

# AppalReD Legal Aid Strategic Plan 2025-2030



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***Serving 37 Eastern and South Central Kentucky Counties - Bell, Clay, Harlan, Knox, Laurel, Whitley, Breathitt, Lee, Leslie, Letcher, Owsley, Perry, Wolfe, Pike, Floyd, Johnson, Knott, Lawrence, Magoffin, Martin, Clark, Estill, Garrard, Jackson, Madison, Powell, Adair, Casey, Clinton, Cumberland, Lincoln, McCreary, Monroe, Pulaski, Rockcastle, Russell, and Wayne.***



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AppalReD Legal Aid is the designated Legal Services Corporation grantee and funding recipient for the South Central and Eastern Kentucky Appalachian Region. More information about the Legal Services Corporation may be found at [www.lsc.gov](http://www.lsc.gov).



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## **Executive Summary**

Clients and community are the cornerstone of AppalReD Legal Aid. AppalReD Legal Aid's Staff and Board are committed to the communities in which they live and work. Many AppalReD team members were born and raised in South Central and Eastern Kentucky. All team members count it as an honor to work with community members and partners who inspire them daily. The work of AppalReD is more than a plan or a job, it is a mission rooted in service and community.

This Strategic Plan sets out AppalReD Legal Aid's vision for the next five years. It is a bold vision that builds on the work of the past and draws upon AppalReD's strong roots in the community. AppalReD is a historic and vibrant organization that finds its focus in service to the community. AppalReD's services are targeted to meet the needs of people and families who face serious challenges and barriers as the result of poverty.

The goals set out in this plan guide all aspects of AppalReD's work, including direct client services; working with volunteers to expand capacity to serve the community; updating AppalReD offices to enhance professional work environments for staff and guests; and expanding financial resources to increase services. All the goals focus on enhancing and expanding civil legal services in the region.

The overarching goal of this plan is to provide AppalReD Legal Aid with a road map to fight injustice, provide better opportunities for economic stability, and ensure that all have access to justice regardless of income. Access to justice for all ensures a fair system for everyone. These driving forces propel AppalReD to continue and grow the work that has defined it for the last 55 years.



## **Adoption and Implementation**

The Board, Staff, and Strategic Planning Committee adopt this Strategic Plan which will serve as a guidepost and roadmap for the years 2025-2030. The plan incorporates the 2024 AppalReD Regional Needs Assessment, the 2025 Pro Bono Assessment, and the work of the Strategic Planning Committee which took place during 2024 and 2025.

This plan sets a course for AppalReD that recognizes the organization's commitment to service of its clients and communities in Eastern and South Central Kentucky. The full staff of AppalReD Legal Aid participated in this project with leadership from the AppalReD Strategic Planning Committee and the AppalReD Board of Directors.

### **AppalReD Legal Aid Strategic Planning Committee**

Carolyn Layne, Board Chair

Joseph Lane, Member, Board of Directors, Attorney, Pikeville

Angeleigh Dorsey, Executive Director

Evan Smith, Advocacy Director

LaDonna Lemaster, Chief Fiscal Officer

Paul Woosley, IT Director

Trish Hatler, Grants Manager

Michelle Fisher, Senior Staff Attorney, Somerset

Sarah King, Secretary, Hazard

Whitney Bailey, Project Director, Disaster Response, Prestonsburg

Charnel Burton, Directing Attorney, Pro Bono

Katie Mullins, Directing Attorney, Central Intake

Katie Young, Paralegal, Richmond

Melissa Tidwell, Directing Attorney, Barbourville

Strategic Planning Consultant, Neva-Marie Polley Scott



## **AppalReD Legal Aid Board of Directors**

Board Chair – Carolyn Layne, Client Representative, Allen, KY

Board Vice Chair – Travis Rossman, Attorney, Barbourville, KY

Jessica Back, Client Representative, Jackson, KY

Edna Bland, Client Representative, Barbourville, KY

Emily Campbell, Attorney, Richmond, KY

Melissa Henke, Professor, Attorney, University of Kentucky J. David Rosenberg College of Law

Thomas Hollon, Attorney, Beattyville, KY

Donald Jones, Attorney, Paintsville, KY

Joseph Lane, Attorney, Prestonsburg, KY

Marilyn Morgan, Client Representative, Stinnett, KY

Laura Oliver, Client Representative, Richmond, KY

Damon Preston, Attorney, Kentucky Public Advocate

Patricia Thomas, Attorney, Burkesville, KY

Justice Daniel J. Venters, Attorney, Somerset, KY

Jacquie Slone, CPA, Financial Oversight Committee Advisory Member

Board Counsel – J. Warren Keller, Attorney, Taylor, Keller & Oswald, PLLC



## Mission and Values

### Mission

*To promote equal access to justice, to encourage self-sufficiency, to empower and to improve the lives of low income and other vulnerable people and families in Eastern and South Central Kentucky by providing them high quality legal assistance.*

### Values

**Empathy** – We strive to understand our clients’ perspectives.

**Service** – We strengthen our communities by providing high quality legal services.

**Justice** – We fight to give everyone a fair chance at a just outcome.

**Accessibility** – We think creatively to continually improve access to legal service. We are available and responsive to clients.

**Dignity** – We see the value in each person and treat everyone with respect.

**Excellence** – We employ talented and dedicated legal professionals with decades of experience.

**Fairness** – We provide fair and equal treatment to all clients.

**Integrity** – We treat everyone with honesty and hold ourselves to the highest ethical standards.



## **Organization Landscape**

AppalReD Legal Aid serves as the primary legal service provider for people who are unable to hire an attorney due to limited financial resources in its 37-county Eastern and South Central Kentucky region. AppalReD provides free civil legal services in a variety of matters including family law, consumer protection, housing, expungement, public benefits, wills, powers of attorney, living wills, tax problems, and other issues that may affect their clients' safety, income, housing, or health. All of AppalReD's work is centered upon furthering its mission and serving people in need.

AppalReD's Board of Directors sets priorities which govern the types of work that AppalReD conducts and reviews these priorities annually. The current priorities are:

### **Maintaining Economic Stability**

### **Safety, Stability, and Health**

### **Preserving the Home**

### **Populations with Special Vulnerabilities**

AppalReD implements these priorities through the provision of services which include traditional legal representation as well as limited-scope representation, community outreach, and legal education.

AppalReD is funded through resources from grants, foundations, and private donors. AppalReD receives its largest grant from the Legal Services Corporation. The organization is externally audited annually and is overseen by a Board of Directors which includes members with financial and legal expertise alongside members of the communities it serves. The organization provides regular programmatic and financial reports to its funders throughout the fiscal year. AppalReD's staff and leadership have decades of experience in the provision of civil legal services and the management of non-profit resources. Last year, AppalReD helped over 10,000 people.

AppalReD conducts its work through six regional offices: Somerset (Adair, Casey, Clinton, Cumberland, Lincoln, McCreary, Monroe, Pulaski, Rockcastle, Russell, and Wayne); Richmond (Clark, Estill, Garrard, Jackson, Madison, and Powell); Barbourville (Bell, Clay,





Harlan, Knox, Laurel, and Whitley); Hazard (Breathitt, Lee, Leslie, Letcher, Owsley, Perry, Wolfe); Prestonsburg (Floyd, Johnson, Knott, Lawrence, Magoffin, Martin, Pike); and Pikeville (Pike). The main administrative office is located in Prestonsburg. Several staff members, including members of Central Intake Unit, work remotely. AppalReD utilizes a centralized intake system which provides regular hours for clients to call in to request services as well as apply for services via an online application. Clients may also apply for services by visiting a local office, attending an outreach event sponsored by AppalReD, and via referral from a community partner. AppalReD uses a “no wrong door” approach to connecting with clients to access services. Once connected, clients are directed to the Central Intake Unit for screening, or they are screened at their point of entry utilizing uniform eligibility criteria.

AppalReD is one of the four LSC-funded legal aid programs that serve Kentucky’s 120 Counties (AppalReD Legal Aid, Kentucky Legal Aid, Legal Aid of the Bluegrass, Legal Aid Society).<sup>1</sup> AppalReD collaborates with the other legal aids programs on joint grant work, special pro bono initiatives, expungement clinics, and task forces that allow advocates to share expertise and challenges in particular areas of work. The four legal aid programs have Advocacy Directors who collaborate to identify systemic issues as well as address day-to-day legal problems encountered by people who the organizations serve.

AppalReD recently completed a Comprehensive Needs Assessment<sup>2</sup> to identify the most pressing needs of the client communities it serves. The Needs Assessment fuels the direction of this Strategic Plan. The Comprehensive Needs Assessment drew upon community surveys, focus groups, Census data, and input from stakeholders in the community.

Key findings and takeaways are included in this report. The full report is available online through AppalReD’s website, [www.ardfky.org](http://www.ardfky.org).

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on Kentucky’s four full service legal aid programs, visit [www.kyjustice.org](http://www.kyjustice.org).

<sup>2</sup> AppalReD’s 2024 Comprehensive Needs Assessment was conducted by threadpartners (<https://threadpartners.com>). Access the full report here: <https://www.ardfky.org/node/552/legal-needs-assessment-results-are-here>.



## **2024 Comprehensive Needs Assessment Findings**

1. Economic Insecurity
  - Loss of primary industry
  - The working poor
  - Lack of transportation
2. Housing Inaccessibility
  - Flood impact
  - Heirs property
  - Renters challenges
  - The unhoused
3. Family Instability
  - Drug crisis
  - Domestic violence
  - Youth resources, mentoring, and children's rights

**The report also noted “key takeaways” that included barriers faced by AppalReD’s client communities.**

- Housing Crisis
- Family Unit Deterioration
- Employment and Infrastructure Decline
- Drug Crisis
- Legal Education Needs
- Awareness of Free Legal Aid
- Disparities Among Minorities
- Distrust in the Legal System



## **Regional Needs Assessment April 2024**

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LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION



## Process and Methodology

Following the completion of the needs assessment process,<sup>3</sup> AppalReD convened a Board and Staff Committee to begin the process of strategic planning. Polley Scott Consulting, LLC, served as the facilitator and consultant during the process. Simultaneously, AppalReD retained a consultant to engage in a review and assessment of its pro bono program. Both the Needs Assessment and the Pro Bono Assessment inform this strategic plan.

The Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) utilized a wealth of resources as it engaged in thoughtful analysis of the needs of the community, the resources of the organization, and the vision for the future. The Committee relied upon the American Bar Association Standards for the Provision of Civil Legal Aid<sup>4</sup> and the Legal Services Corporation's Performance Criteria<sup>5</sup> as guideposts for evidence-based best practices in the legal aid community. The Committee also utilized local and statewide information such as the Kentucky Bar Association's Kentucky Rural Practice Survey<sup>6</sup>, information on domestic violence services in Kentucky<sup>7</sup>, poverty population data, and information based upon coordination with the other three Kentucky legal services programs, including other statewide needs assessments and strategic plans. AppalReD will share this strategic plan with the other three full-service civil legal aid programs (Kentucky Legal Aid, Legal Aid of the Bluegrass, and Legal Aid Society) and other community partners as it continues its collaborative efforts in service to Kentuckians in need.

The SPC conducted seven meetings between September 2024 and January 2025. Each meeting held a particular focus in addition to serving as an opportunity to share updates, coordinate

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<sup>3</sup> Legal Services Corporation Performance Criteria recommends that legal aid organizations regularly conduct a comprehensive needs assessment that assists the organization in identifying its client communities' most important and pressing legal needs. For more information, see [www.lsc.gov](http://www.lsc.gov) and <https://www.lsc.gov/i-am-grantee/model-practices-innovations/plan-strategically/developing-strategic-plan>.

<sup>4</sup> See the following link for more information on the Standards: [https://www.americanbar.org/groups/legal\\_aid\\_indigent\\_defense/resource\\_center\\_for\\_access\\_to\\_justice/standards-and-policy/updated-standards-for-the-provision-of-civil-legal-aid/](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/legal_aid_indigent_defense/resource_center_for_access_to_justice/standards-and-policy/updated-standards-for-the-provision-of-civil-legal-aid/).

<sup>5</sup> See the following link for more information on the LSC Performance Criteria: <https://www.lsc.gov/our-impact/publications/other-publications-and-reports/lsc-performance-criteria>.

<sup>6</sup> For more information, see "Other Information" link at <https://www.kybar.org/page/LawyerResources>.

<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.zerov.org/> for information about services available for survivors of violence in Kentucky and the programs that work with survivors locally across the state.



activities, and develop visionary ideas. In addition to regular meetings, the SPC hosted a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Workshop that was open to all staff members over a period of two days in October with six individual sessions. The SWOT workshop included sessions on Advocacy; Pro Bono; Organizational Structure; Human Resources, Administration and Business Systems; Intake and Client Access; and Finance and Property Matters. Numerous staff members participated in the SWOT workshop, providing keen insights into each of the session topics.

The staff participated in strategic planning throughout the process and were updated as matters progressed. Staff focus groups were held for the following groups: Prestonsburg, Hazard, Somerset, Central Intake Unit, Barbourville, Richmond, and General (open to all). Two staff surveys were conducted and the option for individual meetings with the facilitator was offered and accepted as well. The Board of Directors was represented on the Strategic Planning Committee and participated in the planning process. The varied mechanisms for feedback provided depth to the information gathering process and well as the development of creative ideas.

The process yielded five strategic goals. The goals address both the internal and external work of the organization, providing an opportunity to update policies and procedures, craft a strategy to expand AppalReD's client services, and increase funding to support these efforts.



## Strategic Goals

**Goal One:** Provide client services that are responsive to the most critical and pressing civil legal needs of AppalReD's client community.

**Goal Two:** Revitalize and transform AppalReD's pro bono program, utilizing the recommendations of the recent Pro Bono Assessment.

**Goal Three:** Promote access to client services through expansion and updates to AppalReD offices.

**Goal Four:** Evaluate and update infrastructure to promote a work environment that is efficient, effective, and advances the organization's mission.

**Goal Five:** Revise funding and development practices and procedures to expand funding opportunities, increase collaboration, and maximize resources to support services to the community.



## **Strategic Goals, Objectives, and Strategies**

### **Goal One: Provide client services that are responsive to the most critical and pressing civil legal needs of AppalReD's client community.**

**Objective 1.1: Prioritize AppalReD's client services in light of the recent Comprehensive Needs Assessment with a focus upon economic security, housing, and family law matters.**

**Strategy A.1.1:** Review and update family law services case acceptance policies, taking the steps outlined in Objective 1.2.

**Strategy B.1.1:** Review and update priorities to include updated information regarding substance use disorder, heirs property, and disaster services.

**Strategy C.1.1:** Explore providing additional support and assistance to groups engaging in economic development work, understanding that AppalReD has a historic connection to this work but presently does not engage in this work. Develop connections and partnerships with members of the private bar in this area, with the goal of developing internal expertise, engaging in pro bono partnerships, and collaborating to provide community education.

**Strategy D.1.1:** Create updated written materials for public distribution which outline services provided by AppalReD and how to access those services.

**Strategy E.1.1:** Train staff on the updated case acceptance policies, uniform implementation of those policies, and uniform intake processes. Track and review cases accepted on an ongoing basis, understanding that it will take time for the balance in case types to reach adjusted levels.

**Objective 1.2: Change the manner in which family law services are provided and balance the provision of family law services in relation to other priority legal matters through legal education, self-help resources, and direct representation, with a focus on direct representation in cases involving domestic violence or a specific vulnerability.**



**Strategy A.1.2:** Conduct an evaluation of current and recent caseloads and identify changes that may be made in the case acceptance and assignment process to facilitate a better balance in family law cases in comparison to the overall mixture of cases accepted.

**Strategy B.1.2:** Review current self-help offerings (e.g., clinics, educational materials, forms) and develop a comprehensive annual self-help plan for the organization that provides opportunities for clients to receive self-help advice, forms, and support necessary to use self-help methods to address their family law needs.

**Strategy C.1.2:** Collaborate with other legal services programs in Kentucky to reduce duplication in self-help form creation work, increase uniformity in self-help forms, provide forms online, and increase the acceptance of family law self-help forms in the court system at a statewide level.

**Strategy D.1.2.:** Update the AppalReD website to include additional family self-help resources. This may include, but is not limited to, links to self-help forms and legal education on the statewide legal aid website [www.kyjustice.org](http://www.kyjustice.org), additional self-help forms, and information on upcoming education and clinic sessions.

**Strategy E.1.2.:** Coordinate and collaborate with regional domestic violence and sexual assault community service providers to communicate changes in services, ensure continued direct connections to AppalReD for survivors of violence, and to receive feedback from community partners on an ongoing basis.

**Strategy F.1.2:** Designate staff to engage in outreach and education in the community, specifically in the areas of domestic violence and family law, furthering AppalReD's work and focusing on serving survivors in the community.

**Objective 1.3: Engage in transformative, impactful, and strategic advocacy work that furthers the mission of AppalReD in service to the community.**

**Strategy A.1.3:** Identify opportunities to address critical legal problems and access to justice issues for people in AppalReD's service region.



**Strategy B.1.3:** Create an advocacy plan which is flexible and easily modified, which identifies specific issues, describes action steps, and describes the purpose of the legal work identified.

**Strategy C.1.3:** Work as a unified organization across all offices and regions to identify and address systemic issues through staff training, staff feedback mechanisms, community engagement and community partnerships, utilizing statewide and national resources as appropriate and available.

### **Goal One Commentary**

#### **Client Advocacy Services**

The Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) discussed advocacy at length throughout the strategic planning process. Advocacy is the heart of AppalReD and is the focus of its mission and purpose. Advocacy means client services and includes direct client representation, the provision of legal advice, the sharing of legal education in the community, and the creation of self-help forms and other materials that assist people in addressing their personal legal needs. AppalReD recognizes that there are recurring issues affecting its client community and remains committed to addressing them. As an LSC-funded entity, AppalReD follows all LSC regulations, including those prohibiting class action work, community organizing, and solicitation, among others.

#### **Caseloads, Balance in Types of Cases Handled, and Case Acceptance Processes & Procedures**

There was consensus among the SPC that attorney caseloads need to be analyzed, case acceptance procedures need to be more uniform, and that AppalReD needs to reduce the amount of family law cases accepted for direct services. The SPC understands that AppalReD is known for its family law work. In fact, this is an area of pride for the AppalReD team. However, changing the manner in which family law cases are handled will allow AppalReD to ensure that it is effectively responding to the full array of critical civil legal needs of its client community.

To accomplish this change, AppalReD will increase its self-help resources and deepen the ways in which clients can access self-help family law resources. AppalReD currently provides self-help resources online via its website [www.ardfky.org](http://www.ardfky.org). Forms are also available from statewide partners such as other legal aids and via Kentucky's Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) and the Access to Justice Commission of the Kentucky Supreme Court. Kentucky's four legal aid programs share resources and information via the statewide legal aid website [www.kyjustice.org](http://www.kyjustice.org). AOC provides self-help resources utilizing A2J technology (for an example see <https://www.kycourts.gov/Legal-Help/Pages/Self-Help-Portal.aspx>). A combination of adjustments to in-house self-help (pro se) supportive services, collaboration at a statewide level, and utilization of pro bono resources will assist in accomplishing this goal.





## **Domestic Violence and Survivor Services**

AppalReD will continue to provide services that support survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and other forms of interpersonal violence. The array of services provided to survivors will continue to include family law matters through legal education, self-help legal assistance, counsel, and representation. Until the day when domestic violence is eliminated, AppalReD will walk alongside survivors to support their journey to safety.

## **Goal Two: Revitalize and transform AppalReD's Pro Bono Program, utilizing the recommendations of the recent Pro Bono Assessment.**

**Objective 2.1: Shift AppalReD's approach to pro bono from reactive to proactive by strategically creating pro bono projects that anticipate and meet community needs.**

**Strategy A.2.1:** Update AppalReD's Private Attorney Involvement (PAI) Plan to reflect the changes that take place as a result of implementation of the recommendations of the Pro Bono Assessment and Roadmap for Change, understanding that changes will be implemented over the life of this five-year plan.

**Strategy B.2.1:** Utilizing the 2024 Comprehensive Needs Assessment, continue current pro bono projects and develop new pro bono projects that are responsive to the needs of AppalReD's client community.

**Objective 2.2: Expand volunteer engagement through increased staffing to support recruitment, training, mentorship, and case management.**

**Strategy A.2.2:** Evaluate budgetary resources and, to the extent that funding allows, move some financial resources from contract attorney work to internal staffing to expand pro bono and implement the recommendations of the Pro Bono Assessment.

**Strategy B.2.2:** Identify core poverty law areas that relate to the needs of AppalReD's client community and create training opportunities to equip volunteers with the skills needed to assist clients effectively. Training opportunities should include live and recorded training sessions, written materials, and access to internal AppalReD expertise.



**Strategy C.2.2:** Identify, develop, and utilize “internal experts” to provide mentorship and support to volunteers in key poverty law areas.

**Strategy D.2.2:** Survey volunteers and clients periodically to receive their feedback and improve pro bono systems over time.

**Strategy E.2.2:** Create and implement a consistent manner in which pro bono cases are placed, tracked, and documented utilizing the new case management system (CMS) deployed by AppalReD in 2025. Utilize the CMS to streamline pro bono processes and ensure that information about pro bono cases is readily available to both pro bono staff and staff at regional offices.

**Objective 2.3: Build an internal culture of pro bono through integration and communication.**

**Strategy A.2.3:** Create written protocols and processes for the referral of cases for pro bono assistance. In said protocols, provide information on the specific types of cases that may be referred, client-centered referral procedures, and the process for ongoing oversight of the cases.

**Strategy B.2.3:** Create an internal training program that provides AppalReD team members with the information, skills, and training needed to engage with pro bono staff and volunteers as part of their daily work. Include pro bono training for new team members in the onboarding process.

**Strategy C.2.3:** Launch an internal communications campaign about purpose, value, and mechanisms for engaging in pro bono support.

**Strategy D.2.3:** Engage in ongoing communications with the Staff, Directing Attorneys, Project Leads, Central Intake staff, and all personnel on the opportunities available through pro bono to serve clients in need.

**Strategy E.2.3:** Change the nomenclature of AppalReD’s pro bono work to AppalReD Pro Bono. Discontinue the use of the VLAK acronym and full title, Volunteer Lawyers for Appalachian Kentucky. Utilize consistent branding across the organization and in external communications.



**Objective 2.4: Cultivate a pipeline for cases within the organization that utilizes pro bono expertise to meet client needs.**

**Strategy A.2.4:** Hold regular meetings between the Pro Bono Coordinator and the Central Intake Director to share information, review case referral processes, and develop strategies to fully utilize pro bono resources.

**Strategy B.2.4:** Create limited-scope volunteer opportunities that match client needs with volunteers who are trained to handle specific client matters.

**Strategy C.2.4:** Consider developing pro bono programs that center on services that require a quick turnaround, such as protective order hearings, eviction hearings, and legal needs as the result of natural disasters.

**Objective 2.5: Engage in recruitment activities that incorporate volunteers from an expanded geographic area, offer variety in types of volunteer activities, and build relationships in AppalReD's pro bono community.**

**Strategy A.2.5:** Connect with attorneys outside AppalReD's service area, including law firms in large Kentucky metropolitan areas as well as nationally.

**Strategy B.2.5:** Develop pro bono projects that can be conducted virtually to effectively engage both local attorneys and those that are more distant.

**Strategy C.2.5:** Create a pro bono advisory board that works closely with AppalReD pro bono staff to craft strategies to recruit attorneys and develop projects that will meet needs in AppalReD's client community.

**Strategy D.2.5:** Similar to the communications campaign envisioned internally, launch a communications campaign externally to provide information about AppalReD's Pro Bono Program to the public as well as current and prospective volunteers. Develop a timeline for regular communications to the community, specifically providing information about pro bono matters.

**Goal Two Commentary**

**Incorporation and Implementation of Pro Bono Assessment Report**

AppalReD recently engaged a consultant, Adam Heintz, to conduct a Pro Bono Assessment as part of a Pro Bono Innovation Fund (PBIF) grant through LSC. The results and



recommendations of the assessment are incorporated into this plan and specifically laid out in Goal Two. AppalReD is working to fully integrate pro bono across the organization and to revitalize its pro bono efforts through implementation of this plan.

### **Pro Bono Culture Shift and Name Change**

Through the implementation of this Strategic Goal, AppalReD will pursue a culture shift that moves pro bono from a reactive model to a proactive model. As part of this work, AppalReD is also shifting the way in which it incorporates pro bono into its overall organizational structure. Previously, AppalReD's pro bono work took place under the banner of Volunteer Lawyers for Appalachian Kentucky (Commonly called "VLAK"). Under this paradigm, VLAK was viewed as a separate entity, although it was not a separate non-profit. There was often confusion externally as to whether VLAK was a separate organization. AppalReD is discontinuing the use of VLAK and instead referring to the pro bono work of the agency as AppalReD Pro Bono. The change in name takes place alongside the integration of the pro bono program across AppalReD as a whole.

### **Internal Integration**

AppalReD will follow the steps in this Strategic Goal and the more detailed steps in the Pro Bono Assessment to integrate pro bono across the organization. The purpose of this is to better serve AppalReD's client community through the leveraging of pro bono resources and to provide greater opportunities for members of the private bar to engage in legal aid work. Internal integration will involve training, development of pro bono expertise, and the creation of systems that allow for seamless referrals from AppalReD to volunteers. It is understood that this level of integration will take place over time, and that the pro bono team will discern and prioritize initial steps based upon current client needs and the current staffing level of the pro bono team. As the team expands, further integration will take place.

### **Communications**

Internal and external pro bono communications will increase under this plan. Keeping staff informed of the types of cases desired for referral will be a top priority along with collaboration with Intake and other department leads. External communications will include updates on future events, pro bono needs, and recognition of volunteers. The AppalReD Pro Bono Program will work closely with AppalReD's technology and communications staff to utilize technological and effective communications systems to accomplish this expansion.

### **Training**

Training is essential to the future expansion of pro bono efforts at AppalReD. Training takes place at the front-end of recruitment and all the way through for experienced volunteers. AppalReD envisions a new and invigorated training program that provides basic training for core legal aid poverty law areas (e.g., family law, eviction, life planning documents, protection order hearings, expungement, and more), regular supportive and in-depth training on special topics, and the use of internal staff members to provide expertise in particular areas.



## **Goal Three: Promote access to client services through expansion and updates to AppalReD offices.**

**Objective 3.1: To the extent that funding allows, open a satellite office in the western region of AppalReD's 37-county service area.**

**Strategy A.3.1:** Conduct a budgetary analysis of the cost of opening a satellite office, including the physical, staffing, and ancillary costs associated with the office.

**Strategy B.3.1:** Engage in discussions with local judiciary members, private attorneys, community partners, and client representatives about the possibility of opening an office, particular needs of the client community, available resources, and challenges that may exist.

**Strategy C.3.1.:** Obtain funding to support the opening of the office, with sufficient reserves and designated funding sources to sustain the office.

**Strategy D.3.1.:** Understanding that sufficient funding may not be immediately available to pursue this goal, in lieu of opening a satellite office, pursue similar strategies to increase staff to serve the western region and develop opportunities to increase staff recruitment and retention. This may include, but is not limited to, the offering of a stipend to staff.

**Objective 3.2: Evaluate, assess, and update offices to increase accessibility for staff and guests.**

**Strategy A.3.2:** Conduct an evaluation of all AppalReD office spaces and obtain professional assessments that include recommendations for updates in safety and accessibility.

**Strategy B.3.2:** Obtain funding to implement appropriate recommendations.

**Strategy C.3.2:** Implement security and safety updates. This may include physical modifications and electronic mechanisms depending upon the needs at individual locations.

**Strategy D.3.2.:** Involve and update staff and board members throughout the process, providing opportunities for feedback and participation.



## **Goal Three Commentary**

### **New Satellite Office**

The SPC recommends opening a satellite office in AppalReD's western region when it is financially feasible to do so. An "Offices Subcommittee" was formed to research, discuss, and make recommendations to the SPC on this specific matter. Poverty population data, case services statistics, prior strategic planning notes, judicial circuit information, time zone information, as well as other information available to the committee were used in analyzing the possibility of opening an additional office. The western region is currently served by the Somerset office, which serves a total of 11 counties. AppalReD previously had an office in Columbia and the Offices Committee discussed that this location would be optimal for a satellite office but stopped short of making the goal to open an office in Columbia, recognizing that it will take time to obtain the funding to support this goal, opportunities may change, and staffing will affect the matter as well.

The Committee's initial analysis supports the new office serving the counties of Monroe (40<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit), Cumberland (40<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit), Clinton (29<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit), Adair (29<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit), and Casey (29<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit). However, as with the location of the office, the committee believes this decision should be made contemporaneously with the opening of the office. As such, the SPC recommends the pursuit of this goal as a long-term goal with the flexibility to utilize the best opportunities that come to fruition in the process.

### **Safety and Accessibility**

Office safety and accessibility were discussed by the staff and the SPC throughout the strategic planning process. Discussions in focus groups, survey responses, and SPC meetings highlighted the need to review all AppalReD offices for physical accessibility as well as safety and security. The SPC understands that two types of assessments may be needed to address both safety and accessibility and that some companies may be knowledgeable in one or both areas. The SPC notes that addressing the issues of safety and accessibility will require contractors to work in tandem in the event that more than one contractor is needed to address both issues.

Security matters highlighted during the strategic planning process include the need to look at entrance security, method of access (e.g., key, number pad, swipe card), accessibility to private workspaces, and reception areas. With respect to accessibility, focus group members discussed how people with physical challenges navigate all the areas within the offices as well as looking at increasing accessibility in entry ways. Staff members emphasized that everyone is currently accommodated, and the staff take the steps needed to ensure safe access for all. However, future improvements were recommended to improve accessibility.



## **Goal Four: Evaluate and update infrastructure to promote a work environment that is efficient, effective, and advances the organization's mission.**

### **Objective 4.1: Recruit and retain a professional and talented staff.**

**Strategy A.4.1:** Review pay scales and engage in ongoing assessment to provide competitive wages.

**Strategy B.4.1.:** Evaluate employee benefits for new and existing employees, including considerations like moving expenses, childcare assistance, commuter incentives, and stipends for particular projects.

**Strategy C.4.1:** Create promotional materials highlighting the benefits of living and working in the AppalReD region (e.g., video highlighting local area, work environment, natural beauty, social life opportunities).

**Strategy D.4.1:** Build communications and relationships with law schools to deepen avenues for recruitment as well as opportunities for collaboration.

### **Objective 4.2: Update administrative handbooks, policies, and procedures and provide training for uniform implementation of the policies.**

**Strategy A.4.2:** Update the employee handbook to include changes that have happened over time (e.g., no company cars, addition of positions, virtual/remote work, mileage reimbursement) as well as updates that improve business systems.

**Strategy B.4.2:** Schedule periodic training for new and existing staff to provide training on administrative policies alongside other infrastructure policies such as LSC regulations, EEOC policy, budget matters, and new grants.

**Strategy C.4.2:** Create a Directing Attorney manual to provide onboarding training materials and guidance on successfully serving in the role.

### **Objective 4.3: Leverage technology to streamline and support administrative and advocacy systems.**



**Strategy A.4.3:** Continue the process of deploying AppalReD's new Case Management System (CMS), exploring opportunities to streamline processes and minimize duplication in systems.

**Strategy B.4.3:** Develop a baseline level of technology use expectation, specific to position types, and provide the tools, training, and support needed to assist all employees in utilizing technology systems.

**Strategy C.4.3:** Store electronic policy documents in a shared location that is accessible to all staff, updating the information regularly (e.g., SharePoint, CMS, Learning Management System).

**Strategy D.4.3:** Create and implement a uniform onboarding process that is customizable for individual positions.

**Strategy E.4.3:** Create or obtain a customizable training platform (Learning Management System) that is user friendly and can be regularly updated for use by all staff.

**Objective 4.4: Update AppalReD's performance evaluation process, providing an opportunity for meaningful review and the development of professional goals.**

**Strategy A.4.4:** Review and update performance evaluation forms, including topics such as casework, customer service skills, legal skills, technology, time-management, training requests, goals, and other areas as appropriate to the position (e.g., attorney, support staff, manager, directing attorney, administrative positions).

**Strategy B.4.4:** Include employee feedback and requests for support and training in the performance review process.

**Strategy C.4.4:** Incorporate regular case reviews into the process, monitoring quality assurance, co-counseling needs, training needs, and opportunities to provide support to advocates specific to their level of experience and expertise.

**Objective 4.5: Review and analyze AppalReD's organizational structure, and to the extent that funding allows, update the supervisory structure to best support AppalReD's current staff of over 55 people.**





**Strategy A.4.5:** Review management structure and make changes to reduce the number of direct reports to the Executive Director, which is currently 20% of agency personnel.

**Strategy B.4.5:** Explore the possibility of hiring an Associate Director, to the extent funding allows, to further the mission of the organization and strengthen the organizational infrastructure.

### **Goal Four Commentary**

#### **Recruitment and Retention**

The SPC discussed the challenges of recruitment and retention, noting that some positions have taken a year to fill in recent times. The SPC explored strategies to attract and retain staff, including highlighting benefits in job descriptions and promotional materials. It is recommended that an improved onboarding system as well as a revamped performance review process be deployed to support new and current team members. AppalReD has made substantial strides in the area of compensation in recent years. However, to the extent that sufficient funding is available, further review of salaries is recommended by the SPC. Creating opportunities for staff to receive additional stipends or other forms of compensation and benefits will assist in efforts to increase retention and attract new employees.

#### **Internal Updates**

The landscape has changed in recent years, including changes in the work environment worldwide as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic. AppalReD's policies and infrastructure are ready for review and update. The SPC conducted in-depth discussions and has already developed many specific recommendations, which are included in documents generated as a result of this planning process. While the volume of recommendations precludes including each specific element here, the strategic plan provides sufficiently specific goals and objectives to begin the process of making these updates. This includes revisions to the employee handbook, updates to performance review processes, and the utilization of emerging technology.

In addition to updating these matters, the need for training to ensure all team members have sufficient information and skills to engage in the work is envisioned in this plan. AppalReD's performance evaluation process, while longstanding, is outdated and not uniformly implemented across the agency. Recent changes in management, including new Directing Attorneys, provide a unique opportunity to look at the current process and bring it up to date with current needs. The new process is envisioned to review work, ensure high quality performance, and provide professional development opportunities for each team member.



## **Technology**

A baseline level of technology proficiency enhances all team members' activities. Providing opportunities for technology to enhance existing skills may be an avenue to increase innovation and streamline processes so as to allow more time for substantive work. Using technology effectively will assist in increasing the capacity to serve and provide the tools and skills AppalReD team members need to succeed.

The SPC discussed the need for more uniformity across the organization in the onboarding process, both for new hires and for existing staff during promotion or change to a new position. Implementation of technology will assist with the development of a new onboarding system and ensure continuity across the organization.

## **Organizational Chart Review**

At the time of this plan's creation, 11 of AppalReD's 55 employees report directly to the Executive Director. There is a recognition that this may need to change in the future and that this could happen through changes with existing staff and through the creation of additional positions, specifically an Associate Director position or other similar position. As a non-profit law firm, AppalReD keeps administrative costs low, seeking to focus its budget on service to the community through direct services. However, the environment that today's AppalReD functions in requires increasing administrative support to manage the volume of cases, grant reports, grant applications, fiscal oversight, collaboration with partners, and the fundamental work needed to support the work of an agency serving 37-counties and a client community of over 400,000 client income eligible people served by 25 attorneys.<sup>8</sup>

AppalReD continues to experience a high demand for services. As AppalReD moves forward, updating its organizational infrastructure to continue and expand its services in the community calls for a review and update to support the work of today and the future. The SPC understands that this organizational modification will dovetail with fundraising and that the direction of any changes will be driven by available funding to support them.

## **Goal Five: Revise funding and development practices and procedures to expand funding opportunities, increase collaboration, and maximize resources to support services to the community.**

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<sup>8</sup> AppalReD screens all applicants for income eligibility based upon the Federal Poverty Guidelines and only accepts client whose income is 125% or less that the Federal Poverty Level and up to 200% in certain circumstances. Census data reveals that approximately 200,000 to 400,000 people in AppalReD service region meet these eligibility requirements. Income eligibility does not guarantee service. Multiple factors are utilized in determining whether a case will be accepted, including, but not limited to, the type of legal matter, conflicts of interest, and available resources.



**Objective 5.1: Increase collaboration and the exchange of information regarding advocacy, finance, grant, and administrative matters.**

**Strategy A.5.1:** Utilize and leverage technology to allow administration team members to securely share information in “real time” (e.g., grants, budget, and finance software or platform based in existing AppalReD technology or newly purchased) and increase collaboration.

**Strategy B.5.1:** Provide grant information to staff members and managers (with confidential information redacted) to facilitate the management and implementation of grant requirements transparently.

**Strategy C.5.1:** Engage in training of all staff on services of the agency as a whole and the grants that support all the work, providing knowledge to assist in serving clients holistically across offices, grants, and initiatives.

**Strategy D.5.1:** Create and deploy team building opportunities organization-wide to reduce “siloeing” in the organization and facilitate streams of information and collaboration.

**Objective 5.2: Provide training specific to grants, finance, and administration for the full administration team to deepen opportunities for teamwork, transparency, and project management.**

**Strategy A.5.2:** Conduct training on new and existing technology, equipping the administrative team with the tools needed to engage in collaborative fundraising, grants management, and fiscal activities.

**Objective 5.3: Build upon AppalReD’s current fiscal stability with a focus on continuing that stability over time.**

**Strategy A.5.3:** Create a financial reserves policy that sets a process to determine the amount of reserves to be retained by the organization, authorization process and qualifying reasons to use the reserves, and the process for calculating and updating the reserves amount over time.



**Strategy B.5.3:** Utilize Board and external financial experts to regularly review financial protocols, the accounting manual, and provide guidance as needed on financial matters.

**Objective 5.4: Increase funding and develop resources.**

**Strategy A.5.4:** Create and implement a fundraising plan to maintain and build relationships with grantors, foundations, private donors, and government entities. Include all members of the team in the plan with defined roles, meeting dates, and mechanisms to ensure seamless participation and collaboration among the team.

**Strategy B.5.4:** Purchase subscription(s) to assist in identifying grants and foundations.

**Commentary**

AppalReD is fiscally stable and has policies and procedures that support the proper management and stewardship of resources of the agency. Through the completion of prior strategic plans, AppalReD has increased its resources, hired personnel to assist specifically in fundraising and communications, and thereby increased advocacy work in the community. Staff members, managers, and the SPC brought a variety of ideas forward during the strategic planning process to update administrative procedures to better leverage technology and increase seamless collaboration across the team, some of which work in separate locations and remotely from AppalReD's offices.



## Implementation, Updates, and Modifications

AppalReD intends for this plan to serve as a “living document” – meaning this document will be utilized, reviewed, updated, and modified throughout its implementation to best achieve the mission and vision of the agency. Client needs and organizational matters change over time. The goals set in this plan are set with the vision that they will remain relevant and achievable during the next five years. However, changes in funding, new and emerging needs in the client community, and changes in the legal landscape will occur and may lead to changes in the objectives and strategies outlined to achieve the goals.<sup>9</sup> Flexibility and responsiveness are pillars of AppalReD, and the plan will be updated as appropriate in order to effectively meet the needs of the community.

A separate Implementation Plan sets out leaders, implementers, timelines, and action steps to pursue and achieve the goals outlined in this plan. This plan will be reviewed quarterly by management and no less than annually by the Board of Directors.

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<sup>9</sup> The LSC Performance Criteria as well as generally recognized non-profit best practices recommend that an organization’s Strategic Plan be regularly reviewed, evaluated, and modified to remain relevant and responsive to current needs and environments. Specifically, LSC Performance Area One, Criterion 4 provides, “The program regularly analyzes and evaluates the effectiveness of its delivery strategies and work, in major part by comparing the results actually achieved with the outcomes originally intended, and utilizes this analysis and evaluation to make appropriate changes in its goals, objectives, strategies, and legal assistance activity. Such adjustments should be made on a flexible and ongoing basis, not just after the periodic comprehensive assessments.” See <https://www.lsc.gov/our-impact/publications/other-publications-and-reports/lsc-performance-criteria>.



## Conclusion

AppalReD Legal Aid is committed to being a good neighbor in the communities in which it works in South Central and Eastern Kentucky. As fellow community members, AppalReD staff members devote their professional careers to ensuring access to justice for all. This plan will lead AppalReD through an important moment in its history and will serve as a guidepost for the organization during a time of change. With this plan, the story of AppalReD Legal Aid continues, stronger than ever, mindful of the needs of the community, and ever ready to meet the challenges of the future with pride, professionalism, and purpose.

Thank you to the Board, Staff, Clients, and Stakeholders whose input and expertise shaped this Strategic Plan. Thank you to our partners, supporters, donors, and funders, without whom we could not do this work.

For more information about AppalReD Legal Aid, please visit <https://www.ardfky.org/>.

