

DEAF, Inc.

Strategic Plan 2023-2025

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Introduction

Founded in 1977, DEAF, Inc. is the only Massachusetts community-based, multi-service nonprofit run by and for Deaf (Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing, and Late-Deafened) adults. Since its inception 45 years ago, DEAF, Inc. has consistently worked alongside diverse Deaf community members to help them acquire the knowledge, resources, and skills for living more fulfilling and independent lives.

DEAF, Inc.'s last strategic plan covered the period 2014-2018. The DEAF, Inc. Board released a strategic plan outcome report in 2019, in which the committee recommended that further strategic planning be implemented with the organization's next Executive Director. Following an extensive executive search, Darian Gambrell became DEAF, Inc.'s new Executive Director in September 2021. This strategic plan has been developed in collaboration with the new Executive Director and her vision, and it also reflects the changes to DEAF, Inc.'s goals and organizational structure that have taken place during this executive transition period.

The last 2014-2018 strategic plan succeeded in guiding DEAF, Inc. toward several strategic goals organized around five areas of focus: Quality of Services, Role in Community, Technology Capability, Partnering, and Financial Stability. This plan recommended that future strategic plans implement a shorter timeframe of three years (rather than five) and that DEAF, Inc. seek greater efficiency in the strategic planning process. Another past recommendation was to host focus groups and local town hall events in collaboration with other state and nonprofit partner organizations, as a way to identify community needs and service gaps.

The 2023-2025 strategic plan responds to these recommendations. This strategic plan has been developed after a series of five community forums held across local site offices from late July through early September 2022. The forums included: an internal staff community forum in July 2022, a DeafBlind community forum in August 2022, and local Deaf community forums at DEAF, Inc.'s three Massachusetts office sites (in New Bedford, Lawrence, and Boston) in August and September 2022. These five forums helped gather community feedback that shaped the strategic plan and DEAF, Inc.'s goals and objectives for the next three years. The forums also helped to implement one of DEAF, Inc.'s core values: drawing from community input to shape the organization's concrete priorities.

Like all other nonprofit agencies, DEAF, Inc. is currently emerging from a prolonged period of physical isolation, community displacement, and remote work during the coronavirus pandemic. During the community forums, a range of Deaf and DeafBlind community members expressed desires for more in-person social opportunities. Concerns frequently arose, particularly among the DeafBlind community, about access to mental health resources and community-based activities to combat the effects of isolation. One of DEAF, Inc.'s priorities will be maintaining community involvement whenever possible, while also emphasizing the agency's primary mission of helping build self-advocacy skills and serving as a bridge for consumers to access various resources.

During these community forums, it became clear that DEAF, Inc. has a strong and lasting reputation for our mission of empowering consumers to reach their goals. As DEAF, Inc. continues to tailor its programs to meet current needs, maintaining our community relationships and community trust will be paramount. Many productive ideas arose from our community-based dialogue, including possibilities for further advocacy and partnerships with outside agencies. While DEAF, Inc. does not coordinate or provide certain services directly (for instance, ASL interpreting services or DeafBlind Orientation and Mobility training), there is ample opportunity to strengthen existing partnerships with the agencies who do specialize in these services. DEAF, Inc. also seeks to expand certain Independent Living and adult education services that would serve several pressing needs of the Massachusetts Deaf community. These include driver's education services, immigration-related services, and youth transition programs.

Several prominent themes arose from the strategic planning and community survey process. This 2023-2025 strategic plan begins by presenting DEAF, Inc.'s operating mission and vision. Then it presents a series of strategic objectives for strengthening DEAF, Inc.'s commitment to serving and empowering the Massachusetts Deaf (DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing, Late-Deafened) community, spread across four larger strategic goals.

Mission, Vision, and Values



Mission: DEAF, Inc. seeks to enable self-determination and the rights of Deaf people to identify their own goals and follow through on achieving them, taking increasingly independent charge of their lives.



Vision: DEAF, Inc. envisions a more equitable and accessible world, in which Deaf people feel empowered to take direction of their lives and make rich contributions to the local and global communities around them.



Values: DEAF, Inc.'s work is guided by these five core values:

- **Community-driven:** Supporting and empowering the rights of Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing, and Late-Deafened people to decide and achieve their goals. Community input informs DEAF, Inc.'s programs and services. Staff members participate, lead, and are empowered within the organization.
- **Access:** Being free of barriers to communication for Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing, and Late-Deafened people. DEAF, Inc. is committed to providing full access to our programs, services, and events. We support and advocate for our community's access to services and opportunities in the greater area.
- **Self-determination:** Supporting people in deciding their personal and professional goals. We stand behind people's individual decision-making and acknowledge their right to determine what is and is not appropriate for themselves.
- **Empowerment:** Creating an environment where people increasingly take charge of their lives and where staff members are active participants in the leadership of the organization.
- **Mutual respect:** Respecting diversity in the Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing, and Late-Deafened community. Respect is essential for unity, self-determination, accessibility, fairness, and equality.

Goals and Strategic Objectives

Guided by our internal assessments and community forums, DEAF, Inc.'s strategic goals for 2022-2025 are as follows:

1. Improve marketing, visibility, and community partnerships
2. Increase funding sources and overall revenue
3. Expand services to empower more diverse communities
4. Advance ASL education opportunities

GOAL 1: Improve marketing, visibility, and community partnerships

Objective 1: Strengthen marketing and communication of DEAF, Inc.'s mission

- Emphasize DEAF, Inc.'s mission more strongly among staff and within the Deaf and Hearing communities: what does DEAF, Inc. do and not do?
- Communicate DEAF, Inc.'s role as a "bridge" to other services, consumer goals, and self-determination skills and access and awareness
- Enable staff to communicate the mission to consumers while being culturally aware and sensitive

Objective 2: Maintain DEAF, Inc.'s visibility in the community and on social media

- Continue reaching out to the community at large to identify those who could benefit from services via social media activities, marketing, and events
- Communicate awareness of workshops and events to the diverse communities in Massachusetts through vlogs, emails, online posts, partner agencies using materials accessible to diverse linguistic and cultural populations

Objective 3: Network with local Massachusetts-based hearing agencies and community partners

- Increase awareness of DEAF, Inc.'s mission among the variety of community-based service providers and community groups to pursue stronger, meaningful and more effective collaborations
- Strengthen relationships with external provider agencies: MCB, MCDHH, etc.

GOAL 2: Increase funding sources

Objective 1: Seek more diversity in grants, donations, and sources of funding

- Communicate DEAF, Inc.'s mission (and its impact and results for accessibility/linguistic and social justice/underserved minority communities) more clearly to a wider range of external funders
- Create sustainable initiatives that promote Deaf quality of life and self-empowerment skills through ongoing funding
- Investigate and initiate fee for services

GOAL 3: Expand services to empower more diverse communities

Objective 1: Introduce more immigration services

- Support immigrants with learning and accessing supports and opportunities available to them.
- Assist consumers with navigating pathways to citizenship, including cultural integration/awareness, general processes, test preparation, accessing qualified legal supports, and other immigration-related non-legal processes
- Support new Americans to access rights and privileges of citizenship.

Objective 2: Increase pre-employment-related services and training

- Assist consumers with soft-skills, pre-employment skills to support transition to work

- Support consumers with preparing for job search, employment processes, readiness training, re-employment or advancing current employment, etc.
- Provide supports for obtaining and advancing skills common in the workplace

Objective 3: Establish more youth/transition services

- Guide students' transition beyond high school with college prep, life skills, employment and vocational services, etc.

Objective 4: Expand DeafBlind program

- Expand beyond DBCAN by providing more DeafBlind-centered living skills workshops and train staff to interact more effectively with the DeafBlind community
- Strengthen relationships with outside Deaf and Blind service agencies and provide education and awareness to the community about services that are needed/provided



GOAL 4: Advance ASL education opportunities

Objective 1: Provide ASL classes to Hard of Hearing and late deafened consumers and classes designed for consumers with language deprivation

- Empower those who are learning ASL or who have language deprivation to be more comfortable interacting using ASL

Objective 2: Maintain robust community enrollment for existing ASL classes

- Provide basic ASL education to a wider demographic, seek out more community partners and increase pool of local ASL teachers
- Restructure ASL education program internally as needed