

ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY 2015-2017

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On the eve of its tenth anniversary, Open the Windows prepared this Organizational Strategy for the period 2015-2017. It represents a harmonized platform for future operations and development, in accordance with the contextual changes.

Slow social, economic and political development of Macedonia and insufficiently favorable conditions for the civic sector define the general context. Important external factors include the gradual improvement of the inclusiveness of the Macedonian society and the rapid development of information and communication and assistive technologies.

Open the Windows is the sole organization in Macedonia and in the wider region entirely dedicated to promoting assistive technology. It grew into recognizable and respected organization that uses technology as a tool for fostering the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Bringing assistive technology closer to persons with disabilities and promoting it in the society are the largest achievements of Open the Windows. The organization successfully made the pioneering steps in introducing the assistive technology in the mainstream primary education.

Open the Windows is the winner of the ERSTE Foundation Social Integration Award in 2013 and the UNITE IT Digital Inclusion Award in 2014.

In the forthcoming period, the organization will use all its potentials to continue its successful operations and development. In response to the contextual changes, Open the Windows (OtW) set new long-term commitments:

The vision is a “world of equal and active people who use technology for personal development, improvement of quality of life and furthering community wellbeing”. The organizational mission is “to initiate and facilitate active inclusion of all people in the contemporary world through assistive technology use”.

Operations will be directed towards the following long-term objectives:

- information and communication technologies available for all,
- inclusive and modern education,
- equal opportunities for all, and
- OtW as an innovative organization with credibility and capability for partnerships.

People and their individual needs and abilities will be focused upon. Operations will be based on two basic approaches: person-centered and rights-based.

The organization will remain committed to its key values: participation, equal opportunities, tolerance, partnership and transparency and accountability.

The goal of this strategy is to strengthen the capacity of OtW for development of new services and products in response to beneficiaries’ dynamic needs. The strategy offers solutions for the challenges regarding the organizational growth that will enable Open the Windows to continue on the path towards realization of its vision and mission.

The strategic plan is a framework. Essential and indispensable ingredients for its realization are the potential, dedication and capabilities of the organization’s staff and members of governance bodies, as well as the beneficiaries’ support and cooperation. As in the past, their synergy will turn the plan into reality.

INTRODUCTION

The organizational strategy of the Association for Assistive Technology Open the Windows (OtW) sets the main directions for organizational operations and development in the period 2015-2017.

The strategy was developed in a participatory consultation and planning process and is a reflection of the shared values, objectives and expectation of key involved actors:

Preparations began in the end of 2013 with a comprehensive organizational assessment – holygnosis. The assessment resulted in objective review of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, as perceived by all internal and the key external actors. Detailed analysis conducted in the first half of 2014 enabled the identification of measures that would maximize the opportunities and address the threats. Strategy’s essential elements were agreed upon during a three-day workshop in July 2014 by the members of the Governance Board and OtW’s staff.

The process of preparations was led by the DETRA Center consultancy company and financially supported by USAID Macedonia.

Context analysis

General context

Since its independence, Euro-Atlantic integrations are Macedonia’s priority commitment. Despite the progress in fulfilling membership criteria, the country remains out of the EU and NATO, mainly due to the unresolved issue over its name.

The state invests efforts and largely succeeds in harmonizing the domestic legislation and public policies with the recommendations and standards of the EU. Success is lesser in the implementation of such policies, largely due to lack of funds to ensure realization of legal provisions.

In recent years, the political situation is marked by confrontations between the government and oppositional structures, lack of dialogue and strong polarization along party and ethnic lines. Issues related to daily politics are in the center of public attention, at the expense of social progress and furthering human and citizens’ rights.

The country has dealt relatively well with the world and the European financial crises of 2008 and 2009 and has achieved small, but positive growth rates. Yet, unemployment and low living standard remain key problems for majority of the citizens¹. Social stratification continues and the gap increases between wealthy and poor sections of the population².

Participatory democracy development is marred with difficulties. Citizens lack confidence in the system, which slows down the development of civic activism. Prevailing political culture does not foster wide societal debates in decision-making.

Situation in the civic sector

Civic sector is still not sufficiently rooted in the Macedonian society. The environment is not favorable yet, despite certain improvements.

¹ For example, the research of the International Republican Institute (IRI) in [September 2014](#).

² According to the World Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Macedonia was among the top three European countries with regards to the inequality of the national wealth distribution in 2011.

The Law on Associations and Foundations (LAF) of 2010 enables civic organization to conduct for-profit activities, provided that the profit is used in furthering organizational goals. LAF introduced the status of “organization of public interest” as a basis for additional tax and other types of exemptions. Civic organizations may be suppliers of goods and services to public institutions³ or to conduct social protection activities at the expense of the state⁴. In practice, these provisions are hardly and slowly implemented and did not bring about the expected benefits.

Tax framework is relatively unfavorable, bearing in mind the fact that civic organization are generally treated equally with other legal entities in terms of taxation.

The Law on Volunteering enables civic organizations to engage volunteers and regulates the relations between volunteers and organizations.

Participation of civic organizations in laws and public policies creation is unsatisfactory, despite the fact that the need and framework for such engagement is set within the governmental Strategy for Cooperation with Civic Organizations. The Law on Access to Information of Public Character is implemented inconsistently, which hampers the efforts of organizations to participate in the decision-making process and to monitor the implementation of legislation and public policies.

On the positive side, public institutions are usually open for cooperation with the civic sector in conducting initiatives that facilitate the realization of institutions’ core activity or support their strategic commitments.

Citizens still insufficiently trust civic organizations⁵. Significant portion of citizens believe that participation in organizations is solely motivated by lucrative reasons and that political parties execute strong influence over organizations. Also, the opinion is widespread that civic organizations are focused on realizing the priorities of their foreign donors, as opposed to the needs and priorities of their target groups.

Cooperation between the civic and the business sector is insufficiently developed. However, the awareness of companies for their corporate social responsibility is gradually growing, which encourages mutual relations.

The civic sector remains dependent on foreign financial support. The departure of ‘traditional’ donors is only partly substituted with support from domestic sources and the EU.

State budget funding is insufficient and allocated exclusively for project support through an inadequately transparent public call procedure. Institutional (organizational, core) support is only provided for the national alliances of persons with various disabilities, which are the only beneficiaries of the funds emerging from lottery and other games of fortune. Funds provided by the local governments are, in general, of minor amounts and also intended for project support.

Civic organizations do not ensure significant financial support from the business sector and citizens’ individual donations. The foreseen tax exemptions for companies’ donations to civic organizations are not sufficiently inciting and are burdened with an extensive and long administrative procedure⁶. The Law on Personal Income Tax enables citizens to donate part of their personal income tax to civic organizations, but the foreseen procedure practically makes the use of this opportunity impossible.

Access to EU funds is limited due to high standards and eligibility requirements. EU support for the Macedonian civic sector is exclusively granted for project support through thematic public calls, which attract significantly more applications compared to the available funds.

Civic organizations insufficiently cooperate among themselves with regards to the key issues of common interest. Joint initiatives are rare, initiated by foreign donors or facilitators and are generally short-lived.

³ Pursuant to the Law on Public Procurements.

⁴ Pursuant to the Law on Social Protection.

⁵ For example, the research of the International Republican Institute (IRI) in [September 2014](#).

⁶ The procedure is regulated by the Law on Donations and Sponsorships in Public Activities.

Context in the area of operations

The specific context in the area of operations of OtW is mainly determined by the slow, yet continuous improvement of the inclusiveness of the Macedonian society and the rapid development of information and communication and assistive technologies:

Improvement of the inclusion of persons with disabilities is recognized as a need by almost all of society. While creating a solid basis, this support is largely declarative. The public understands the need to promote the rights of persons with disabilities, but disability remains to be perceived through the prism of pity, charity, and the medical paradigm. The understanding of accessibility is limited to physical accessibility, which in itself is an unresolved challenge.

In 2011, the Assembly ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. However, introduction and implementation of legislation and policies in the spirit of the social paradigm of disability are not conducted with the required dynamics.

Efforts continue to improve the inclusiveness of the educational system, albeit within a limited scope. An increasing number of schools engage special educators and undertake measures to improve physical accessibility. These trends are particularly characteristic for the primary education, and less in the secondary (which became obligatory as of 2009) and other educational levels. On the other hand, there are no systematic measures to improve the capacity of teachers for working with students with disabilities and to provide accessible teaching aids, computer equipment including assistive peripherals, and software.

The implementation of the National Strategy for Development of e-Content in Support of Computer Use in the Education 2010-2015 is slow. Already produced electronic textbooks do not match the needs of students with disabilities, notwithstanding strategy's provisions that all educational e-materials need to be accessible.

Awareness is gradually built concerning the need to ensure digital inclusion of all citizens. The National Strategy on e-Inclusion 2011-2014 has made certain achievements in promoting assistive technologies and web-accessibility. All public internet cafes were equipped with assistive peripherals. The web-accessibility standards were translated in Macedonian. Development began of a text-to-speech software application in Macedonian, but the process progresses slowly.

Information and communication technologies (ICT) continue their rapid development. Some of the key trends include:

- mobile devices take over from computers as the most commonly used devices,
- mobile applications are intensively developed,
- increase of demand and supply of various online services,
- 3D printing is increasingly used and becomes more affordable,
- development of cloud computing, and
- development of solutions for support of new learning internet-based styles.

Also, the implementation of the universal design is visibly progressing: an ever growing number of hardware and software products are universally accessible and designed in a manner that accommodates beneficiaries' individual needs. New web development platforms include the essential web-accessibility standards, thus improving the accessibility of the virtual space.

New technologies are present and become increasingly affordable at the Macedonian market, including certain assistive peripherals or hardware devices that are based on universal design, such as: big-button keyboard, trackballs, touch screens, Kinect-technology, smart tables, etc. However, the market still does not offer permanent supply of specific assistive peripherals, such as eye-gaze devices.

The country lacks applications developed or localized in Macedonian or the languages of the other ethnic communities, which decreases the opportunities for digital inclusion of marginalized groups. Particularly obvious is the lack of educational applications in Macedonian or the other ethnic communities' languages, which could be used to support the educational process and the learning.

Description of the organizational situation

OtW is the sole organization in Macedonia and the wider region that is entirely focused on promoting assistive technology. Since its establishment in 2005, OtW grew into recognizable and respected organization that uses technology as a tool for fostering the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

The operations of the organization are conducted through two main activities:

On the one hand, OtW is a **service provider** for assistive technology that provides three types of services for persons with disabilities: individualized support for computer and internet use, individual assessment of assistive technology needs and advisory-consultative support for assistive technology use.

Services are based on the person-centered approach and aim at fostering beneficiaries' personal development. The use of assistive technology, including accessible software, and the professional team of special educators and an IT specialist, turn OtW into a unique service provider in the country. Services are free of charge. The demand exceeds the organization's capacity, hence a waiting list has been introduced.

On the other hand, OtW implements **projects** for promotion of assistive technology use through: capacity strengthening of other actors, development of innovations and research, and awareness raising and informing.

Capacity strengthening of other actors is conducted through trainings and knowledge and knowhow dissemination, for which OtW has developed strong capacity and obtained significant experience. Knowledge and knowhow dissemination includes preparation and publication of manuals and other resource materials and consultations and advice in assistive technology use. In addition to Macedonian, part of the materials is available in Albanian and English language. Within capacity strengthening, OtW also provides support in assistive technology equipping of other actors.

Innovations development includes manufacturing of assistive peripherals and adjustment of standard devices into assistive solutions, as well as localization and development of educational applications. The organization conducts research and develops practices (models) related to assistive technology use and disability, in particular in the field of education, which are unique in the country.

Awareness raising and informing is conducted through production and distribution of printed and electronic informative materials, organization of public debates and events and campaigns. The organization has its own website, Facebook group, YouTube channel and uses other social networks, as well. OtW publishes the quarterly news bulletin *View from the inside* in Macedonian and English language.

Since 2010, OtW has been particularly active in mainstream education: the organization introduced assistive technology in almost 10% of all primary schools in the country and started piloting assistive technology use in secondary education. For the first time ever, in 2013 the state used public budget funds to procure assistive peripherals for OtW's partner schools.

In the second half of 2014, OtW launched its first project abroad. The project consists of introducing assistive technology in mainstream education in Serbia as per the model developed by OtW. The organization provides consultative and advisory support to the Serbian partner organization [EHO](#).

In 2014, OtW began a nation-wide research on the situation of persons with disabilities in Macedonia. For the first time since its establishment, OtW ran a research that is not entirely limited to issues related to assistive technology, but includes issues such as the rights of human and civil rights of persons with disabilities in general. This engagement reflects the understanding that the inclusion of persons with disabilities is a precondition for their e-inclusion.

OtW began cooperating with an association of elderly in 2012, running joint initiatives for promotion of assistive technology among elderly citizens. The organization recognized the interest and the specific needs of elderly with regards to digital inclusion.

International donors are the main source of income for OtW. The implementation of projects funded by USAID and the EU is a reflection of the organization's strengthened capacity for project management, and proved an opportunity for further on-the-job learning. On the other hand, the prevailing contribution of international donors into the total organizational budget may represent a risk for its sustainability.

The organization occasionally receives support from the business sector, mainly in smaller amounts and in the form of institutional support or provision of equipment.

OtW is well-connected at national and international level. The organization is an active member for two European networks: [EASPD](#) and [Telecentre Europe](#) and has positive experience in cooperating with actors from the civic, public and business sectors.

OtW received the ERSTE Foundation Social Integration Award in 2013 and the [UNITE IT](#) Digital Inclusion Award in 2014, as well as other national and local recognitions.

The OtW Holygnosis Report, prepared by the DETRA Centar consultancy company towards the end of 2013, presents a detailed overview of the organization's condition and was used as the basis for the planning of the Organizational Strategy 2015-2017.

Key-terms definitions

As an organization acting in a relatively new area in the Macedonian society, OtW contributes towards determining adequate Macedonian-language terms related to assistive technology. The key terms for OtW's operations are the following:

Assistive technology includes devices, aids and software that facilitate or enable the use of technology by persons who cannot or face difficulties in using standard solutions. Assistive technology includes assistive computer devices – hardware (in its wider meaning including: desktops, laptops, tablets, mobile devices, etc.) and software, which enable users to use information and communication technologies in a barrier-free manner. Assistive devices (or peripherals) are tools specifically designed to make computer use easier, such as: big-button keyboard, switches, assistive or adjusted joystick, trackball, etc. Assistive software refers to software that is specifically developed to match the needs of persons with disabilities who face problems in using standard software programs and applications.

Accessible technology is used to denote technology that is intended for all, in line with the principles of [universal design](#) and the [W3C web-accessibility standards](#). Accessible hardware includes standard computer equipment that may be used without major difficulties by as many users as possible. For example, touchscreens or tablets are not assistive devices *per se*, but can be used by persons with disabilities who face problems when using standard computer equipment. Similarly, accessible software includes software programs and application that can be equally used by a wide variety of beneficiaries' groups: persons with disabilities, elderly, persons with low literacy skills, persons who do not speak the language used by the software, persons using slower internet connection or older technologies, new or occasional beneficiaries, etc.

E-accessibility means enabling access to information and communication technologies for all, in a manner that accommodates different individual needs.

Web-accessibility refers to web-sites, web-content and software that are sufficiently flexible to accommodate the variety of needs and priorities of beneficiaries. Web-accessibility requires application of the [W3C web-accessibility standards](#) with regards to the content, contrast, navigation and compatibility with other technologies.

E-inclusion (digital inclusion) stands for effective participation of all persons in all aspects of societal life through use of information and communication technologies.

Center for Assistive Technology refers to the service-provision arm of OtW that offers the following three types of services: individualized support for computer and internet use, individual assessment of assistive technology needs and advisory-consultative support for assistive technology use.

Counselling services (for assistive technology) is the term used to denote the three types of services provided by the Center for Assistive Technology of OtW.

LONG-TERM COMMITMENTS

Almost ten years after its establishment, OtW modifies its long-term commitments in an effort to maximally use its capacity, credibility and achievements, to adjust to the contextual changes and the changed needs of its beneficiaries.

Vision and mission

The **vision** of OtW is a world of equal and active people who use technology for personal development, improvement of quality of life and furthering community wellbeing.

Personal contribution to the common good is the highest form of one's participation in the societal living. Each individual's right and duty is to contribute in the community in accordance with their abilities and possibilities. Everyone's contribution is equally important.

Every human community progresses in accordance with its ability to enable and motivate its members to contribute to the common wellbeing. It is an obligation of, but also an essential benefit for each community to enable full development of the abilities of and to stimulate participation by all its members.

Modern technology greatly enhances the opportunities for personal development and contributes to the improvement of the quality of living. These benefits must be available for all. Technology needs to adapt to people, not the other way around.

The world is our common home. Everyone of us individually and all of us together can and must make the home a better place for living. OtW views technology as a tool that can help everyone among us contribute to improving our home.

The **mission** of OtW is to initiate and facilitate active inclusion of all people in the contemporary world through assistive technology use.

OtW develops and promotes new and alternative solutions for creation of an inclusive information society. The organization uses assistive and information and communication technologies in general to enable the participation of all persons in the society. OtW stands for and contributes to changes that will improve the e-accessibility of the modern world and will expand the application of the universal design principle.

In its operations, OtW focuses on persons with disabilities, but takes into account the needs of the elderly and all other persons in needs of assistive and non-standard solution to participate in the ever-more important digital public space.

OtW's primary area of operations is Macedonia: the main efforts are made to improve the situation in the country. At the same time, the organization initiates and participates in relevant initiatives in the neighboring region, as well as at European and international level, which stems from its perception of the inter-dependence of the modern digital work.

Values and principles

The values of OtW emerge from the following **convictions**:

- the use and development of information and communication technology enable and facilitate the active participation of all people in the society, and

- information and knowledge are common (public) goods.

People and their **individual** needs and abilities are in the **focus** of OtW.

Operations of the organizations follow two basic **approaches: person-centered and rights-based.**

The organization is led by the following **principles and values:** participation, equal opportunities, tolerance, partnership, and transparency and accountability.

Participation means an opportunity for all persons to take part in the public affairs and to contribute into the community. OtW believes that people have the right to take part in the wider societal processes that affect them, for which marginalized groups need support. At organizational level, participation of beneficiaries and target groups in the planning, conduct and evaluation of the organization's operation is of paramount importance.

The **equal opportunities** principle foresees that all people need to have equal access to the benefits from the social, economic, political, technical and technological changes and development. OtW contributes to the creation and improvement of societal mechanisms for ensuring equal opportunities, without any discrimination. The organization provides equal opportunities for inclusion of all persons in its executive and governance bodies and its activities.

Tolerance represents an ability to recognize and respect the values and the behavior of others. Tolerance is the essential basis for the cohesion and stability of a society. Through its operations, OtW promotes tolerance and respect for diversity in the society; internally, the organization builds mechanisms and practices for governance and management based on these principles.

Partnership is dedication to cooperation with all relevant actors, based on mutual trust and respect for everyone's rights and duties. A saying goes: "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go with others." OtW is dedicated to building relations of trust and partnership on the long path towards its vision and mission.

Transparency and accountability refer to the public (in terms of public check) and openness of societal processes and institutions, as well as mechanisms that ensure responsible acting by societal actors. OtW is and will remain an example of a transparent and accountable organization, in order to maintain its credibility to promote these principles in the wider society.

These values and principles reflect OtW's respect of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other international documents that address the rights of persons, citizens or any marginalized group.

Long-term objectives

OtW's operations are directed towards the following long-term objectives:

- information and communication technologies available for all,
- inclusive and modern education,
- equal opportunities for all, and
- OtW as an innovative organization with credibility and capability for partnerships.

Information and communication technologies available for all

Availability of information and communication technology is a precondition for the equal access of all persons to the benefits of its development.

OtW improves the availability of information and communication technology for all persons in need of assistive or accessible solution through:

- provision of counseling services for assistive technology,
- research and development of assistive and accessible hardware and software innovations and adaptations,

- provision of affordable (price-wise) assistive and accessible hardware devices and software,
- production of resource materials: manuals, guidebooks, instructions, etc.,
- capacity strengthening of other actors,
- awareness raising and informing of the general and the professional public, and
- advocacy to ensure public sector support for improved availability of technology for marginalized groups.

The counseling services are the point of departure in developing good practices, needs assessment, research and development, awareness raising, and advocacy. These services ensure the legitimacy of OtW's operations directed towards other societal actors and the wider societal community.

Inclusive and modern education

Education is the key factor of social mobility in the long run.

An inclusive and modern educational system creates globally competitive individuals and workforce with contemporary skills and knowledge, while at the same time offering equal educational opportunities to all its students. Such a system reflects the equality, diversity, and democratic nature of the society and is based on wide use of information and communication technology in the learning process.

OtW contributes towards inclusive and modern education through:

- capacity strengthening of educational institutions to use assistive and accessible solutions in their daily operations,
- technical support, including provision of assistive and accessible devices and software to educational institutions,
- production of thematic resource materials that support the use of assistive and accessible solution by educational institutions,
- development of accessible educational software applications,
- awareness raising and informing of the general and the professional public, and
- advocacy for systematic use of accessible information and communication, as well as assistive technology in the education.

In its operations, OtW focuses on all levels of the mainstream educational system, devoting largest attention to the obligatory levels of education: primary and secondary. At the same time, the organization supports the use of assistive and accessible information and communication technologies in the informal education and in supporting life-long learning.

By exception, OtW supports the use of assistive and accessible information and communication technologies in the special education in cases when that is not contrary to the organization's dedication to ensuring the right to mainstream education for children and youths with disabilities.

Equal opportunities for all

Equal opportunities are a precondition for active involvement of all persons in the societal living.

Technology is a tool for ensuring equal opportunities. It is all the more important in modern information societies based on information and knowledge.

OtW contributes to ensuring equal opportunities for all by using information and communication and assistive technologies in the following areas:

- support to employment and enabling access to the open labor market,
- support to independent living in the community,
- promotion of the use of assistive and accessible information and communication technologies within current and yet-to-be-developed social services,
- support to civic activism and participation,
- facilitation of communication and informing,
- awareness raising and informing of the general and the professional public, and

- advocacy for systematic use of assistive and accessible information and communication technologies in the society.

In respect of the fact that digital inclusion is not possible without wider social inclusion, OtW activities also include:

- awareness raising on the need to implement international standards and legal documents that promote equal opportunities and inclusion, and
- advocacy for implementation of internal standards and legal documents that promote equal opportunities and inclusion.

OW as innovative organization with credibility and capability for partnerships

Innovation is a key commitment of OtW: the organization incites and leads innovative solutions based on assistive and accessible information and communication technologies use, with an aim to enable active participation of all persons in the life of the community.

The key resources for innovation are human resources – the persons in the governance and executive bodies. OtW is dedicated to fostering the development of everyone at the organization in terms of their personal and professional integrity and commitment, through trainings and continuous education and promoting on-the-job learning. OtW builds an organizational culture that incites innovation and development of alternative solutions at all levels within its public operations, as well as its internal governance, management and structure. The commitment to learning includes strengthening internal mechanisms for organizational learning and development based on documenting, monitoring and evaluating the organization's activities and achievements.

Innovation, professionalism and dedication to transparent and accountable operations strengthen the credibility and recognition of OtW, equally as does the successful counseling work in the field of assistive technology.

The ability for cooperation and partnership are the second essential feature of OtW: the organization is independent, but it does not operate in isolation and is not focused on itself. On the contrary, the organization builds relations of cooperation and effective partnership with actors from the civic, public and business sectors.

In addition to doing so in the country, OtW builds partnerships at internal level, as well. It enables the organization to actively take part in the evermore dynamic and important exchange of experiences and information in the modern digital world.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The **general objective** of the Organizational Strategy 2015-2017 is to contribute to the realization of the long-term objectives of the organization.

The **objective** is to strengthen the capacity of OtW for development of new services in response to the dynamic needs of its beneficiaries.

The organizational **focus** is to improve the organizational structure, learning and internal processes. This shall ease the development of new services and provide basis for long-term sustainability of the organization.

The **strategic priorities** are presented below in four different areas: beneficiaries, learning and development, internal processes, and funding.

Beneficiaries

Current situation

Since the establishment, persons with disabilities were OtW's target group. The organization directly provides products and services (hereinafter called: services) to them, but, in an effort to improve their condition, beneficiaries of OtW's services are also a number of involved and affected actors: schools, teachers, educational institutions, other relevant institutions, civic organizations, the business sector and employers, as well as the public. The types of services for each of these groups of beneficiaries are briefly described in section: Description of the organizational situation.

Throughout its previous operations, OtW constantly increased the scope and types of services offered, maintaining or improving the level of quality.

The new services that the organization develops have a strong innovative component, which enables the organization to accommodate the needs of its beneficiaries, but also to take the leading position in the field of assistive technology in the country and in the Balkans.

In delivering, the organization promotes the person-centered approach and provides tailored (i.e. individualized) services. OtW is especially recognized by the services offered to persons with disabilities within the Center for Assistive Technology and its engagement in the mainstream primary education.

Beneficiaries' participation in needs assessment, planning, delivery and evaluation of services is of essential importance. Despite currently lacking written procedures and rule, this value is clearly shared among OtW' staff and is continuously applied.

In the past several years, OtW made the first steps in cooperating with elderly and their associations, in response to their increased interest for and needs of non-standard solution in using information and communication technology.

All services of OtW have been free of charge since the establishment of the organization.

Scope

OtW will continue delivering high-quality, timely and individualized services.

The organization will introduce new services for the beneficiaries, which includes development of innovations. Past experiences in the development of innovative hardware and software solutions or new and improved training programs create a good starting point.

New services will continue to be based on the person-centered and rights-based approaches. Beneficiaries' participation in needs assessment, planning, delivery, and evaluation of services remains of essential importance and shall be regulated with formal rules and procedures (see section: Internal processes).

OtW will develop services in the field of early intervention.

Mainstream education will remain in the focus. In addition to the obligatory levels of education, primary and secondary, the organization will initiative activities in preschool and high education.

The organization will develop services to promote the employment of persons with disabilities, taking into account the state's active employment measures.

OtW will participate in public policies creation and will promote digital inclusion. In support of such advocacy activities, awareness raising and campaigns will be conducted. Within this framework and in line with the rights-based approach, OtW will run initiatives that will promote the inclusiveness of the society in general.

The organization will develop services for elderly and their associations.

OtW will support other actors (civic organizations, day-care centers, institutions, informal association of parents, etc.) to include assistive technology in their daily operations.

Desired situation

OtW is an organization that delivers high-quality, timely and individualized services to users with various types of disabilities and at different age.

In order to accommodate the dynamic and changing needs of beneficiaries, OtW develops new innovative services.

The organization uses modern approaches in service delivery: person-centered and rights-based.

OtW provides support to persons with disabilities in key segments that endorse and enable active and independent living, in particular education, as well as employment and early intervention.

OtW is a recognizable organization that contributes to the inclusiveness and in particular to e-inclusiveness of the Macedonian society.

Indicative activities

The Organizational Strategy foresees the development and delivery of at least 6 new services including:

- Development and delivery of at least 1 service in the field of early intervention,
- Development and delivery of at least 1 service in preschool and at least 1 service in high education (software or hardware innovation),
- Development and delivery of at least 1 service in employment of persons with disabilities,
- Development of at least 1 awareness raising initiative or campaign related to inclusion and e-inclusion,
- Development of at least 1 service for elderly and their associations, and
- Publication and promotion of at least 1 review (catalogue) of services or part of the services (e.g. the trainings) delivered by OtW.

The action plan is enclosed in Annex 1.

Learning and development

Current situation

As the leader in the field of assistive technology in Macedonia, OtW considers organizational learning and development a necessity and an essential feature.

In its ten-year operations, OtW accumulated knowledge and experiences. On-the-job learning is the main form of learning, followed by trainings and exchange with other organizations, mainly from abroad. Staff and members of the governance bodies are dedicated to and motivated for learning and development.

The main weakness is the lack of mechanisms, rules and procedures that encourage learning and development. As a result, learning and development are realized in an unsystematic manner and are mainly reactive, i.e. follow the opportunities in the environment.

Assessment of staff performance is not conducted, which would identify the needs for professional development in accordance with job descriptions. The decisions on professional development are taken on ad-hoc basis.

Significant improvement has been achieved with regards to monitoring and documenting the organization's activities and achievements. However, OtW does not have a functional system for organizational memory, which hinders the transfer of knowledge and the sharing of lessons learnt among the staff. This decreases the effectiveness and the efficiency of the activities for dissemination of knowledge and knowhow.

OtW maintains a database on the beneficiaries of the Center for Assistive Technology, but does not systematize data on other beneficiaries and external collaborators, including interesting persons for volunteering or employment.

In 2014, OtW developed a system for context monitoring, with the support of DETRA Centar. Yet, the organization has limited capabilities to follow the development of assistive and information and communication technologies, mainly due to the lack of funds and human resources to provide practical testing. This creates a risk that the organization might lose the pace in following rapid technological developments.

No programs have been developed for orientation and mentoring of new staff and volunteers, which prolongs the accommodation upon taking over a new job.

OtW does not hold internal trainings and does not have mechanisms for horizontal sharing of knowledge, experiences and lessons learnt.

Due to the focus on operational working, OtW does not pay sufficient attention to cooperating with other actors in sharing experiences and learning from others.

OtW uses various channels of communication with and informing the public of its activities, including the internet. The organization adjusts its approach to the different target groups it addresses. OtW does not have a formal strategy for public relations.

In 2014, OtW undertook measures to strengthen staff capacity in project management through a series of trainings. This is even more important given the fact that project funding is the main source of income for OtW.

Scope

OtW shall develop a system for organizational learning and development.

Staff professional development must be included and addressed within the performance review mechanism.

The organizational memory must be organized in a functional system based on cloud computing, which will be easy to use.

OtW must ensure the application of the established context monitoring system.

When cooperating with other organizations and relevant actors, OtW must focus on the opportunities for exchange and learning from others.

A mechanism must be developed to cover the costs for learning and development through the projects, including the procurement of new assistive devices and accessible hardware and software. OtW needs to explain to donors that bearing these costs is of essential importance for the organization.

OtW should establish monthly staff meetings to share knowledge, experiences and lessons learned. According to the needs and opportunities, internal trainings should be organized.

A coherent public relation strategy needs to be developed in support of the organization's operations and for promotion of its values.

Databases need to be setup and regularly updated containing data on all beneficiaries and external collaborators of OtW.

The organization can introduce orientation and mentoring programs for new staff and volunteers.

Desired situation

OtW is an organization that systematically learns and develops, capable of initiating and leading innovative solutions for the problems. OtW uses staff knowledge, experience and potential to anticipate and intercept contextual changes.

Professional development of staff is planned within staff performance review. Working positions at OtW are attractive due to opportunities for professional and personal development.

The organizational memory is well-organized and easily accessible through cloud computing. OtW has databases on its beneficiaries and external collaborators.

Staff regularly exchange knowledge, experiences and lessons learnt through internal trainings and mechanisms for horizontal sharing.

Cooperation with other organizations and actors is used for experience sharing and learning.

OtW is recognizable for its operation and the values it promotes.

OtW staff apply the project cycle management concept.

Indicative activities

The Organizational Strategy foresees the following indicative activities:

- Inclusion of professional development within the staff performance review system,
- Development and application of a cloud-computing organizational memory system,
- Systematic context monitoring, in accordance with the already developed mechanism,
- Experience and knowledge exchange with at least 10 actors,
- Convening internal monthly meetings for experience, knowledge and lessons learnt sharing,
- Procurement and testing of at least 6 new, previously not used assistive or accessible hardware devices,
- Development and updating of at least 1 database on beneficiaries or external collaborators,
- Development and application of organizational public relations strategy, and
- Development and application of at least 1 orientation or mentoring program for new staff or volunteers.

The action plan is enclosed in Annex 2.

Internal processes

Current situation

Regulating and standardizing internal processes is an area where OtW needs to significantly improve.

Namely, in response to the rapid growth of the scope of project working in 2010, OtW used most of its resources and energy for its operations. Development of new and adjusting current rules and procedures was neglected, as was the need to adjust the organizational structure. The lack of enabling rules, procedures and structure prevented OtW to routinize the working processes related to project work. This decreases the opportunities for the organization to engage in research, learning and development.

The organizational structure is now fully defined: At macro level, the functions of the governing bodies are not appropriately distinguished from management and executive functions. Important aspects of the functioning of the governing bodies are not sufficiently regulated with internal procedures (e.g. convening and chairing sessions). These ambiguities burden the communication between the governing and the executive bodies of OtW and prevent the maximum usage of the entire organizational potential.

At micro level, the organization does not have adequate systematization of working positions. This creates obstacles to managerial allocation of resources and responsibilities.

Current rules on labor relations, project working, administrative and office working, accountancy and financial working, procurement, etc. are not supportive of efficiency and effectiveness working of OtW. These were uncritically taken over from other larger organizations. There are no written procedures for work with beneficiaries at the Center for Assistive Technology, which would formally regulate mutual rights and duties and determine the quality of service. This hampers the efforts to ensure beneficiaries' and their families' participation not only in service delivery, but in the overall working of the organization.

Human management system is not in place, which negatively impacts the management of OtW and staff professional development. Despite promoting inclusion, the organization does not have a single employee with disability or of minority ethnic community in the country. In the long run, this could negatively impact OtW's credibility.

The organization does not engage volunteers. There are no formal rules and procedures for engagement of volunteers.

Despite conducting practical lectures to students from relevant high-education institutions, the organization still does not organize the obligatory students' practical work. There are no formal rules and procedures for students' practical work.

Also, OtW has neither formal rules and procedure for, nor practical experience in conducting commercial activities, i.e. profit-making activities. This limits the organization in using several sources of income and decreases the chances for sustainability.

Scope

OtW must precisely and clearly define its organizational structure:

At macro level, management and executive functions must clearly be separated from governance. The macro-structure must support the inclusion of governance bodies with all their capacity in the organization's working. This shall be done through modification of the organization's statute.

At micro level, the organization must provide new working positions systematization, including precise and clear job descriptions.

OtW must revise current or enact and apply new rules and procedures for: labor relations, project working, archive working, accountancy and financial working (including petty cash). Rules and procedures need to be adequate for the size and the needs of OtW and to enable more efficient and more effective operations of the organization.

The Center for Assistive Technology must establish and apply written rules and procedures to regulate mutual rights and duties of OtW and the beneficiaries and to formalize quality standards.

OtW must establish a human resources management system that will aim at staff personal and professional development and improvement of their dedication to the work. The system shall include staff performance review and equal opportunities employment policies and measures.

The organization needs to engage volunteers in its operations. Formal rules and procedures for engagement of volunteers need to be developed.

Commercial activities need to be foreseen and regulated.

OtW may establish rules and procedures to become eligible for conducting obligatory students' practice. This mechanism needs to enable proper practical work for and transfer of knowledge to the students, who will in return contribute in OtW's operations.

The efforts to improve internal processes must be supported by external consultants who will propose tailored solutions for OtW. The organization neither has, nor needs developing internal capacities for creation of formal internal systems, rules and procedures; the capacity should rather be directed towards strict implementation of formalized internal processes.

Desired situation

OtW has clear organizational structure and defined internal processes that support effective and efficient working. Internal rules and procedures provide for quality and timeliness of the operations and enable the organization to use all its potentials.

The structure of the organization supports participation in decision-making.

The human resources management system is motivating and supports the development of staff's personal and professional integrity and their commitment to the work.

Rule and procedures of the Center for Assistive Technology foresee beneficiaries' participation in planning, delivery and evaluation of services.

Internal processes are designed to support the diversification of the sources of funding, especially through gains-making activities.

Rules and procedures exist that enable OtW to engage volunteers, including attractive offer for obligatory practical work of students from relevant high-education institutions.

Indicative activities

The Organizational Strategy foresees the following indicative activities:

- Determination of the organizational structure,
- Determination of working positions systematization, including precise job descriptions,
- Revision of current or development and implementation of new internal rules and procedures. Amended or established are the rules and procedures in at least the following areas of operations: labor relations, project working, archive working, accountancy and financial working,
- Revision of current or development and implementation of new internal rules and procedures concerning mutual rights and duties of the Center for Assistive Technology and its beneficiaries and formalized quality standard,
- Establishment and implementation of a human resources management system,
- Establishment and implementation of rules and procedures for volunteers engagement,
- Establishment and implementation of rules and procedures for students' practical work,
- Establishment and implementation of internal regulations for conducting commercial activities and use of other sources of funding.

The action plan is enclosed in Annex 3.

Funding

Current situation

In the past five fiscal years (2010-2014), the organization's budget recorded a growing trend. Most funds were earmarked for project support from international donors.

The increase of provided financial support led to increase of staff, improvement of working conditions and provision of organization's own vehicle. On the other hand, OtW's fixed costs have also increased.

Following the extremely high ration of the support from one donor in the OtW's annual budget between 2010 and 2012, in 2013 and in particular in 2014 the organization increased the number of donors and obtained a grant from European Union funds for the first time. These funds were earmarked for project support, as well.

Financial support from domestic sources was limited to several one-off donations from the business sector. However, in the past few years, two larger donations in kind from the business sector provided for renewal of almost entire equipment of the organization. OtW does not receive funding from the national and local authorities. As exception, for the first time in 2014 a governmental institution⁷ supported OtW's project activities procuring assistive devices that were distributed to schools and public internet-cafes across the country.

In 2013, OtW received an offer from a world-known assistive technology producer⁸ for commercial partnership – the organization was asked to become a sales agent for the company's products in Macedonia. Due to the inexperience in such activity and the volume of current project activities, it was jointly agreed to postpone the decision on this proposal. OtW remains in communication with the company.

The organization does not provide funds from citizens' individual donations, memberships, participation by beneficiaries in covering services costs, economic activity, interest or other sources of funding foreseen by law.

OtW has at disposal own funds which would cover the fixed costs of the organization for a period of approximately three months. These reserves resulted from financial awards and several smaller consultancy engagements.

In 2014, OtW began its first project on regional level (in Serbia), which is important in terms of funding as it presents the beginning of creating a regional project portfolio.

Also in 2014, OtW conducted external audit over one of its projects. The obtained auditor's opinion was positive and without materially-significant or essential remarks.

The withdrawal of large number of donors present in Macedonia represents a risk for OtW's sustainability, in particular in its current volume. Despite the improving availability of European funds, the access to them is burdened with complex and expensive application procedure and funding is subject to obligatory co-funding.

This sustainability-related threat is more significant given the fact that the two largest projects of OtW end almost simultaneously in mid-2015.

Scope

In the optimal scenario, OtW needs to develop mechanisms for fundraising that will secure the sustainability of its achievements and the organization in its current volume; in the optimistic prospective, the organization will maintain its current growth trend.

Due to the importance of international donors for OtW's funding, the organization must develop a mechanism for following grant application calls. This particularly refers to European Union funds.

⁷ The Ministry of Information Society and Administration.

⁸ [Tobii Technology](#).

OtW's capability must be improved for efficient response to donors' administrative requirements within the application procedure including: regularly updated organizational profile and supporting documents, CVs of staff, updated organizational profile in key donors databases, etc.

OtW must strengthen its capacity and devote time and resources to regularly apply at call of international donors.

The organization must examine in details the possibilities to diversify its sources of funding, in particular in the direction of profit-making activities. On one hand, that includes commercialization of (a part of) the services, and on the other, the possibilities for commercial cooperation with assistive technology producers.

The organization needs to devote funds, time and resources to introduce regular annual audits over its financial working. Expected positive auditor's opinions will improve its credibility in the eyes of potential supporters.

OtW must have proactive approach in following domestic companies' activities with regards to corporate social responsibility. This primarily refers to companies in the field of information and communication technologies. The capacity for cooperation with the business sector needs to be improved.

It is preferable for OtW to examine all possibilities for provision of financial or non-financial support, project-based or institutional, from national or local public institutions, primarily for the work of the Center for Assistive Technology.

OtW may follow the state's active employment measures, to assess their applicability and possibly decrease staff-related costs in future employments.

Desired situation

OtW is financially stable and sustainable organization that secures financial and non-financial support for its operation from a variety of funding sources foreseen by law:

As project bearer or partner of other organizations, OtW received project financial support from several international donors. A part of the projects include regional or international cooperation.

OtW secures project, organizational or in-kind support from the business sector. The cooperation with at least one company is long-term.

The organization partly provides for its financial sustainability from consultancy engagements and activities that provide profit, including commercial services and beneficiaries' participation in covering services costs.

National and/or local authorities provide financial or non-financial support to the Center for Assistive Technology.

Indicative activities

The Organizational Strategy foresees the following indicative activities:

- Establishment of a mechanism for following grant application calls;
- Establishment of a mechanism for efficient fulfilment of donors' administrative requests in grant application procedures;
- Submission of at least 20 applications (project proposals) for grants. The goal is to ensure at least 4 projects with a budget exceeding 50.000 Euros from at least 3 international donors;
- Conduct of analysis of fundraising possibilities from commercial activities;
- Conduct of external audit over the financial working;
- Provision of support from at least 3 companies. At least one of them is expected to provide support for at least 2 consecutive years;

- Development of strategy for provision of financial and non-financial support from the public sector for projects and for the organization's operations;
- Establishment of a system for following the state's active employment measures.

The action plan is enclosed in Annex 4.

ANNEX 1: Action plan for strategy's area: Beneficiaries

Activity	Bearer*	Time	Assets required**	Success indicator	Critical factor
Development and delivery of at least 1 service in the field of early intervention	Center Manager	2016	min. 2.500 Euros for staff training in early intervention	1 service is developed in the field of early intervention	Adequate early intervention trainings are available
Development and delivery of at least 1 service in preschool and at least 1 service in high education	Project Manager and/or IT Specialist	2016-2017	/	1 service is developed in: - preschool, and - high education.	Funds are available for implementation of services in preschool and high education
Development and delivery of at least 1 service in employment of persons with disabilities	Project Manager	2015	/	1 service is developed in employment of persons with disabilities	Funds are available for implementation of employment services
Development of at least 1 awareness raising initiative or campaign related to inclusion and e-inclusion	Project Manager	2015-2017	/	1 awareness raising initiative is conducted, or a campaign related to inclusion and e-inclusion	Funds are available for realization of the awareness raising initiative or campaign
Development of at least 1 service for elderly and their associations	Center Manager	2015	/	1 service is developed for elderly or their associations	At least one association of elderly is interested in cooperation
Publication and promotion of at least 1 review (catalogue) of services or part of the services (e.g. the trainings) delivered by OtW	Learning and Development Manager	2017	min. 1.000 Euros for catalogue design and printing	1 review (catalogue) of OtW's services	Funds are available for catalogue design and printing

* titles of working positions are used that are expected to be introduced within the forthcoming (at the time of strategy preparation) systematization of OW; modifications are likely in terms of the titles and responsibilities

** refers only to the specific, additionally needed assets for realization of the activities; does not include the operational costs of OW

ANNEX 2:**Action plan for strategy's area: Learning and development**

Activity	Bearer	Time	Assets required	Success indicator	Critical factor
Inclusion of professional development within the staff performance review system	Executive Director	2015	Consultancy support is provided by USAID	Established system for staff performance review focusing on professional development	Insufficient commitment to applying the staff performance review system
Development and application of a cloud-computing organizational memory system	IT Specialist	2015	/	Established cloud-computing organizational memory system	Insufficient staff knowledge of cloud computing systems
Systematic context monitoring, in accordance with the already developed mechanism	Learning and Development Manager	2015-2017	/	Annual plans include context analysis	Insufficient commitment to systematic context monitoring
Experience and knowledge exchange with at least 10 actors	Executive Director	2015-2017	/	Number of networks that OtW is a member of Number of organizations that OtW exchanges with Number and description of exchange activities	Inadequate documentation of activities
Convening internal monthly meetings for experience, knowledge and lessons learnt sharing	Executive Director	2015-2017	/	12 monthly meetings for internal sharing each year	Insufficient commitment to convening monthly sharing meetings
Procurement and testing of at least 6 new, previously not used assistive or accessible hardware devices	Center Manager and/or IT Specialist	2015-2017	Euros	2 new, previously unused assistive or accessible hardware devices are tested each year	Inability to procure new previously unused devices
Development and updating of at least 1 database on beneficiaries or external collaborators	IT Specialist Project Manager	2016	/	1 new database of beneficiaries or external collaborators is created and regularly updated	Insufficient commitment to updating the new database
Development and application of organizational public relations strategy	Public Relations Officer	2016-2017	min. 1.000 Euros for consultancy support and/or training min 1.500 Euros annually for implementation	Developed strategy for public relation; implementation in progress	Insufficient capacity for development and implementation of the public relation strategy
Development and application of at least 1 orientation or mentoring program for new staff or volunteers	Learning and Development Manager	2017	/	At least 1 developed orientation or mentoring program; implementation in progress	Insufficient interest for volunteering and/or practical work with OtW

ANNEX 3:**Action plan for strategy's area: Internal processes**

Activity	Bearer	Time	Assets required	Success indicator	Critical factor
Determination of the organizational structure	Governance Board Exec. Director	2015	Consultancy support is provided by USAID	Determined macro-organizational structure	Inability to reach internal common ground concerning the structure
Determination of working positions systematization, including clear and precise job descriptions	Executive Director	2015	Consultancy support is provided by USAID	Determined systematization of working positions	Dissatisfaction of working positions allocation
Revision of current or development and implementation of new internal rules and procedures	Exec. Director Fin. and Admin. Mngr.	2015	Consultancy support is provided by USAID	Enacted internal rules and procedures for: - labor relations, - project working, - archive working, and - accountancy and financial working.	Insufficient commitment to applying enacted rules and procedures
Revision of current or development and implementation of new internal rules and procedures at the Center for Assistive Technology	Center Manager	2015-2016	/	Enacted rules and procedures at the Center; implementation in progress	Insufficient participation of beneficiaries and parents
Establishment and implementation of a human resources management system	Executive Director	2015	Consultancy support is provided by USAID	Established human resources management system; implementation in progress	Insufficient readiness of staff to accept the change
Establishment and implementation of rules and procedures for volunteers engagement	Center Manager Fin. and Admin. Mngr.	2016	/	Number of engaged volunteers and description of their activities	Insufficient interest for volunteering with OtW
Establishment and implementation of rules and procedures for students' practical work at OtW	Center Manager Fin. and Admin. Mngr.	2017	/	Number of students conducting practical work with OtW and description of their activities	Insufficient interest among students for practical work with OtW
Establishment and implementation of internal regulations for conducting commercial activities	Governance Board Exec. Director	2016	/	Revenues from commercial activities (once the internal regulation is in place)	Lack of capacity and experience of OtW in commercial activities

ANNEX 4:**Action plan for strategy's area: Funding**

Activity	Bearer	Time	Assets required	Success indicator	Critical factor
Establishment of a mechanism for following grant application calls	Executive Director	2015	/	Number of identified grant application calls annually	Focus on the current sources of grants support
Establishment of a mechanism for efficient fulfilment of donors' administrative requests in grant application procedures	Fin. and Admin. Mngr.	2015	/	Established mechanism for efficient Воспоставен механизм of donors' administrative requests in grant application procedures	Insufficient commitment of staff to updating data
Submission of at least 20 applications (project proposals) for grants	Learning and Development Manager	2015-2017	/	At least 4 projects are approved with budgets exceeding 50.000 Euros	Lesser number of approved grants (i.e. low quality of applications)
Conduct of analysis of fundraising possibilities from commercial activities	Exec. Director Learning and Development Manager	2016	/	Conducted analysis of fundraising possibilities from commercial activities	Lack of capacity and experience in commercial activities
Conduct of external audit over the financial working	Exec. Director Fin. and Admin. Mngr.	2016	2.000 Euros Annually	Conducted external audit over the financial working	Inability to provide funds for external audit
Provision of support from at least 3 companies	Executive Director Learning and Development Manager	2015-2017	/	Number of companies that provide support to OtW Amount of provided funds Duration of support (min. 1 company provides support for a period over 1 year)	Insufficient interest of companies to cooperate with civic organizations
Development of strategy for provision of financial and non-financial support from the public sector	Executive Director Learning and Development Manager	2017		Developed strategy for provision of support from the public sector; implementation in progress	Limited opportunities for securing public funding and support
Establishment of a system for following the state's active employment measures	Fin. and Admin. Mngr.	2016		Systematic following of the active employment measures Use of the measures in case of future employments with OtW	Active employment measures that OtW would not be able to use