJ

2. Redesigned Mix of Virtual, Digital, and In-Person Services That Serve Exiters Within the Metro NYC Area and Elsewhere

YEAR	QUARTER	BENCHMARKS
Year 1 (FY 22–23)	Q1–3	Continue to provide online access to some services and engage individuals across the country as well as locally
	Q1	Get more proximate to members in NY Metro area: resume services in Manhattan location, by Fall 2022, re-establish Rockland space and secure space for Brooklyn program offerings
	Q3–4	Revisit demand for local programming near Lakewood, NJ in preparation for Year 2 workplan development
	Q4	Conduct member survey to assess member satisfaction; continuous member feedback; reassess hybrid programming strategy and adjust as needed
Year 2 (FY 23–24)	Q2	Assess national presence and demand for services beyond the NY metro area, explore opportunities for training leaders and partner organizations in key locations outside of NY
	Q2–3	Explore and offer new group programming for diversified target groups, e.g. intellectuals, more established members
	Q3	Explore the possibility of making the Art Show & Zine permanent annual creative programming
	Q3	Bring recommendations to the Board to determine directions for further national expansion
Year 3 (FY 24–25)	Q1	Board votes on new direction(s) for national expansion
	Q2	Initiate R&D for creating an app to connect members to resources and to a global network of fellow exiters
Year 4 (FY 25–26)	Q2	Launch the new app, contingent on resources

3. Creating a Sense of Belonging for All Members

YEAR	QUARTER	BENCHMARKS
Year 1 (FY 22–23)	Q1	Establish diversity priorities for hiring on program and leadership teams (i.e.: gender balance, lived experience, etc.)
	Q2	Contract with consultants to assist with identifying issues and strategy adjustments and development to strengthen members' sense of belonging, inclusion, and safety internally and externally
Year 2 (FY 23–24)	Q4	Build FY24 workplans, with explicit benchmarks to diversify programming (different genders, age groups, interests), align communications efforts
	Q3–4	Begin research on how to expand community engagement work with secular spaces (i.e.: music, arts); build on success of Interfaithless programming
Year 3 (FY 24–25)	Q1	Assess progress toward desired outcome of a greater sense of belonging, identify areas needing immediate and long-term adjustments, refine strategy and develop Year 3 workplan

4. Cultural Competency of Potential Collaborators and Partner Organizations

YEAR	QUARTER	BENCHMARKS
Year 1 (FY 22–23)	Q2–4	Respond to requests for training via exposure and word of mouth through local and national partners
	Q2	Identify, differentiate, and tailor trainings to different sets of organizations and collaborators
	Q3	Research how FS can become certified as a continuing education organization for various professionals who need training
	Q2	Identify priority mental health practitioners to train alongside other local partners
Year 2 (FY 23–24)	Q2	Refine and formalize training curriculum and build out earned revenue structure
	Q2–3	Proactively research resources and potential partners outside of NY as well as broadening expertise of local practitioners to train
Year 3 (FY 24–25)	Q3–4	Run a train-the-trainers program for member leaders and those of lived experience to conduct cultural competency trainings to external partners

5. Define and Develop Feasible Approach To Provide Housing Support to Members

YEAR	QUARTER	BENCHMARKS
Year 1 (FY 22–23)	Q1	Convene a Board-approved task force to explore options, costs, and feasibility
	Q2 early	Initiate fundraising efforts and hire R&D consultants
	Q3	Task force will present 2–3 options and pros and cons to Board; for discussion, include in plans a recommendation for crisis funding adjustment
Year 2 (FY 23–24)	Q1	Board decision made about how to approach housing
	Q2	Pending Board approval, hire program staff
Year 3 (FY 24–25)	Q2	“Soft Launch” pilot program, implement crisis funding adjustment
	Q1	Launch pilot program
Year 4 (FY 25–26)	Q3–4	Assess pilot & adjust
Year 5 (FY 26–27)	Q1–4	Full implementation

6. Explore Youth Services

YEAR	QUARTER	BENCHMARKS
Year 2 (FY 23–24)	Q1–4	Fundraise for R&D phase
	Q4	In Summer 2024, convene a Board-staff task force to explore options for Footsteps program services; task force develops a year-long research plan
Year 3 (FY 24–25)	Q1–3	Staff and Board conduct research, with support of consultants; report quarterly progress to Board
	Q3	Task force presents recommendations to board; for discussion, initiate further fundraising if board determines we should move ahead with pilot
	Q4	Board decision made to plan, fund, and implement the selected approach
Year 4 (FY 25–26)	Q1–2	Pending board approval, develop operational goals for pilot, hire initial staff by Spring 2026
Year 5 (FY 26–27)	Q1	Launch the Pilot Youth Services expansion, pending board approval

7. Develop a Robust Pipeline of Leaders of Lived Experience for Increased Engagement

YEAR	QUARTER	BENCHMARKS
Year 1 (FY 22–23)	Q1–4	Raise dedicated funds for investing in leadership development for those of lived experience
	Q1	Integrate opportunities for member leadership in operational plans in FY 23
	Q1–2	Convene taskforce of Board, staff and key partners to develop longer term field building and leadership development strategy; taskforce updates board quarterly
	Q2	Launch first formal member training for public speaking
	Q4	Establish annual goals and plans for integrating member leadership in Year 2 program operations (MAC, Connect Over Coffee, CE Cohort programs)
Year 2 (FY 23–24)	Q2	Taskforce will present 2–3 potential directions, costs and feasibility for new directions to the Board
	Q4	By Summer 2024—pilot new field building and leadership development strategy based on taskforce recommendations, align communications efforts
Year 3 (FY 24–25)	Q1–Q4	Continue to implement new field-building and leadership development strategy, research and roll out additional elements of strategy
	Q3	Present additional elements of field-building and leadership pipeline strategy to the Board for discussion

BUDGET PROJECTIONS FY 2023–FY 2027

To accomplish the goals articulated in this plan, Footsteps anticipates growing the organization’s budget as follows:

	CURRENT (FY 22)	YEAR 1 (FY 23)	YEAR 2 (FY 24)	YEAR 3 (FY 25)	YEAR 4 (FY 26)	YEAR 5 (FY 27)
Annual Budget	\$4.3 M	\$5.5 M	\$6 M	+20% over FY 24	+10–20% over FY 25	+10–20% over FY 26

A detailed annual budget will be developed as part of the staff’s operational planning process each year and presented to the Board for review and approval.

FUNDRAISING TO SUPPORT THIS PLAN

In recent years, Footsteps has achieved great success in expanding its circle of donors and funders. Working as a team, Board and staff annually develop fundraising goals, timelines, and work plans. Footsteps will mark its 20th anniversary in 2023, and the organization's leadership anticipates conducting a major fundraising campaign to mark the milestone year and build a financial foundation to support organizational sustainability.

The goals of Footsteps 20th Anniversary Sustainability campaign will reflect the strategic priorities described in this strategic plan. Likely to be included in the campaign, and directly related to this strategic plan, will be:

- ⌘ Raising resources for R&D and expert consultants help to support Footsteps as the organization assesses appropriate and financially sustainable opportunities to expand its housing services and to explore youth services
- ⌘ Raising resources for the ongoing crises around mental health and financial instability in the COVID-19 ongoing endemic
- ⌘ Building out family programming and legal reform work to support parents and their children in maintaining strong relationships as a parent contemplates or leaves ultra-Orthodoxy
- ⌘ Maximizing access to Footsteps services for members in the New York Metro Area and across the United States through the appropriate mix of in-person and virtual program offerings
- ⌘ Developing a robust pipeline of leaders of lived experience for to serve as thought leaders and change makers

MONITORING OR EVALUATING PROGRESS

To stay on track to achieve these goals, Footsteps will collect data at the close of each fiscal year on its progress toward reaching the benchmarks and objectives outlined in the plan. Footsteps will also schedule staff meetings to review, discuss, and assess this progress, and summarize the discussion in a report to the Board, which will also conduct a similar discussion to review progress on the plan. At the end of Year 2 or beginning of Year 3, staff and Board should consider whether there have been big enough changes in the strategic priorities, budget projections, or benchmarks to merit adapting or updating this strategic plan.

APPENDICES

- A. Footsteps Theory of Change
- B. Summary of Stakeholder Data Collection Methods
- C. Calendar of Strategic Priorities 2022–27
- D. Footsteps Outcomes Aligned with Strategic Priorities



Footsteps Theory of Change

PURPOSE: To support, affirm, and advocate for individuals and families who have left, or are contemplating leaving, ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities in their quest to lead self-determined lives; and to create conditions that further their agency and independence

ISSUES, NEEDS, & CONTEXT

Those who seek to leave an ultra-Orthodox community face complex social, emotional, economic, and legal obstacles

Many of them have minimal English literacy and are unfamiliar with the basics of twenty-first century life

Their needs include mental health, community, housing, employment, and education

For parents, the risks are profoundly deepened by the likelihood of legal battles and the threat that they will lose their children

Footsteps provides essential services as well as access to resources and networks for these constituencies, for whom the challenges and sense of isolation are great and the resources scarce

FOOTSTEPS STRATEGIES

1. Identity development (clinical services)
2. Economic empowerment (educational support, career services, housing stability, crisis funding)
3. Family justice and legal counseling
4. Community building and network weaving
5. Public awareness and communications
6. Leadership development and partnerships for change and field building

TARGET CONSTITUENCY

Exiters (people leaving, considering leaving, or have left) from ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities in metro NY and across North America

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

1. Members develop a stronger, authentic, and more integrated sense of self
2. Members gain tools for independence and financial stability, including employment and education, to reduce likelihood of poverty or housing insecurity
3. Members establish new relationships and peer support
4. Court cases of members seeking child custody advance to fair, compassionate resolutions
5. Some exiters take on leadership, advocacy, and creative roles in the broader community.

COMMUNICATIONS OUTCOMES

1. Potential members learn about services and programs and gain a sense of hope
2. Increased public conversation, nuanced understanding, and acceptance of those leaving ultra-Orthodoxy
3. Informed discourse about the clash of modernity and fundamentalism
4. More individuals express support for Footsteps and contribute financially
5. State and local officials have a better understanding of issues affecting members' struggles for self-sufficiency

SYSTEMS OUTCOMES

(through partnerships with others)

1. Ignite incremental change within ultra-Orthodox communities to make circumstances better for those who remain as well as those who choose to leave
2. Reform laws, policies, and social/cultural norms to reduce obstacles for those who leave (e.g., family court, schools, sexual abuse)
3. Increase public funding and support for people as they exit ultra-Orthodox communities

VALUES: Respect, inclusive community, integrity, self-determination, continuous improvement

ULTIMATE IMPACT: A world in which all who choose to leave insular religious communities can live self-determined lives, have the resources to flourish and thrive within them, and are fully supported in achieving the educational and cultural acclimation and skills necessary for a richly integrated life



Appendix B: Data Collection & Stakeholder Input for Footsteps Strategic Planning Process

The planning process for Footsteps 2022 Strategic Plan, facilitated by Informing Change, included the following components:

- Initial informational interviews with 19 Footsteps board, staff, and advisors (May 2021))
- Revising the Footsteps Theory of Change, a process which included:
 - Desk review of past strategic planning materials and organizational documents.
 - Three online workshops (approximately 3 hours each) with Footsteps board members and staff, to develop key concepts and agreements for a draft Theory of Change (June, July, & September 2021)
 - Circulating a draft Theory of Change among board and staff for edits and comments
 - Board approval of the revised Theory of Change (October 2021)
- Survey of Footsteps members (March 2022)
- Community survey of ultra-Orthodox exiters who are not Footsteps members (March 2022)
- Focus groups:
 - Two focus groups with Footsteps members (January 2022)
 - Two focus groups with Footsteps staff (March 2022)
 - Three focus groups with donors --2 conducted by Informing Change, 1 conducted by Footsteps staff (March 2022)
- In-person daylong Strategic Planning retreat attended by all board members and members of staff leadership team (April 11, 2022)

Appendix D: Calendar of Strategic Priorities & Expected Year-by-Year Status

R&D



Plan, Fundraise



Pilot & Assess



Implement



Strategic Priority	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Criteria for success & barriers to overcome
Strengthen & build upon holistic, member-responsive services						
1 Build capacity to meet the needs of members 1A Re-establish basic services post-COVID	Plan Implement	Implement	No new services are planned at this time; this will depend on #2 (see below)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental factors e.g., COVID rates stabilizing Safety protocols (physical) Update guidelines for safe & respectful events
1B Strengthen clinical services	Plan & fundraise Fill staff vacancies	Implement changes, expand staffing		No new action		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal assessment of staffing needs, partner capacity, and additional funding needed Monitor & assess
1C Strengthen Family Legal Services infrastructure	Plan, fundraise Hire Program Manager; add staff hours	Expanded staffing		No new action		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional funding needed Complete hiring, enhance case management processes, increase staff hours, and recruit referral partners. Resources to support cases with the potential for setting legal precedence
2 Redesign mix of virtual, digital and in-person services to serve exiters within the NYC metro area and elsewhere.	Establish accessible spaces for in-person activities in Brooklyn & Rockland	Assess national demand Identify partner organizations beyond NYC Implement programs locally	Board decision on national expansion Develop app for members	Launch app	Pilot and assess app	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal infrastructure growth i.e., tech (Salesforce) Funding (to support hybrid programming + funding new referral partnerships) Staffing
3 Create a sense of belonging for all members	Plan fundraising; update guidelines; immediate adjustments	Implementation	Assess progress; adjust tactics			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member leadership in planning and implementing Funding for large events, satellite locations in Brooklyn, Rockland & potentially other areas, staffing

Strategic Priority	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Criteria for success & barriers to overcome
Strengthen & build upon holistic, member-responsive services						
4 Cultural competencies of potential collaborators & partner organizations	Implementation	Formalize training curriculum; generate revenue Train outside of metro NYC	Training of trainers			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue (expand) consultant capacity to train, coach Member leadership
Consider ways to address longstanding unmet needs of exiters						
5 Define & develop a feasible approach to providing housing	R&D Board Task Force Fundraising	Board decision; soft launch	Pilot	Assess pilot, adjust	Full implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Costs Funding Robust R&D Alignment & engagement of all stakeholders in decision making Clear criteria & communication to members
6 Explore Youth Services		Fundraise	Board task force, consultant help, Board decision	Pilot	Full implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liability issues in serving minors
Invest in greater member engagement and leadership						
7 Develop a robust pipeline of leaders of lived experience, for increased engagement	Plan, fundraise	Board task force Pilot new strategies	Implementation	Implementation		

Appendix D: Footsteps Strategic Priorities Aligned with Intended Outcomes

JUNE 2022

Footsteps Outcomes	Near or long term?	Strategic Priorities in FY23 & FY24 that align with this outcome	Strategic Priorities in FY25, FY26, & FY27 that align with this outcome
<p>Members gain a stronger, authentic, and integrated sense of self.</p> <p>Members gain the knowledge to create healthy boundaries for themselves amongst their families and friends who still live within ultra-Orthodox communities, and to create psychological flexibility that enables them to engage with ambiguity.</p> <p>Members experience improved mental health, including processing and healing from trauma. Members feel empowered to raise their children with a sense of pride and authenticity.</p>	Near	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Re-establish basic services after pandemic disruptions of 2019-22 Strengthen clinical services Strengthen infrastructure to support Family Justice and Family Services Redesign mix of virtual, digital & in-person services that serve exiters within the metro NYC area & elsewhere. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore youth services
<p>Members gain tools for independence and financial stability, including employment and education, that reduce the likelihood of poverty or housing insecurity.</p>	Near	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define & develop feasible approach to provide housing support to members 	----->>
<p>Members and alums gain new relationships and peer support—amongst themselves, with the broader community of those questioning or leaving ultra-Orthodox communities, and with others from outside ultra-Orthodox communities—that encourage and support them on their individual journeys.</p>	Near	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a sense of belonging for all members Develop a robust pipeline of leaders of lived experience, for increased engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore youth services <p>----->></p> <p>----->></p>

Footsteps partnerships with support organizations and volunteers result in more and better-aligned services for members.	Near	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural competency of potential collaborators and partner organizations 	----->>
Court cases of members seeking child custody advance to fair, compassionate resolutions.	Near	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen infrastructure to support Family Justice and Family Services 	----->>
Some exiters who wish to create change in the world based on their own experiences take on leadership, advocacy, and creative roles in the broader community	Near	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a robust pipeline of leaders of lived experience, for increased engagement 	----->>

COMMUNICATIONS OUTCOMES

Potential members find and access Footsteps services early in their journeys and gain a sense of hope .	Near	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a sense of belonging for all members 	----->>
There is increased conversation, nuanced understanding, and acceptance of those leaving ultra-Orthodoxy.	Long Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a robust pipeline of leaders of lived experience, for increased engagement Cultural competency of potential collaborators and partner organizations 	 ----->> ----->>
The media accurately depict stories about those leaving ultra-Orthodox communities, giving people a better understanding that each person's story is unique.	Near	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a robust pipeline of leaders of lived experience, for increased engagement 	----->>

Increasing numbers of individuals express support for and contribute financially to Footsteps.	Near		
There is better informed public discourse about the clash of modernity and religious fundamentalism.	Long term		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and support a robust pipeline of member leaders for increased engagement
State and city officials better understand the issues of how leaving an ultra-Orthodox community impacts individuals seeking self-sufficiency.	Long Term		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural competency of partner organizations • Develop and support a robust pipeline of member leaders for increased engagement

SYSTEMS OUTCOMES

Incremental changes occur within ultra-Orthodox communities to make circumstances better for those who choose to leave as well as those seeking to live authentic lives while staying.	Long term		
Increased public funding and support flows to people as they transition from ultra-Orthodox communities.	Long term		
Reforms in laws, policies, and social/cultural norms reduce obstacles for those who leave ultra-Orthodox communities (e.g., reduce systemic biases against formerly ultra-Orthodox parents in Family Court, ensure adequate educational standards in ultra-Orthodox schools, ensure appropriate statute of limitations on reporting sexual abuse).	term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen infrastructure to support Family Justice and Family Services • Develop a robust pipeline of leaders of lived experience, for increased engagement 	<p>----->></p> <p>----->></p>