

Strategic Plan

2019/20 - 2021/22



Making a Difference

Everything we do at Legal Aid Alberta (LAA) helps support Albertans as they face some of the most challenging times in their lives.

We help to enhance fairness in the justice system. We help young people get their lives back on track. We help broken families pick up the pieces and stand up strong on their own.

Our staff see the incredible challenges our clients face, and in helping them overcome these challenges they make a meaningful, positive difference in the lives of Albertans every day. As an organization, we have a proud history going back nearly 50 years. We make up just one of many parts of Alberta's justice system, but the contributions we make continue to have an enormous impact on the system.

The remarkable effectiveness of LAA is possible because of the expertise, dedication and passion of its staff and hardworking Roster Lawyers. This Strategic Plan will guide the organization and will help the LAA team work together effectively and ensure we continue to play a vital role in Alberta communities and the province's justice system.


This Strategic Plan envisions LAA as a client-focused Centre of Excellence that contributes to an Alberta where everyone can understand and exercise their legal rights. We describe what we envision LAA to look like in the future, and the strategic priorities we need to focus on to achieve this future state. We identify significant areas where we believe we must improve within the next three years, what we will do about each, and how we will measure our success along the way.

This document is a three-year rolling plan that will be updated annually and reviewed regularly by our Board of Directors and senior management team. It will drive our annual business plan and budget, and ensure that as we carry out our operations, we also remain focused on our broader goals and strategic direction. It will help us ensure we continue to remain focused on our mandate and fulfill our obligations as set out in our Governance Agreement.

*Each one of us can make a difference.
Together we can make a change.*

This plan is also intended to provide insights for our many community partners and stakeholders who we recognize as being integral to our success. By publicly setting goals for our organization and expressing the long-term direction we intend to follow, this plan will help us more effectively work together as part of Alberta's larger justice system community.

We would like to thank the Board of Directors, the LAA executive team and senior management, and especially our employees for their valuable input and contributions to this plan.



Chair of the Board
Deanna Steblyk




President and CEO
G. John Panusa

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About Legal Aid Alberta



Legal Aid Alberta is a not-for-profit organization that provides legal representation and support for Albertans facing legal issues.

A registered society incorporated under the provincial Societies Act, LAA is independent from government but accountable to Alberta's Minister of Justice and Solicitor General and to the Law Society of Alberta.

LAA provides legal services to clients in support of fairness in Alberta's justice system – services that help ensure Albertans in all circumstances understand and are able to defend their legal rights.

LAA supports its core business, provision of legal services to eligible Albertans, through:

- Intake and assessment,
- Appointment,
- Representation and case management, and;
- Invoicing, billing and client collections.

The LAA service delivery model is a hybrid of staff and contractors. LAA staff provide highly specialized legal and other support services directly to Albertans, and the balance of our services are provided by LAA Roster Lawyers, who are independent Alberta lawyers who have registered to be part of the Roster and provide services on behalf of LAA.

LAA is uniquely positioned to provide additional services that are within our mandate and have a significantly positive impact on the justice system and the lives of Albertans. This includes services like Duty Counsel for all Albertans in courtrooms and elsewhere, services in support of Emergency Protection Orders, services for Indigenous Albertans at the Siksika Nation, and support workers for youth and families in crisis.

LAA also provides legal services on behalf of Alberta Justice and Solicitor General when they are directed to do so by Alberta courts.

Internally, LAA strives to be an employer of choice and a Centre of Excellence where employees are, and are recognized to be, some of the top experts in their fields.

Vision, Mission, and Values

In a complex organization like LAA, a compelling vision and mission are essential for staff to focus on those areas where they can make the most significant contribution, and to ensure everyone in all parts of the organization is working together towards shared goals. For Albertans, our vision and mission give a clear picture of our role in the legal system and in the province.

The LAA vision statement focuses on tomorrow, on where we want to be, and the direction our organization is headed. Our mission statement focuses on today, and what we can do now to move towards our ideal future state.

Vision

An Alberta where everyone is able to understand and protect their legal rights.

Mission

We provide legal services and expertise to individuals and the legal community to support fairness in the justice system.

Our Legal Aid Alberta Values

Our organization strives to always focus on what matters, to stay true to our values in everything we do. These values are the underpinning of our organization, and as such reflect what is truly important to us and guide us in the decisions we make every day.

We are **ONE**. We work together in a collaborative and supportive manner to deliver unwavering and innovative services to our clients as one unified organization.

We are **PROTECTORS**. We serve Albertans, often the most vulnerable of us, and work tirelessly to protect their rights and to ensure a fair process.

We are **EXCEPTIONAL**. We are experts at what we do and we continually strive for improvement.

We are **INDEPENDENT**. We operate and provide legal counsel free from outside involvement.

Where We Are Going

Our long-term success is dependent on ensuring we share a common understanding of what we want our organization to be in the future.

Our goal...

A Legal Aid Alberta where an energized and enthusiastic staff work together using their extensive expertise to provide the best solutions to those Albertans whom we serve.

Imagine a Legal Aid Alberta where...

We are recognized by all for the difference we make in the lives of all Albertans. All stakeholders, including the general public, fully understand and appreciate Legal Aid Alberta's mandate and the work we undertake each and every day to protect the legal rights of our clients. We are seen as an essential service that is integral to maintaining a fair and accessible justice system for the benefit of all Albertans. LAA's brand recognition is strong and we are viewed as a Centre of Excellence.

We provide more timely, quality services that meet the true needs of our clients. Albertans are able to access our services through innovative intake, assessment, and appointing processes that more quickly match identified client needs with the right level of legal service. Clients are able to connect with us by phone, online, or in person without delay. They only need to tell us their story once; we are able to resolve client inquiries at the first point of contact; and for those requiring legal representation we promptly appoint their preferred choice of counsel. We consistently provide sound legal advice and representation to clients through both staff counsel and Roster Lawyers in accordance with best practice quality assurance standards.

We are viewed as a top employer and a great place to work. We recognize the value of our people, and invest in the development, training, and advancement of our workforce. We ensure that all employees know what is expected of them, how they are performing, and what steps to take with our support in order to achieve their longer-term career objectives. We celebrate our successes and recognize any failures as opportunities for growth and continual improvement. We are proud to work at Legal Aid Alberta and consistently rate our organization as a great place to work. We are known to be a top employer in Alberta.

How We Get There

With these outcomes in mind, this Strategic Plan is intended to function as the roadmap to assist us in reaching our desired destination. By focusing on key priorities over the next three years and targeting strategic areas of improvement, LAA will be well positioned to drive towards fulfilling its mission and achieving its vision.

Strategic Priorities

1. *Our mandate, vision, and services are clearly defined and better understood by all stakeholders.*
2. *We operate as one unified, innovative, and sustainable organization.*
3. *We are and are seen to be a Centre of Excellence.*
4. *Our services are accessible and delivered fairly to Albertans.*
5. *Our organization is a great place to work.*

Strategic Areas of Improvement

With this vision for LAA and these Strategic Priorities in mind, the following Strategic Areas of Improvement outline the current gaps and challenges that must be addressed:

1. Fully Recognizing the Value of Our People

We need to invest sufficient time, energy and/or resources to properly train, develop, and recognize our workforce for their outstanding efforts and accomplishments. This is true across the organization, but in particular for our leaders in order to sharpen leadership practices and support consistent performance planning and evaluation practices. We must continue to build a comprehensive career development and succession planning process for employees. Our staff are craving more opportunities to develop their careers, enhance their expertise, and advance to management and senior leadership roles within the organization.

2. Communicating & Living Our New Vision, Mission, and Values

LAA has developed a new vision, mission, and value statement that more accurately reflects what we stand for, what our mandate is, and how we make a difference in the lives of Albertans. We now need to turn our attention to communicating, embracing, and integrating this new vision, mission, and values into our day to day activities and in how we deliver services to our clients.

3. Enhancing Our Public Profile & Stakeholder Relations

LAA has little public profile, and much of what exists is erroneous and based on a misunderstanding of how the legal aid system works in Alberta. In addition, the expectations that many of our stakeholders have about LAA and the services we provide are inconsistent with our true mandate, purpose, and function within the broader justice system as outlined in our new five-year Governance Agreement. LAA needs to undertake a multi-faceted, strategic approach to redevelop our brand, educate stakeholders on our mandate and role in the justice system, and to profile our expertise in the delivery of legal services.

4. Strengthening Our Business Structure, Processes & Technology

Many of LAA's existing business processes and practices require updating in order to more effectively serve our clients and Roster partners. LAA needs a more robust enterprise risk management strategy that contains the necessary framework controls to identify, monitor, address, and minimize organizational risks, including sustainable funding to maintain ongoing business operations. We need to invest the time and resources to stabilize our core business systems, processes, and procedures to reduce overall financial, business, and operational risks. This includes continuing to optimize our organizational structure to eliminate physical or cultural barriers and to enhance the delivery of client service across LAA as one unified organization.

5. Innovating & Enhancing Service Delivery

Barriers still exist that impact the ability of many Albertans to contact LAA and/or receive services in a timely manner. We need to develop specific strategies to shorten our intake and assessment processes, and to better serve the needs of vulnerable Albertans, particularly those in rural areas and Indigenous communities. We also need to undertake a comprehensive review to enable us to redesign the way we qualify applicants, appoint counsel, and deliver family and criminal legal services in order to improve the overall client experience and serve more Albertans within our available funding envelope.

6. Identifying, Undertaking & Completing Key Initiatives

We need to ensure every business initiative has appropriate corporate oversight to maintain alignment with LAA's mission and mandate and to ensure resources are consistently deployed in the most effective manner. Many LAA staff are overwhelmed from constant change in the organization that has historically happened too quickly and without proper planning, consultation, or communication to all affected parties. Now is the time to develop and implement best practices in initiatives management in order to more effectively plan, prepare, design, communicate, implement, and evaluate business process changes and other initiatives to maximize their effectiveness and long-term sustainability.

Actions and Measures

Following are the specific actions and measures that will be used to develop more comprehensive action plans to address each Strategic Priority.

Strategic Priority 1

Our mandate, vision, and services are clearly defined and better understood by all stakeholders.

Strategic Areas of Improvement

- Communicating & Living Our New Vision, Mission, and Values
- Enhancing Our Public Profile & Stakeholder Relations

Actions

1. Launch LAA's new Vision, Mission, and Values and incorporate into daily operations of all staff.
2. Continue to improve LAA's reputation and relationship with our funder and other public organizations and stakeholders through defined communications, government relations, and stakeholder relations strategies.
3. Develop an updated brand and promote a new story for LAA with all stakeholders and especially the general public through a variety of traditional and online channels.

Expected Results – First Year

- Updated LAA Brand and new story developed and communicated to all stakeholders by April 30, 2019.

Key Performance Indicators

- Minimum 5% increase in Organizational Vision Index as measured by the 2019 Employee Engagement Survey.
- Improve positive opinion of LAA in Public Reputation Survey by 5% from benchmark set in 2018.

Strategic Priority 2

We operate as one unified, innovative, and sustainable organization.

Strategic Areas of Improvement

- Strengthening Our Business Structure, Processes & Technology
- Identifying, Undertaking & Completing Key Initiatives

Actions

1. Restructure LAA to unify business areas and optimize our workspaces through strategic planning and business changes to eliminate unnecessary physical, procedural, or system barriers.
2. New Governance Agreement in place that provides greater clarity on the responsibilities and authority for LAA to administer the Legal Aid Plan, including clearly defined authority to modify certain terms or conditions of service to operate within our available budget.
3. All parties respect the responsibilities and authority of Legal Aid Alberta, and the role of the Government of Alberta, with regard to the administration of and reporting on the Legal Aid Plan.
4. Mitigate enterprise risk through establishment of risk management framework, including IT enhancement projects, to address major risks over time.

Expected Results – First Year

- A comprehensive risk management framework and project prioritization is in place by June 1, 2019.
- Stakeholder engagement strategy developed and implemented by May 1, 2019.
- Data Centre project completed by April 1, 2019.
- IT security and threat assessment completed by June 30, 2019.

Key Performance Indicator

- Defined initiatives are completed on time, on budget, and achieve the expected benefits.

Strategic Priority 3

We are and are seen to be a Centre of Excellence.

Strategic Areas of Improvement

- Fully Recognizing the Value of Our People
- Enhancing Our Public Profile & Stakeholder Relations
- Innovating & Enhancing Service Delivery

Actions

1. Develop a public relations and brand image campaign to educate stakeholders on the expertise that exists amongst LAA staff.
2. A new project management methodology, tools, and approach for all major project initiatives is developed and implemented.
3. Develop and implement a change management methodology to be used consistently for all major projects and initiatives.
4. Develop and share stories with stakeholders that showcase our expertise and how we make a difference in the lives of Albertans.

Expected Results – First Year

- Project Management methodology in place and working as expected by June 30, 2019.
- LAA Brand relaunch developed and implemented by April 1, 2019.

Key Performance Indicators

- Improve positive opinion of LAA in Public Reputation Survey by 5% from benchmark set in 2018.
- Special Counsel roles established as recognized legal experts in specific fields.

Strategic Priority 4

Our services are accessible and delivered fairly to Albertans.

Strategic Areas of Improvement

- Enhancing Our Public Profile & Stakeholder Relations
- Strengthening Our Business Structure, Processes & Technology
- Innovating & Enhancing Service Delivery

Actions

1. Undertake redesign work to improve the manner in which we qualify applicants, appoint counsel, and deliver family and criminal legal services in order to improve the overall client experience.
2. Identify physical, social, geographical, economical, and/or technological barriers of access to vulnerable people and develop and implement a plan to eliminate or reduce those barriers, improve access for those groups, and enhance delivery of service.
3. Increase awareness and understanding of LAA services and how to access services through stakeholder engagement and branding.
4. Develop and implement an Indigenous Strategy, in alignment with recommendations from the Truth & Reconciliation Commission Final Report, to increase awareness, enhance relations with Indigenous communities, and develop/modify our service delivery approach to reduce access barriers to LAA services in these communities.

Expected Results – First Year

- Services provided to family law clients are focused via an enhanced assessment process which takes into account the urgent needs of applicants. Expanded Duty Counsel services in family court.
- Reduced time required to appoint counsel.
- Increase in the number of clients served/assisted in Indigenous Communities.

Key Performance Indicator

- 5% increase in call centre service level (% of calls handled in our General, Remand and Youth Queues as a function of calls presented).

Strategic Priority 5

Our organization is a great place to work.

Strategic Areas of Improvement

- Fully Recognizing the Value of Our People
- Communicating & Living Our New vision, Mission and Values
- Identifying, Undertaking and Completing Initiatives

Actions

1. Align all leaders on our mission, expectations, and priorities and inspire them to pursue excellence in everything they do.
2. Provide customized leadership and management training to address known and emerging gaps.
3. Seek input from employees on new opportunities for improvement through a 2019 Employee Engagement survey.
4. Undertake a Compensation Analysis and Review, including compensation philosophy and benchmarking against comparable external organizations.
5. Develop and implement a robust Health & Safety program across LAA and focus on initiatives to promote and enhance Employee Wellness.
6. Provide opportunities for employee development, career progression, and training.

Expected Results – First Year

- Conduct a follow-up Employee Engagement survey by April 1, 2019.
- Communicate new LAA vision, mission, and strategic priorities to all staff by April 30, 2019.
- Implement and train management staff on a new, robust health and safety program across LAA. Initial training and rollout to be completed by April 30, 2019.
- All leaders identified and trained on LAA's new strategic plan, vision, mission, and leadership expectations by April 30, 2019.
- Multi-year leadership and management training program identified and implemented by October 31, 2019.
- Develop and implement onboarding package and process for new employees by December 30, 2019.

Key Performance Indicator

- Improve overall engagement score on 2019 Employee Engagement survey by 5% from benchmark set in 2017.