

Legal Aid Society

of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberland

Strategic Plan: 2014-2018

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Introduction:

A joint committee of Legal Aid Society (LAS) staff and Board members was convened on June 21, 2012, to begin the planning process for development of a strategic plan for LAS. The committee decided to employ a strategic planning consultant, Cissy Mynatt, to assist in the process. The committee decided to develop a five-year strategic plan and a process that would achieve maximum input and engagement of staff and Board members. Over the course of the following 14 months, input was continually solicited through the joint committee, surveys sent to staff and Board members, a presentation made to staff at all staff meeting, and a presentation made to a joint meeting of the Board and Community Advisory Committee.

Priorities, Goals, Strategies, and Objectives:

Key themes became clear throughout the process. From those themes, there were four areas of Priority to develop Goals and Strategies, including measurable outcomes, over the next five years:

- I. MAXIMIZE THE AVAILABILITY OF HIGH-QUALITY, HIGH-IMPACT LEGAL SERVICES**
- II. DEVELOP A CULTURE OF LEARNING AND ACCOUNTABILITY**
- III. INCREASE COMMUNITY AWARENESS AND SUPPORT FOR THE LAS MISSION AND SERVICES**
- IV. ENHANCE ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

Finally, a critical component of implementation will be efforts by staff to provide oversight. The Plan was approved by LAS's Board of Directors at its meeting on October 22, 2013. The Plan was approved with the understanding that the timelines would be adjusted by staff as circumstances demanded within the framework of completion of the plan by 2018. The implementation will be overseen by oversight committees. The Strategic Plan goals will be assigned to each oversight committee with objectives for the next year established at the conclusion of each year.

Mission Statement:

To advance, defend, and enforce the legal rights of low-income and vulnerable people in order to secure for them the basic necessities of life.

2014 – 2018: Goals and Strategies

Strategic Priority I: MAXIMIZE THE AVAILABILITY OF HIGH-QUALITY, HIGH-IMPACT LEGAL SERVICES

Goal 1 – Deliver high quality casework.

Strategies:

- 1.a. *Develop comprehensive standards of practice for appropriate practice areas to reflect best practices.*
- 1.b. *Create guidance letters and forms that support best practices and consistent use organization-wide.*
- 1.c. *Integrate standard practices within the database as much as possible.*
- 1.d. *Monitor consistency in implementation of standards of practice.*
- 1.e. *Review and update areas of practice as needed.*
- 1.f. *Improve and expand the peer file review process to incorporate specific criteria to reflect the organization's standards of practice and values.*
- 1.g. *Create an internal mechanism for regular meetings to review organization-wide advocacy.*

2014 Objectives:

- 1.1. Identify appropriate practice areas and establish a schedule for development of comprehensive standards of practice by March 31, 2014.
- 1.2. Develop standards of practice for two identified areas by December 31, 2014.
- 1.3. Inventory the file reviews completed during 2012 and 2013 by January 31, 2014.
- 1.4. Evaluate the peer file review process and make adjustments as needed by February 28, 2014.
- 1.5. Create and release 2014 file review assignments by March 31, 2014.
- 1.6. Establish monthly advocacy meetings attended by Managing Attorneys and Director of Nashville Pro Bono Program beginning in January 2014.
- 1.7. Review progress and develop any additional objectives for 2015 by December 31, 2014.

2015 Objectives:

- 1.8. Provide support for the adaptation of the two standards of practice by each LAS office by December 2015.
- 1.9. Re-examine the file review process to ensure integration of adopted standards of practice for 2015.
- 1.10. Develop standards of practice for two more identified practice areas by December 2015.
- 1.11. Review progress and develop any additional objectives for 2016 by December 2015.

Goal 2 – Target services to achieve significant results for our clients and high-impact issues within the community.

Strategies:

- 2.a. *Identify and build relationships with community partners who share the goal of improving the lives of low-income and other vulnerable Tennesseans.*
- 2.b. *Gather information throughout our service area to determine the most pressing civil legal needs.*
- 2.c. *Identify communities and special populations who are underserved and determine the most significant barriers to accessing meaningful legal advocacy.*
- 2.d. *Analyze available relevant data and other information, including census figures and any legal needs studies for the state or program service areas.*
- 2.e. *Develop and implement organization-wide and local office targets for deliberate advocacy through case selection process.*
- 2.f. *Conduct an annual review of the extent to which LAS services are aligned with identified priorities.*

2014 Objectives:

- 2.1. Create a centralized tracking tool by March 31, 2014, to show staff engagement with local boards, organizations, and other community connections throughout our service area.
- 2.2. Inventory current community collaborations by September 30, 2014, and provide a report of successes, challenges, and recommendations for increasing collaborative efforts that enhance LAS impact.
- 2.3. Develop a system by June 30, 2014, to collect and analyze internal data, information collected from community partners and from other external sources in order to identify emerging issues, and high impact or systemic problems facing clients and communities.
- 2.4. Review whether organization is meeting identified needs and make recommendations for necessary adjustments to improve access to advocacy services by December 31, 2014.
- 2.5. Review progress and develop objectives for 2015 by December 31, 2014.

2015 Objectives:

- 2.6. Set targets for deliberate advocacy at local level and organization-wide by June 30, 2015, that enable LAS to implement high-impact advocacy while maintaining an appropriate and defined balance of direct and other services.
- 2.7. Conduct year-end audit to determine extent to which LAS services are in alignment with priorities.

Goal 3 – Expand and coordinate Pro Bono resources throughout the entire service area in order to better serve individuals in each county.

Strategies:

- 3.a. *Develop and phase in a plan to expand the Nashville Pro Bono Program beyond Davidson and Williamson Counties in order to provide regional support throughout the LAS service area.*
- 3.b. *Incorporate the use of technology to extend access to services using Skype, video conferencing, and other communication tools.*
- 3.c. *Increase extended services assistance offered to clients in areas of priority.*
- 3.d. *Provide training on poverty issues to pro bono attorneys.*
- 3.e. *Develop and implement a system to collect and report outcomes achieved through the Pro Bono Program.*
- 3.f. *Create Advisory Council to assist with the development and coordination of pro bono services.*

2014 Objectives:

- 3.1. Launch the new regional structure of the Nashville Pro Bono Program as a resource throughout LAS service area on January 31, 2014.
- 3.2. Establish the methodology to collect and report outcomes for Pro Bono services by January 31, 2014.
- 3.3. Collect and report baseline data for Pro Bono and extended services delivered by the eight offices (e.g., names of attorneys, total number of attorneys in area, and types of cases) for 2013 by January 31, 2014.
- 3.4. Collect data from the eight offices for pro bono services during 2014.
- 3.5. Establish a Pro Bono Advisory Council for LAS by March 31, 2014.
- 3.6. Have four meetings scheduled with staff representatives from eight offices and the Advisory Council by December 31, 2014.
- 3.7. Review progress and develop objectives for 2015 by December 31, 2014.

Goal 4 – Provide high quality community education services and updated communication materials that inform and empower the individuals we serve.

Strategies:

- 4.a. *Create and maintain a centralized system and protocols to routinely review community education needs and materials and update as needed.*
- 4.b. *Establish protocols governing outreach activities to reach particularly isolated or underserved communities and practices regarding effective and appropriate communication with specialized populations.*
- 4.c. *Develop and implement a system to collect and report outcomes achieved through community education and outreach services.*

- 4.d. *Increase the use of technology and website to distribute community education information.*

2014 Objectives:

- 4.1. Ensure that all community education materials are current and relevant to identified needs by December 31, 2014.
- 4.2. Create workgroup to review website, identify needs for improved access to helpful information, and recommend new features or modifications to website by June 30, 2014. (Note: Workgroup will work also on how website can be improved to attract donors and resources to LAS.)
- 4.3. Develop and communicate protocols by September 30, 2014, for reaching specialized populations and underserved communities.
- 4.4. Review progress and develop objectives for 2015 by December 31, 2014.

Goal 5 – Ensure prompt and accurate service to clients by evaluating and strengthening the intake screening process and protocols.

Strategies:

- 5.a. *Evaluate the effectiveness and efficiencies of the intake screening process.*
- 5.b. *Research best practices for intake/screening including the use of technology.*
- 5.c. *Develop and test protocols designed to increase desired features of the intake/screening process and address any language barriers.*
- 5.d. *Provide training to enhance staff competencies in communicating effectively with non-English speakers; persons with cognitive, mental health or physical disabilities; and individuals from different cultures.*
- 5.e. *Gather client input including feedback on the intake/screening process and use this data to strengthen customer service.*

2014 Objectives:

- 5.1. Collect information on intake screening process and protocols of each office, including the utilization of staff resources devoted to initial intake and screening by June 30, 2014.
- 5.2. Research utilization and effectiveness of web-based intake component as part of intake process by September 30, 2014.
- 5.3. Develop recommendations to strengthen the LAS intake/screening process by September 30, 2014, based on research of best practices and evaluation of current system.
- 5.4. Review progress and develop objectives for 2015 by December 31, 2014.

Strategic Priority II: DEVELOP A CULTURE OF LEARNING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Goal 6 – Review and update staffing structure, roles, and compensation plan as needed to accomplish organizational goals.

Strategies:

- 6.a. Research effective staffing structures and documented best practices.*
- 6.b. Engage consulting expertise as needed to review and recommend optimal structure.*
- 6.c. Incorporate a balance of centralized functions and local flexibility in design of structure.*
- 6.d. Review and update job descriptions to accurately reflect staff roles and responsibilities.*
- 6.e. Conduct periodic salary and benefits reviews and implement recommendations as financially feasible.*

2014 Objectives:

- 6.1. Complete a study of current organizational structure with recommendations for LAS structure and roles prepared by December 31, 2014.
- 6.2. Update the salary and benefits review for comparable organizations by December 31, 2014.
- 6.3. Review progress and develop objectives for 2015 by December 31, 2014.

Goal 7 – Ensure that all staff has development plans including professional development opportunities, performance reviews, and training relevant to their role with LAS and individual career goals.

Strategies:

ALL STAFF:

- 7.a. Provide orientation to all new employees about the organization and their specific job duties.*
- 7.b. Evaluate and strengthen the performance review instrument and process.*
- 7.c. Conduct performance reviews at least annually, including staff development goals as part of the review process.*
- 7.d. Track and provide feedback to supervisors on the timeliness and quality of reviews.*
- 7.e. Develop standards and guidelines for LAS staff positions including expectations for workloads and productivity where applicable.*
- 7.f. Monitor and provide feedback to staff about progress in achieving training and development goals.*
- 7.g. Develop and maintain a centralized source of LAS Learning Resources, including knowledgeable LAS personnel, published materials, websites and internet sources, etc., that is accessible to all staff.*

LEGAL STAFF:

- 7.h. Conduct performance reviews at least annually including professional development goals as part of the review process.*

- 7.i. *Develop standards and guidelines for legal caseload volume with expectations for case mix and productivity based on best practice.*
- 7.j. *Develop and implement a mentoring program to ensure attorneys have the opportunity to benefit from the legal experience and expertise of their colleagues.*

2014 Objectives:

- 7.1. Create a system to provide oversight of the evaluation process by January 31, 2014, with designated individuals to review the timeliness and quality of performance reviews.
- 7.2. All staff will receive performance reviews at least annually including staff development goals as part of the review process during 2014. Reviews will be reviewed quarterly.
- 7.3. Review progress and develop objectives for 2015 by December 31, 2014.

Goal 8 – Implement internal communication strategies to inform and connect staff throughout the organization.

Strategies:

- 8.a. *Create an internal communication plan with specific objectives and strategies.*
- 8.b. *Increase the number of staff opportunities to recognize and celebrate individual, team, and organizational achievements.*
- 8.c. *Gather feedback and input from staff annually about effectiveness of internal communication strategies.*
- 8.d. *Maintain a current and accessible shared calendar of legal proceedings and a Moot Court schedule.*
- 8.e. *Ensure effective grant management through a communication plan for staff that assigns responsibilities and provides for clear guidance for grant compliance.*

2014 Objectives:

- 8.1. Convene an internal workgroup in January 2014 to develop LAS internal communication strategies by June 30, 2014.
- 8.2. Review progress and develop objectives for 2015 by December 31, 2014.

Goal 9 – Maintain succession plans for key organizational positions.

Strategies:

- 9.a. *Evaluate best practices for succession planning in comparable organizations.*
- 9.b. *Identify the positions organization-wide that are critical to ongoing operations.*
- 9.c. *Develop written protocols for transitions – planned or unexpected – in key positions.*
- 9.d. *Encourage staff interested in assuming more senior roles to incorporate appropriate activities in their professional development plans to support these aspirations.*

2014 Objectives:

- 9.1. The Board of Directors will review and update the Executive Director Succession Plan by April 30, 2014.

- 9.2. Identify the positions organization-wide that are critical to ongoing operations by June 30, 2014.
- 9.3. Review progress and develop objectives for 2015 by December 31, 2014.

2015 Objectives:

- 9.4. Review and update the succession plan for key management positions.
- 9.5. As part of annual evaluations and performance reviews, other staff members identified to be trained to “back-up” key management positions.

Strategic Priority III: INCREASE COMMUNITY AWARENESS AND SUPPORT FOR THE LAS MISSION AND SERVICES

Goal 10 – Increase awareness of LAS and its mission.

Strategies

- 10.a. *Evaluate the effectiveness of current communication strategies and methods.*
- 10.b. *Publish and deliver an e-newsletter (hard copies as needed) that effectively makes the case for access to justice and tells the story of how LAS impacts the poverty community.*
- 10.c. *Identify LAS key audiences and implement communication strategies to best reach each group.*
- 10.d. *Review website about how it can be better used to inform the public and potential donors about LAS.*
- 10.e. *Recruit former clients who are interested in engaging with LAS as a spokesperson or as volunteers.*

2014 Objectives:

- 10.1. Evaluate our current strategies and provide recommendations to strengthen the LAS communication plan by April 30, 2014.
- 10.2. Workgroup focused on website will examine other legal services websites and make any recommendations to improve website by June 30, 2014.
- 10.3. Review progress and develop objectives for 2015 by December 31, 2014.

Goal 11 – Strengthen the roles of the Board of Directors and Community Advisory Council within the guidelines set out by the Legal Services Corporation.

Strategies

- 11.a. *Provide orientation and Board development for all Board members throughout the year.*
- 11.b. *Increase opportunities for Board, staff, and Community Advisory Council members to communicate and have interactions with one another.*
- 11.c. *Include staff presentations about LAS programs and operations in each Board meeting.*
- 11.d. *Actively engage each Board member in the work of at least one LAS committee or project throughout the year.*
- 11.e. *Promote 100% Board members’ giving to the annual campaign.*

2014 Objectives:

- 11.1. Hold a Board orientation session by June 30, 2014.
- 11.2. Extend a standing invitation to Community Advisory Council members to attend LAS Board meetings throughout 2014.
- 11.3. Incorporate staff presentations in each 2014 Board meeting and evaluate Board member response.
- 11.4. Provide quarterly updates to the Board on strategic plan progress.
- 11.5. Achieve 100% Board giving in 2014.
- 11.6. Review progress and develop objectives for 2015 by December 31, 2014.

Goal 12 – Broaden the base of public and private sector support for LAS and continue to increase contributions to the annual campaign.

Strategies:

- 12.a. *Implement a comprehensive plan including staff, Board, and clients to educate members of the Tennessee General Assembly about the mission and impact of Legal Aid Society.*
- 12.b. *Increase involvement of Board of Directors, Community Advisory Council and Pro Bono Council in Campaign for Equal Justice and contact with donors (current and potential).*
- 12.c. *Continue to increase the donor base in all communities served by LAS.*
- 12.d. *Provide additional opportunities for LAS staff to participate in fundraising activities.*

2014 Objectives:

- 12.1. Create and implement a survey to assess staff interest, relevant skills, and connections benefitting fundraising efforts by January 31, 2014.
- 12.2. Deliver information packets to all members of the General Assembly by April 30, 2014, and visit at least 30 legislators by December 31, 2014.
- 12.3. Recruit clients from each of the LAS offices by July 2014 who will commit to serve as spokespersons and will interact with legislators through personal visits and/or by sending testimonial letters, publicizing the mission and work of LAS through their personal experience.
- 12.4. Increase by 5% the total funds raised through the Campaign for Equal Justice in 2014.
- 12.5. Review progress and develop objectives for 2015 by December 31, 2014.

Goal 13 – Increase grant and foundation funding.

Strategies:

- 13.a. *Maximize funding from local United Ways and the Combined Federal Campaign throughout the 48-county service area.*
- 13.b. *Increase funding for special projects such as medical-legal partnerships, education-legal partnerships, extended care for foster youth, and veterans.*
- 13.c. *Identify sources and seek funding to support our response to new and emerging needs.*
- 13.d. *Engage and support staff in all offices to be more fully engaged in identifying potential new needs and sources of funding and to secure such funding.*

2014 Objectives:

- 13.1. Expand United Way partnerships and Combined Federal Campaign funding throughout the 48-county service area for 2014-2015 fiscal year.
- 13.2. Submit proposals to five new funding sources that address high-priority and/or emerging needs by December 31, 2014.
- 13.3. Review progress and develop objectives for 2015 by December 31, 2014.

Goal 14 – Establish new giving opportunities that increase the sustainability of our mission.

Strategies:

- 14.a. *Create and implement a plan and timeline to expand the work of the Planned Giving Committee.*
- 14.b. *Educate attorneys and judges about the appropriate circumstances to recommend LAS as a Cy Pres award recipient*
- 14.c. *Evaluate and determine if establishing a signature fundraising event is desirable as part of the organization's public awareness and fundraising efforts.*

2014 Objectives:

- 14.1. Secure five new gifts for the Beacons of Justice Society by December 31, 2014, through implementation of a plan to expand Planned Giving requests.
- 14.2. Complete visits to ten judges and ten law firms to educate them about Cy Pres awards by December 31, 2014.
- 14.3. Develop recommendations by October 31, 2014, about creating a signature fundraising event.
- 14.4. Review progress and develop objectives for 2015 by December 31, 2014.

Goal 15 – Increase the number of volunteers, interns, and fellows actively engaged in LAS operations and ensure they have a quality experience in their role and are able to make a meaningful contribution to the LAS mission.

Strategies:

- 15.a. *Gather baseline information about our current use of volunteers, interns, and fellows.*
- 15.b. *Conduct an internal review to determine areas of greatest need where volunteers, interns or fellows could fill meaningful roles.*
- 15.c. *Develop written protocols recruitment, support, supervision, retention, training, evaluation, and recognition of volunteers, interns, and fellows.*
- 15.d. *Establish clear roles to provide oversight for and support of LAS volunteer, intern, and fellow activities.*
- 15.e. *Periodically evaluate the effectiveness of our volunteer, intern, and fellow program and make improvements as needed.*
- 15.f. *Work with Equal Justice Works, Skadden Fellowship Foundation, and law schools to identify and recruit candidates for paid fellowships.*

2014 Objectives:

- 15.1. Establish a written protocol to ensure organization-wide consistency in recruitment, supervision, evaluation, and recognition of volunteers , interns, and fellows by June 30, 2014.
- 15.2. Implement a plan beginning February 28, 2014, to gather feedback via brief exit interviews with all departing volunteers, interns, and fellows about their experience with LAS.
- 15.3. Review progress and develop objectives for 2015 by December 31, 2014.

Strategic Priority IV: ENHANCE ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Goal 16 – Increase efficiencies through optimal use of technology.

Strategies

- 16.a. *Deliver training to all staff on the effective use of the database system, electronic filing with the Courts, and other technology tools.*
- 16.b. *Upgrade the telephone system.*
- 16.c. *Evaluate use of technology tools and recommend new approaches as needed.*
- 16.d. *Document and maintain updated protocols and processes for use of the database.*

2014 Objectives:

- 16.1. Secure funding for a organization-wide telephone system by June 30, 2014.
- 16.2. Establish an oversight group of “super users” for the database who will evaluate the system and make recommendations for protocol, training, and updates by March 31, 2014.
- 16.3. Review progress and develop objectives for 2015 by December 31, 2014.

Goal 17 – Ensure that LAS work environments are conducive to effective and efficient operations.

Strategies

- 17.a. *Develop and implement a plan to address facility needs including maintenance, furnishings, and security.*
- 17.b. *Review the location and service areas of offices to determine if the current locations promote or impede efficient and effective delivery and access to services.*
- 17.c. *Evaluate opportunities to support remote worksites with mobile computing options.*
- 17.d. *Establish and implement organization-wide procedures for most cost-efficient purchasing of supplies and materials.*
- 17.e. *Review and update the Administrative Manual annually.*

2014 Objectives:

- 17.1. Review, evaluate, and recommend optimal location of offices and service areas by December 31, 2014.

- 17.2. Office Managers will recommend policy and procedures for centralized purchasing by September 30, 2014, to achieve efficiencies and cost savings.
- 17.3. Review the Administrative Manual and identify policies and procedures that need to be updated by July 31, 2014.
- 17.4. Review progress and develop objectives for 2015 by December 31, 2014.

Goal 18 – Implement Go Green strategies organization-wide to reduce the use of resources and achieve energy savings.

Strategies:

- 18.a. *Implement a recycling program in each office that takes into account the recycling systems and resources available in local communities.*
- 18.b. *Research and implement recommended practices to achieve energy savings.*
- 18.c. *Reduce the use of paper in copying and printing by establishing standards and practices for electronic recordkeeping.*
- 18.d. *Shift purchasing of supplies to items that are reusable and/or made of recycled materials where it is cost-efficient and available.*

2014 Objectives:

- 18.1. Research best practices in “going green” and make recommendations by September 30, 2014, for implementation at LAS.
- 18.2. Review progress and develop objectives for 2015 by December 31, 2014.

Goal 19 – Develop a comprehensive continuity of operations plan.

Strategies:

- 19.a. *Develop a management supported, cost-effective, and documented plan that provides organization-wide capability for organized preparation and timely recovery from a major unforeseen disruption. At a minimum, the continuity of operations plan shall address the following:*
 - *General information regarding functions and services;*
 - *The location of critical documents;;*
 - *Computers and technology*
 - *Specific information for individual offices;*
 - *Business impact analysis;*
 - *Personnel and crisis communications*

2014 Objectives:

- 19.1. Develop a comprehensive continuity of operations plan by December 31, 2014.