



Memphis Area Legal Services, Inc.

STRATEGY PLAN

Fiscal Years 2022 – 2024



Memphis Area Legal Services, Inc.

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*Memphis Area Legal Services' mission is
to Provide Excellence in Legal Advocacy for Those in Need*

Organizational Identity

Memphis Area Legal Services (MALS) is the primary provider of civil legal representation to low income families in the western Tennessee counties of Shelby, Fayette, Tipton, & Lauderdale. MALS helps individuals and families facing critical, sometimes life-threatening, situations. MALS provides free legal assistance through advice and counsel, court and administrative representation, and community education and outreach to vulnerable residents.

MALS has deep roots in the local community and has been advocating for those in need since 1968 when the organization first formed as the Neighborhood Legal Services Project. MALS continues the traditions of its early years in providing high quality and aggressive advocacy. MALS has grown to become a multi-faceted law firm guided by values and principles that embody its commitment to equal access to justice for all.

Core Values	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ All individuals have an equal right to legal representation❖ Respect and inclusion for all populations in our community❖ Compassion by being empathetic and understanding❖ Professionalism by exhibiting high standards of conduct	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Competency in delivery of services and being the most effective resource❖ Embracing diversity and being culturally sensitive and aware❖ Fostering trust and transparency through honest communication❖ Empowering our clients to make positive changes to their situations

The above Core Values along with indicators are included in the Appendix.



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Memphis Area Legal Services' Substantive Priorities were established through a process that commenced with both a statewide and regional legal needs study published in 2014 and 2015, respectively. It further evolved with the input of key stakeholders including affinity organizations, the organized bar, volunteers and supporters, and of equal importance, MALS' staff and Board of Directors. To synthesize the vast amount of information, MALS convened a focus group that included affinity groups and a representative of the legal community. The overall safety of clients was pervasive and permeated the list of priorities developed. In the spring of 2016, the Board of Directors approved the Substantive Priorities reflected below:



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Priority Service Areas

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Family & Children Issues<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Domestic Violence/Abuse○ Divorce○ Parental Rights○ Child Custody & Support○ Education❖ Housing & Real Property<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Landlord/Tenant Disputes○ Eviction prevention and addressing unlawful ouster○ Fair Housing○ Housing Counseling○ Foreclosure Mitigation○ Evictions❖ Income Maintenance<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Disability (SSI/SSDI)○ Unemployment Compensation○ Veteran Benefits○ Families First (TANF)○ Veteran Benefits○ Expungements○ Restoration of Rights | <ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Health & Senior Issues<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ TennCare○ Medical Bills○ Health Insurance○ Healthcare○ Medicaid○ Medicare○ Nursing Home Issues○ Elder Law❖ Consumer/Utilities and Individual and Civil Rights<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Predatory Lending○ Collections○ Unfair Sales Practices○ Consumer Contracts○ Utility Access |
|--|---|

The above Priority Areas informed the development of
MALS' Case Acceptance Guidelines



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Intended Impact

Individuals and families from underserved populations in western Tennessee counties of Shelby, Fayette, Tipton, & Lauderdale who might otherwise be unrepresented, will have access to and be able to obtain legal representation that provides not only high quality legal aid, but also educates and builds the resilience of those clients.

MALS will leverage its services and expertise to affect broader impact in the community, including contributing to:

- Cycles of success in areas where cycles of poverty are most prevalent
- Addressing some of the most common factors in cycles of poverty including, but not limited to domestic violence, homelessness, predatory consumer practices, and individual and civil rights violations
- Increasing awareness of the legal needs and the gaps in available services
- Joining with our community partners and expanding our partnerships to create a more comprehensive network of community service providers

Vision

The overarching vision for Memphis Area Legal Services, Inc. is to become recognized as both a premier provider of legal services and also a catalyst for broader community impact. MALS seeks to be recognized as a “Community Law Firm,” a firm that is representative of and advocates for the low-income communities served by MALS. In order to do so, MALS is committed to obtaining and training more attorneys to enable them serve our community.

MALS’ history in the local community and record of success over nearly 50 years have well prepared the organization for this continuing evolution from service provider to community leader. MALS has demonstrated the respect and commitment needed to build a deep level of trust with its clients and in the local community. MALS seeks to build upon the trust and relationships it has forged to expand its outreach to clients and to continue to build meaningful community partnerships and collaborations.

Programs and services will be representative of community needs and be tailored to demographics, socioeconomic status, and common legal issues. MALS has both the expertise and professional capacity to deliver needed services as well as a significant understanding of local need and issues. This knowledge of local issues combined with a broader understanding of current political and economic factors enables MALS to assess and identify the gaps, and potential gaps, in local needs and available services



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and design meaningful and lasting solutions. MALS will continue to deliver high quality legal aid services and will be the go-to community resource for legal assistance for those who would otherwise be unable to obtain private counsel.

Beyond maintaining its tradition of access to legal services for all those in need, MALS will also continue to expand its presence and role in the community. As MALS positions itself as a community law firm, the organization will utilize an approach of “strategic advocacy,” that is, identifying and leveraging all available resources, both internal and external to the organization, to extend MALS’s service capacity and reach in the community.

Through strategic alliances with other organizations, partnerships with affinity groups, and strengthening relationships with professional associations, MALS will enhance its capacity to affect larger and more impactful change in the community beyond individual legal cases while continuing to expand systemic and impact litigation. MALS will be the provider of choice for legal aid and will partner with networks of providers offering complimentary services. MALS will seek to create single points of entry for a “continuum of care” for clients.

Based upon the lessons learned from the pandemic, Memphis Area Legal Services, Inc.’s strategic goal is to not only continue, but enhance its role as a beacon for connecting, educating, and helping to strengthen the resilience of those in underserved populations. MALS will shine as an established community partner that is helping to make Memphis and surrounding counties of western Tennessee better communities in which to live and work.



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Organizational Strategy

Memphis Area Legal Services will expand the identity and role of the organization to be recognized as a “community law firm,” a firm that is representative of and advocates for the communities served by MALS. MALS will also decrease its physical footprint while increasing its service through remote work and use of technology to better serve clients.

Memphis Area Legal Services will be strategic in advocating and in leveraging both internal resources and leadership as well as partnerships and alliances to increase MALS’ service capacity and potential for creating lasting change in the community.

Strategic Priorities

Brand Identity and Outreach

MALS will strengthen and expand its brand identity and its outreach to client populations and the larger community. MALS will align services within its priority areas to be responsive to local needs and gaps in available services.

Improved Services Through Use of Technology

MALS will implement programs and make use of available technology to enable it to serve more clients in a more efficient fashion.

Community Partnerships and Alliances

MALS will build strategic alliances with community partners and a referral network of providers of complementary services to increase the comprehensive outcomes for clients while growing MALS’ community presence and impact.

Structure, Culture, & Leadership Development

MALS will assess its structure to better align the operations of the organization with the organization’s core values, brand identity, and areas of service, as well as continue to develop MALS’ leadership, culture, and a high performing staff.



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Financial Sustainability

MALS will develop a revenue strategy that maximizes potential from existing funding streams while increasing unrestricted revenue and flexible funding to better insulate against potential changes to funding, to build future reserves, and to position MALS to more readily pursue innovative opportunities.



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Priority Area #1: Brand Identity and Outreach

Rationale:

As MALS seeks to be recognized as a community law firm, greater brand awareness and increased post pandemic outreach become central to furthering that desired identity and increasing the integration of MALS into the community as an established and essential community resource.

Goal

MALS will strengthen and expand its brand identity and its outreach to client populations and the larger community. MALS will ensure services are responsive to local needs and gaps in available services in alignment with MALS's priority areas and capacity.

Tactical Approaches

- Establish and develop MALS' identity as that of a pro bono law firm.
- Continue to make various radio and television programs that are geared to reach our target audiences
- Develop a system for gathering community feedback
- Develop a comprehensive marketing plan to broaden awareness of MALS and promote MALS' brand
- Conducted targeted marketing to individuals, organizations, and entities that are beyond the client base and outside the legal community
- Develop a program evaluation model that integrates current productivity measures with a more detailed assessment of the outcomes and impact of program services

Key Performance Indicators

MALS is regarded as an expert in the areas of service the organization provides

MALS has an expanded reputation in the community and strong brand recognition, evidenced by increased referrals, partnerships, and service outputs

MALS is generating support and funding from outside the legal community



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MALS is viewed by the public as an organization that serves its clients with compassion, respect, and high quality service and is an essential resource to the community

Increased awareness and relationships with individuals, organizations, and entities inside and outside the legal community

Priority Area #2: Improved Services Through Use of Technology

Rationale:

Technology is readily available that would enable MALS to serve its clients more rapidly and efficiently. As MALS seeks to be strategic in improving the timeliness and efficiency of its service, increased use of available technologies can be beneficial.

Goal:

MALS will use technology to enable online intake drastically cutting its response time to clients. Use of technology to enable remote working will enable MALS to devote more of its dollars to staff that provide assistance to clients as opposed to directing those dollars to rental space. Technology will also be obtained and used to enable clients to receive periodic updates on their cases, ensuring greater client awareness and management of client expectations with a goal of increasing client satisfaction and trust.

Tactical Approaches:

- Decrease workplace footprint while increasing services via hybrid and remote working model
- Obtain and install online client intake software to decrease the length of time for the client application process
- Install software to create a client update system to enable clients to know the status of their cases on demand

Key Performance Indicators

Decrease period of time for client intake

Successful implementation of client update portal

Efficient hybrid operation



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Priority Area #3: Community Partnerships and Alliances

Rationale:

As MALS positions itself as a community law firm, MALS can leverage partnerships to extend its service capacity and enhance its community standing. As MALS seeks to be strategic in leveraging all available resources, MALS can utilize partnerships for expanding capacity.

Goal

MALS will build strategic alliances with community partners and a referral network of providers of complementary services to increase the comprehensive outcomes for clients while growing MALS' community presence and impact.

Tactical Approaches

- Capitalize on and expand existing partnerships and create new partnerships with peer organizations, affinity groups, and other nonprofits
- Expand relationships with professional associations, including but not limited to: bar associations, University of Memphis, School of Law, Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services, and the Tennessee Access to Justice Commission
- Research existing models for provider networks and continuums of care
- Train volunteers and groups in order to expand MALS' service capacity
- Find or develop methods to track and measure collective impact of partnerships and alliances

Key Performance Indicators

Increased awareness and reputation among peers and potential partners

Reduction in overlapping services from providers in the community and better quality referrals for MALS

Increased numbers of trained community volunteers and partners



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MALS is reaching more people and has increased collective impact through collaboration

Increased level of respect for MALS among the community, supporters, and partner organizations



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Priority Area #4: Structure, Culture, and Leadership Development

Rationale:

As MALS evaluates and designs programs to be more responsive to community needs and expands partnerships and collaborations, MALS' internal structure, culture, and leadership must be aligned with those changes to support implementation of the overall strategy.

Goal

MALS will continue to assess its structure to better align the operations of the organization with the organization's core values, brand identity, and areas of service, as well as continue to develop MALS' leadership, culture, and staff.

Tactical Approaches

- Identify an organizational structure that best aligns the different areas of service, increases operating efficiency, and provides clear systems for internal communication and reporting
- Implement improved systems for staff development that integrate incentives and advancement opportunities and leadership development
- Increase the retention and development of diverse and high quality staff
- Create more opportunities for meaningful board engagement

Key Performance Indicators

Greater operating efficiency characterized by an increase in output numbers that consistently outpace any cost increases

MALS develops a salary structure and benefits package that is sufficiently competitive with the public sector

Improved staff morale and satisfaction

Establishment and maintenance a highly trained and high performing staff

Establishment of an organizational structure that enhances operational efficiency, high performance, and communication

Board and Staff leadership continues to reflect diversity that is representative of the communities served by MALS

Increased and consistent engagement from the full Board

Priority Area #5: Financial Sustainability



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Rationale:

As MALS implements a strategy to grow the organization and enhance its role in the community, the organization must at the same time, focus on building the sustainability of its revenue model: Having the revenue needed to cover current funding needs while at the same time generating funding for future viability and expansion.

Goal

MALS will develop a revenue strategy that maximizes potential from existing funding streams while increasing unrestricted revenue and flexible funding to better insulate against potential changes to funding, to build future reserves, and to position MALS to more readily pursue innovative opportunities.

Tactical Approaches

- Maximize the revenue potential from grants and contracts
- Evaluate and establish new revenue streams
- Build existing revenue streams, including but not limited to contributions from individuals and corporations, foundation support, and grants and contracts
- Research potential investments in new partnerships or program expansion
- Create meaningful opportunities for increased Board involvement in fund development and provide the necessary fundraising training and support that Board members need

Key Performance Indicators
Significantly increase unrestricted funding with a goal of \$500,000 generated by the 54 th anniversary of MALS in 2024
Increasing reserves consistently on an annual basis
Consistently maximizing revenue potential from all grants and contracts
Maximizing and maintaining funding potential from existing revenue streams



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Appendices

MALS Values Report

Intended Impact

Summary of Critical Issues

Discussion Points from Planning Retreat

MALS Business Model Matrix Map

MALS Revenue Model



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MALS Values Report

Compassion

MALS will show Compassion by being respectful, understanding, and empathetic.

Indicators

- ▶ Active Listening
- ▶ Patience
- ▶ Kindness
- ▶ Tone
- ▶ Being non-judgmental
- ▶ Being helpful and accessible
- ▶ Truthfulness
- ▶ Sensitivity

Professionalism

MALS will demonstrate Professionalism by exhibiting high standards of personal and organizational conduct.

Indicators

- ▶ Dress appropriately
- ▶ Timeliness
- ▶ Confidentiality
- ▶ Respect
- ▶ Honesty
- ▶ Refrain from negative communications
- ▶ Being courteous and polite
- ▶ Integrity
- ▶ Dependability
- ▶ Being prepared

Empower Our Clients

MALS will Empower Our Clients by equipping them with knowledge and confidence which allows them to make positive changes to their situations.

Indicators

- ▶ Informed
- ▶ Engaged
- ▶ Invested
- ▶ Encouragement
- ▶ Validation

Trust

MALS will foster Trust by promoting open and honest communication and belief in each other by working as a team to accomplish common goals.

Indicators

- ▶ Establishing realistic expectations
- ▶ Continuing to manage client expectations throughout the course of the relationship of the
- ▶ Respect
- ▶ Reliability
- ▶ Integrity in our dealings with our clients and each other

Mutual Respect

MALS will strive to foster an environment of Mutual Respect and understanding by valuing others and employing empathy and open communication in all of our relationships and interactions.

Indicators

- ▶ Being courteous
- ▶ Showing compassion
- ▶ Honesty
- ▶ Integrity
- ▶ Active listening

Competency

MALS will be Competent in its delivery of services by acquiring and maintaining the knowledge necessary to be the most effective resource to our clients, partners, and community.

Indicators

- ▶ Preparedness
- ▶ Training and education
- ▶ Innovative and creative thinking
- ▶ Sharing ideas and expertise



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Transparency

MALS will be Transparent in communicating, when appropriate, in a timely and honest manner with openness and clarity without fear of retaliation.

Indicators

- ▶ Accessibility and prompt delivery of information including but not limited to internal emails, memoranda, use of social media, website, newsletters, and annual reports

Diversity

MALS will embrace Diversity by appreciating and understanding all people and being culturally, sensitive, aware, and competent.

Indicators

- ▶ Providing education about people's rights and responsibilities, customs, and traditions
- ▶ Promoting equality
- ▶ Embracing differences
- ▶ Being inclusive of all types of clients, staff, and services



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Intended Impact

Who

Underserved Populations, including but not limited to:

- Low-to-Moderate Income
- Families & Children
- Veterans
- Persons with Disabilities
- Victims of Domestic Violence
- Rural Communities
- Hispanic Communities
- Seniors

Impact

Individuals and families from underserved populations in western Tennessee counties of Shelby, Fayette, Tipton, & Lauderdale who might otherwise be unrepresented, have access to and are able to obtain legal representation that provides not only high quality legal aid, but also educates and builds the resilience of those clients.

Byproducts

- Stemming cycles of social issues, including poverty, homelessness, domestic abuse, predatory consumer practices, and civil rights violations
- Increasing awareness of legal needs and the gaps in service coverage
- Building a more comprehensive network of community service providers



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