

# Louisiana Commission for the Deaf Strategic Planning Report

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Background Summary	2
Process Summary	2
Focus Group Data & Survey Report Summary	2
Mission, Vision, Values Development	3
Strategic Plan Development	5
Implementation	6
Consultant Observations & Recommendations	7
Conclusion	8

## Background Summary

Innivee Strategies, Inc. provided consulting services for the Louisiana Commission for the Deaf (LCD) on developing its three-year strategic plan for 2022-2024, from December 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021. Services provided to LCD under this contract included:

1. Reviewing all materials prepared by LCD,
2. Facilitating the development of the new LCD mission, vision, and values statements,
3. Supporting the development of the LCD strategic priorities and plan,
4. Guiding the development of accountability mechanisms to ensure follow-through, and,
5. A final report (this document) that briefly summarizes Contractor's services and efforts, and provides recommendations.

Services were provided by Mr. Shane Feldman, Chief Executive Officer of Innivee Strategies, and Davin Searls, Innivee Strategies Consultant. The primary representatives of LCD who participated in this process, via an Ad Hoc committee, include: Dr. Ashley Argrave, Mr. Shane Bates, Ms. Jana Broussard, Ms. Mallory Brown, Mr. Ernest Garrett III, Mr. Jay Isch, Ms. Vanessa Magnon, Ms. Amy Shamburger, and Mr. Brad Wellons.

## Process Summary

LCD's strategic planning was a multi-phase process over the period of six months. This process began on December 1, 2020 with an orientation for the ad hoc committee, including an overview of the process, and a facilitated discussion which stakeholders to engage and how, the data collection process, and resources that LCD could provide to facilitate this process. This was followed by eight meetings with the LCD strategic planning ad hoc committee from January 1, 2021 to July 1, 2021, as well as regular weekly meetings with LCD leadership. During this time, two focus groups were held with a total of 13 participants, and a stakeholder survey was conducted, which received 36 responses.

## Focus Group Data & Survey Report Summary

Questions asked during the focus groups were:

- What do you see as the community's major strengths and assets?
- What do you see as the community's major issues or challenges?
- What can be changed or improved with current LCD programs and services?

- What key priorities should LCD include in its 3 year strategic plan?

Questions asked in the survey included:

- How satisfied are you currently with the work, programs, and services provided by LCD?
- How likely are you to recommend each of LCD’s programs or services?
- How would you describe LCD’s programs/services to other people?
- What needs/services are you seeing in the community or your personal/professional life that LCD should establish as key priorities in its strategic plan for the next three years?
- If funding was not an issue, what would you recommend LCD do that is new or different within the next three years?
- What do you see as the overall key strengths of LCD?

Responses from the focus groups and survey were analyzed and consolidated into a report which was delivered to the ad hoc committee on May 21, 2021. This report is attached as Addendum A. The ad hoc committee used this report to develop LCD’s 2022-2024 strategic priorities, listed below.

## Mission, Vision, Values Development

As a result of the facilitated workshops, ad hoc committee members developed the following, all of which were approved by LCD commissioners on July 9, 2021:

Mission (Old)	Mission (New)
<p>The Louisiana Commission for the Deaf (LCD) provides people who are D/deaf, DeafBlind, hard of hearing, and those with speech disorders with programs and services to ensure full communication access to the world around them. Staff work closely with members of the D/deaf and DeafBlind communities to continuously improve the programs and meet their needs. LCD's goals are to allow everyone to communicate fully - regardless of their hearing, vision or speech-related abilities, improve access to needed communication supports, and to enable all people to participate in society and reach their full potential.</p>	<p>To engage, empower and enrich the lives and opportunities of Louisiana Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing people.</p> <p>ENGAGE: We are committed to informing the community in an inclusive manner that actively draws people. We will be proactive in reaching people that we have not connected with before.</p> <p>EMPOWER: We aspire for Deaf, DeafBlind, hard of hearing people to confidently say that they have the information and tools they need to succeed and advocate for themselves.</p>

	<p>We define success as Deaf people being independent.</p> <p>ENRICH: The deaf community advances from not just surviving or living, but thriving! In attaining this mission the Deaf person has maximized their life potential. They lead fulfilled lives through accessible information and resources to support their individual goals.</p>
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Mission statements are integral to the core identity of an organization, communicating its purpose, informing its strategy, and driving the development of measurable goals and objectives, through which the organization can ascertain the success of said strategy. The mission statement describes what the organization is doing today and how it is building toward the organization’s vision.

Prior to engaging Innivee Strategies, LCD did not have a vision statement. A vision statement, which articulates what an organization aspires to be, is a critical tool in aligning an organization’s work and creating shared purpose among staff, leadership, and stakeholders. The commission’s new vision statement is as follows:

**New Vision:** A Louisiana that embraces the inclusion of a diverse deaf community through full access to information, communication, and opportunities.

Similarly, LCD did not have established values statements prior to its work with Innivee Strategies. Organizational values are beliefs and principles that guide the behavior of all individuals involved in the organization. Effective organizations use their values to support decision-making at all levels, guide workplace behaviors and interpersonal interactions, recruit and retain individuals, attract stakeholders and supporters, and to conduct performance evaluations, rewards, and recognition. LCD’s approved values statements are as follows:

**New Values:**

- **ADVOCACY:** We wholeheartedly believe that your best advocate is you. Our work is centered in ensuring stakeholders become independent and confident self-advocates by providing information, education, and encouragement along the way.
- **ACCOUNTABILITY:** We aim to eliminate long-standing misconceptions and barriers in systems and practices by taking the time to educate, collaborate with, and hold agencies, organizations, institutions and

ourselves accountable when d/Deaf, DeafBlind, or hard of hearing needs are not met.

- **EQUALITY:** The community we serve is incredibly diverse. We strive to serve the full spectrum of the community by addressing inequity and challenging biases where they exist.
- **ACCESSIBILITY:** True accessibility is not an afterthought, but must be built-in from the beginning. This starts with defining what it means to be accessible, educating others, modeling best practices, and empowering those we serve.
- **SUSTAINABILITY:** We are resolute in making Louisiana nationally known as a place where d/Deaf, DeafBlind and hard of hearing community members thrive. We achieve this by partnering with state agencies, service providers, consultants, employers, community members, and other stakeholders.

LCD members have expressed that many constituents are unclear as to what LCD does, what it stands for, and how they, individually, can benefit. LCD members have also indicated that LCD is still working to establish its reputation as a trusted and effective body. The above values, applied regularly and communicated clearly, will significantly advance LCD's objectives when it comes to stakeholder relationships. These values will also help guide commissioners in making decisions and in recruiting and retaining future commissioners and staff. It is critical to regularly review LCD's mission, vision, and values and ensure that all parties understand them, as well as revisit them as the organization scales and grows.

## **Strategic Plan Development**

The final phase of developing priorities, goals, and partial implementation took place between May 21, 2021 and July 1, 2021. The ad hoc committee developed five strategic priorities, all of which were approved by the commission on July 9, 2021. Recognizing that DeafBlind services are integral to LCD's work and that significant foundational work toward meeting DeafBlind needs was conducted over the past few years and will be carried out via an upcoming Request for Proposals released by LCD, the decision was made to add a sixth priority that demonstrate the continuation of this work. These six priorities are as follows:

### **ENHANCE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

LCD will enhance its engagement with Louisiana citizens on relevant issues through robust, accessible communication platforms and strategies.

#### MODERNIZE THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACCESS PROGRAM

LCD will modernize its Telecommunications Access Program to keep pace with the rapid advancement of assistive technology and consumers' communication needs.

#### ADDRESS GAPS IN MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

LCD will collaborate with agencies and organizations to advocate for the increased number of signing and culturally competent mental health professionals and systems that are designed to be inclusive of Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing people.

#### ADDRESS RACIAL DISPARITIES IN LCD SERVICES

LCD will increase engagement and representation of Deaf people of color about decision making related to state and LCD services provided to the community through audits, assessments, and strategic initiatives to mitigate the disparity in the provision of services and ensure equitable distribution among each racial demographic.

#### ESTABLISH INTERPRETING STANDARDS AND SYSTEMS

LCD will establish new systems and standards for American Sign Language (ASL) interpreting which define, describe, and incentivize new expectations for and oversight of the quality of ASL interpreters, including those in educational settings.

#### *FOOTNOTE: SERVICES FOR DEAFBLIND LOUISIANANS*

LCD will continue its multi-year overhaul of its DeafBlind programs to better meet the needs of the DeafBlind community.

Strategic prioritization compels an organization to make the difficult decision of focusing on a few initiatives and doing them well, rather than risk doing many initiatives poorly. These priorities dictate how the organization allocates its resources and builds toward its future goals.

## **Implementation**

Innivee Strategies provided a workshop on strategic implementation on July 9, 2021 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, after the above mission, vision, values, and strategic priorities were approved. During this workshop, participants brainstormed potential implementation activities and conducted an informal vote as to which to proceed with. It was agreed that the LCD Executive Committee would continue the process of

determining implementation activities and appointing commissioners to carry them out in partnership with LCD staff. Innivee Strategies provided LCD staff with a template implementation plan via email on July 16, 2021. This implementation plan includes action items and tasks, individuals accountable for implementing assigned action items, resources needed, and expected completion dates.

## **Consultant Observations & Recommendations**

LCD participants responded positively to the overall strategic planning process. At the strategic implementation workshop on July 9, 2021, participants mentioned feeling energized, clarity of purpose, and appreciation for having a “thought partner” in both fellow LCD representatives and Innivee Strategies. Moving forward, LCD, its leadership, and staff, are advised to:

- Communicate LCD’s new mission, vision, values, and strategic priorities to all members and stakeholders in English and ASL, ensuring that internal and external messaging are consistent and accurately reflect LCD;
- Regularly reinforce LCD’s mission, vision, values, and strategic priorities by reviewing them or reciting them at the beginning of commissioner meetings, making them visible in LCD’s place of work, encouraging all staff and commission members to memorize them, communicating them in newsletters and other staff, commissioner, and stakeholder touchpoints, and so on;
- Review policies and procedures with the intention of aligning them with LCD’s mission, vision, values, and strategic priorities. For instance, structuring staff performance reviews around the values and strategic priorities, incorporating them into future surveys of stakeholders and staff to gauge their familiarity with these statements, integrating them into position descriptions, recruitment, candidate interview processes, onboarding/orientation, and more;
- Model values from the top, leading by example - especially in difficult situations or in conflict situations;
- Reward and recognize values-centric behaviors, such as directly acknowledging those who live up to LCD’s values or by encouraging staff and commissioners to nominate peers who uphold LCD’s values;
- Address the performance of individuals, both staff and on the commission, who consistently engage in behavior that are contrary to LCD’s values. This impacts their personal performance as well as the performance of the commission as a whole; and,
- Make current and future decisions based on the mission, vision, values, and strategic priorities and relevant data from stakeholders.

LCD recently contracted with Innivee Strategies to provide governance training for LCD commissioners. This process is integral to the internal and external understanding of commissioner roles, and to building the foundation for a successful commission for years to come.

LCD has invested a significant amount of resources in this process. It is critical that LCD create and implement accountability measures that will center the strategic plan as part of LCD's day-to-day work. LCD is advised to commit to a future date to conduct a strategic plan review process, within 6 months if not sooner. At this time, LCD should also begin developing implementation plans for Year 2 of its strategic plan. LCD is strongly encouraged to communicate its progress throughout the duration of the strategic plan, as well as produce a final report upon close of the 2022-2024 strategic plan that details what strategic goals were or were not achieved, and why.

## **Conclusion**

We thank Mr. Ernest Garrett III and Ms. Jana Broussard for contracting with Innivee Strategies, Inc. and for the significant time and resources they have devoted to this process. We firmly believe that the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind community of Louisiana will benefit greatly from LCD's increased clarity of purpose and direction, and eagerly look forward to updates from LCD over the months and years to come.