



Expanding possibilities for people with vision loss

AFB Strategic Plan

2024 – 2029

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PRESIDENT AND CEO'S MESSAGE

I am honored to introduce AFB's new five-year strategic plan that boldly launches us into our organization's second century. This plan was developed through the collective effort and wisdom of the AFB leadership team, our dedicated staff and Board of Trustees, and our organizational partners who provided valuable perspectives and input. As always, AFB's success will depend on the relentless drive of our talented staff and our commitment to strategic partnerships. We seek to serve as a trusted resource across our field and beyond, equipping our partners with the knowledge and tools necessary to fight for the rights and equal opportunities of blind individuals and individuals with disabilities.

I have always had profound admiration for the history of AFB, which provided a platform for Helen Keller, convened community leaders, and spearheaded societal advancements. This strategic plan reinforces our organization's Core Values and honors our past achievements, while blazing a path toward our inspiring vision for the future.

The world is rapidly changing, along with the needs of blind individuals. AFB will diligently remove barriers to inclusion and opportunity, correct discriminatory perceptions, and ensure that accessibility is proactively designed into future innovations. Our five strategic goals are interdependent and equally important in establishing our focus and priorities. They will guide our strategies and programs, which will result in inclusion, opportunity, and dignity across all stages of life, ensuring accessible educational experiences, meaningful career opportunities, and the ability to live independently.

Throughout this plan, you will notice that we use the term "blind" to cover the full spectrum of blindness, including visual impairment, low vision, and total blindness. You will also notice that we've incorporated quotes from AFB's Helen Keller Archival Collection that capture the spirit of our strategic goals. I am excited to lead our incredible team as we turn this plan into action, expanding the possibilities of tomorrow.



Eric Bridges, President & CEO,
American Foundation for the Blind

"Tomorrow!" What possibilities are in that word." - Helen Keller

MISSION

The American Foundation for the Blind creates equal opportunities and expands possibilities through advocacy, thought leadership, and strategic partnerships.

VISION

AFB is dedicated to changing how the world views blindness. We have a clear and comprehensive vision for how AFB and its strategic partners will help shape the future.

1. Coalitions of leaders and organizations will be unified to eliminate discriminatory barriers and institute policies, practices, and perceptions that result in equal access to opportunities.
2. The digital world will be welcoming to the blind community, with information and media accessible through a range of devices and software that enable a fully inclusive experience.
3. Employers will understand and value the capabilities and unique contributions of blind people, expanding access to rewarding careers and advancement opportunities.
4. Organizations across sectors (e.g., corporate, government, academic) will be equipped with the necessary knowledge, tools, and strategies to enable disability inclusion and accessibility.
5. Blind individuals will be able to move freely through the world, and innovations in transportation will be designed around accessibility.
6. AFB will continue to grow as a collaborative team of passionate and skilled professionals and trustees, committed to our mission and guided by our core values, as we create a world of equal opportunities.



CORE VALUES

AFB's core values were established by our staff to guide our professional behavior and provide the foundation for AFB's culture. We aspire to live these values every day, in our interactions with one another, our strategic partners, and the communities that we represent and serve.

Learning

We expand our expertise and commit to continuous improvement and innovation to create a future of expanded possibilities for blind individuals.

Collaboration

We empower others, combine skills, and champion inclusion to maximize our collective impact.

Impact

We change lives by being bold, delivering results, and measuring our effectiveness.

Excellence

Our success depends upon our investment in our people and their tools, our commitment to act with integrity, and our determination to create value for our constituents, partners, and customers.



SWOT ANALYSIS

As part of the strategic planning process, AFB conducted a series of assessments to examine its **S**trengths and **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities for improvement, and potential **T**hreats to mission success (SWOT). We conducted SWOT analyses on individual programs as well as AFB-wide. We gathered input from AFB leadership, staff, and stakeholders to better understand our strategic position and where we can make the greatest impact in the future. The major findings of this AFB-wide SWOT Analysis helped shape the goals and priorities in this plan.

Strengths

- Brand recognition and historical reputation with stakeholders and partners in the field.
- Rigorous, data-driven research is trusted and well-respected.
- Recognized in the cross-disability space as a leader in the areas of policy advocacy and advancing digital inclusion.
- AFB Leadership Conference has a long-established reputation of bringing groups together to network and learn from one another.
- Knowledgeable and skilled employees dedicated to and passionate about AFB's mission.

Weaknesses

- Research is not achieving its potential impact, because it is not reaching all audiences that can help to drive change.
- In recent years, AFB's identity and priorities have become unclear to our partners and stakeholders.
- Inconsistent internal and external communications are hampering effective collaboration.
- Variable revenue streams, heavily dependent on fundraising, and a relatively high cost structure have created recurring operating deficits.

Opportunities

- Leverage our storytelling capabilities to raise awareness and change public perception.
- Disseminate research findings in a consumable manner to the general public and practitioners.
- Translate research into actionable resources which lead to tangible results (e.g., change policy, educate workforces).
- Stay focused on programs that align directly with the mission, and set parameters around what AFB chooses to invest in.
- Strengthen role as non-partisan convener in the field, creating opportunities for meaningful dialogue where stakeholders can connect, unify, and partner to amplify common interests.
- Rebuild trust and partner relationships within the field and beyond.
- Identify and leverage the shared strategic directions of potential sponsors and partners.
- Identify opportunities to generate revenue to secure financial sustainability and growth.

Threats

- Spreading our resources across too many priorities may divert our focus from our areas of greatest impact.
- A lack of clearly communicated priorities and programs in recent years may have diminished AFB's reputation as a leader and convener in the field.
- Continued operating deficits.
- Insufficiently implemented knowledge management systems and succession planning threatens knowledge continuity.



STRATEGIC GOALS

Goal 1: Generate Knowledge that Drives Change

AFB is committed to delivering consumable research findings and resources to the public, practitioners, and other stakeholders to improve the lives of blind individuals. AFB conducts research that drives systemic change by influencing policy, practice, and perception and supports the shared objectives of our strategic partners, paving the way toward AFB's vision for the future. We will strategically communicate our research plan and results to grow awareness and equip our partners and stakeholders with data and action plans to drive real change. At the onset of this strategic plan, our research focus areas are technology and transportation across all phases and aspects of life.

Goal 1 Strategies

- 1.1 Conduct annual review to define AFB's mission-focused research and public policy agendas.
- 1.2 Communicate AFB's research and policy agendas internally and externally to increase awareness and collaboration.
- 1.3 Establish and strengthen a coalition of partners to drive change through research and advocacy.
- 1.4 Deliver research findings and recommendations in a manner that can be easily consumed and applied by practitioners and the general public.
- 1.5 Equip stakeholders with accurate data on the blindness population.
- 1.6 Conduct fee-for-service research for organizations aligned with AFB's priorities.

Goal 1 Key Performance Indicators

1. Influence on federal policies, resulting in greater opportunity, access, self-sufficiency, choice, and independence for blind individuals.
2. Reach of AFB research.
3. Performance of the Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness (JVIB).
4. Interest in and utility of fee-for-service research.

"To understand is essential to progress.... America should also be in the vanguard, planting banyans of enlightened understanding of other peoples' history and evolution, their manner of living and their chances of future well-being. Only through the meeting of minds and hearts everywhere can the earth be blessed with true Civilization and the sun of its peace."

~ Helen Keller speech, while receiving an honorary degree from Harvard University, 1955 ~

Goal 2: Expand Possibilities through Workforce Programs and Community Engagement

AFB will serve as a trusted convener of coalitions, equipping organizations across sectors with the necessary knowledge, tools, and strategies to achieve disability inclusion and accessibility. AFB will continue to prepare members of the blindness community for rewarding careers and train technology professionals to fill the accessibility skills gap and serve as catalysts for change across industries. As an advisor to organizations, AFB will advocate for the needs of blind people, ensuring that products, services, and experiences are accessible and representative of the community.

Goal 2 Strategies

- 2.1 Continuously evaluate and enhance the impact of AFB events.
- 2.2 Explore opportunities to redesign an impactful and sustainable leadership development program.
- 2.3 Scale digital inclusion workforce development programs to increase program reach while finding operational cost efficiencies and achieving financial sustainability.
- 2.4 Increase marketability of workforce development programs to raise the profile of programs and increase revenue.
- 2.5 Position Client Services Program to expand upon and emphasize advisory work and service offerings, leveraging digital inclusion, research, marketing, and communications domain expertise.

Goal 2 Key Performance Indicators

- 1. Awareness of Workforce Programs.
- 2. Capacity and reach of Workforce Programs.
- 3. Growth of Client Services Program (includes advisory services and fee-for-service research).
- 4. Interest in AFB Leadership Conference.

"What do I consider a teacher should be? One who breathes life into knowledge so that it takes new form in progress and civilization.... Education not translated into terms of this collective experience is lacking in content and creative thinking."

~ Helen Keller's speech to the National Education Association, 1938 ~

Goal 3: Build a National Narrative on Blindness

AFB is committed to lead societal advancements that will provide blind individuals with equal opportunity to pursue the American Dream. Advancements in this area will rely heavily on perceptions of the needs and capabilities of blind individuals. We must evolve the way that our society views blindness in order for the necessary accommodations and accessibility to become an expected part of doing business across all sectors and industries.

Goal 3 Strategies

- 3.1 Unify and amplify the voices of organizations committed to improving the lives of blind individuals.
- 3.2 Create and distribute awareness campaigns that influence perceptions of blindness.
- 3.3 Launch AFB Studios to produce, distribute, and promote informative and engaging media.
- 3.4 Educate and motivate members of the blindness community.

Goal 3 Key Performance Indicators

- 1. Sustainable growth of our relationship map.
- 2. Expand the audience across all AFB channels.
- 3. Change in societal perceptions of blindness and the capabilities of blind people.

"The chief handicap of the blind is not blindness, but the attitude of seeing people towards them.... It is to educate the people to think intelligently, and therefore helpfully towards the blind, that I have undertaken this campaign. Oh my friends, the vision of better days for the blind cannot be fulfilled until you can put yourself in the place of a blind man or woman."

~ Helen Keller's speech in Washington D.C., advocating for AFB, 1925 ~

Goal 4: Foster a High-Performance Workplace

We are committed to building a skilled and engaged AFB workforce and Board of Trustees that embody our Core Values. We will continuously evaluate and adjust our processes, tools, systems, and project teams to enable us to efficiently and effectively collaborate, share knowledge, and reach our full potential to further AFB's mission.

Goal 4 Strategies

- 4.1 Foster a workplace culture that reflects AFB's Core Values.
- 4.2 Recruit candidates who represent the blind community and are committed to AFB's mission.
- 4.3 Provide training and development opportunities for staff to utilize tools effectively, achieve performance goals, and develop skills for career path progression.
- 4.4 Implement an organizational process and tools that promote collaboration and efficiency, including cross-organizational project coordination and planning.
- 4.5 Effectively recognize and reward outstanding performance.
- 4.6 Implement standard systems and applications across AFB.
- 4.7 Ensure an effective and engaged Board of Trustees.

Goal 4 Key Performance Indicators

- 1. Employee engagement and retention.
- 2. Vacancies filled with qualified candidates in a timely manner.
- 3. Formal employee recognition.
- 4. Access to career development opportunities.
- 5. Board effectiveness and trustee engagement.

*"We live by each other and for each other.
Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."*

~ From Helen Keller's and Anne Sullivan Macy's Vaudeville performance script ~

Goal 5: Achieve Financial Stability

Establish and implement a business model and resource development plan that supports the mission and vision of the American Foundation for the Blind.

Goal 5 Strategies

- 5.1 Integrate the Resource Development Assessment into daily practice.
- 5.2 Identify revenue streams across the organization.
- 5.3 Prioritize major gifts fundraising through a culture of philanthropy.
- 5.4 Evaluate and enhance the financial impact and sustainability of AFB.

Goal 5 Key Performance Indicators

- 1. Establish a culture of philanthropy.
- 2. Elevate revenue streams.
- 3. Financial impact and sustainability.

"To each one of us is given in some degree the power to create and distribute happiness, and that is about the best thing any one of us can do. There is no surer way to keep the fire of happiness burning in our own hearts than by sharing its brightness with others. I am wondering if some of you who are listening in tonight would not like to help me in my work for the blind of this country. We are just starting a nation-wide campaign to raise funds for the American Foundation for the Blind. The object is to assist all the sightless in a great many ways to become self-supporting and reasonably happy human beings."

~ Helen Keller radio speech soliciting funds for AFB, 1924 ~

PLANNING AND REPORTING PROCESS

The AFB Mission, Vision, and Strategic Goals provide direction and guidelines for all AFB activities and decision making throughout the duration of this Strategic Plan. This is a living plan, which means that the AFB senior leadership team (SLT) will continuously plan, monitor, and adjust strategies, initiatives, and programs in response to changes in the operating environment and emerging opportunities.

System and Soul (S2) Framework

AFB is implementing the System and Soul (S2) management framework and online platform in conjunction with the launch of the Strategic Plan. The S2 management framework will enable the SLT to maintain strategic focus on the Mission, create a roadmap toward the Vision for the future, clearly define near-term and long-term objectives to achieve the Strategic Goals, and hold one another accountable. The S2 platform provides the SLT with the ability to make and monitor assignments, keeping the performance of departments, teams, and staff members connected and aligned with the Strategic Plan.

Annual and Quarterly Planning and Reporting

AFB operates on a fiscal year calendar that begins on July 1st and ends on June 30th. Prior to the beginning of the fiscal year, the AFB SLT will establish annual objectives associated with each of the Strategic Goals. The SLT will present the annual performance plan, along with a proposed budget, to the Board of Trustees for review and approval.

The S2 online platform will play a key role in the quarterly planning and reporting process. At the start of each quarter, the SLT will establish quarterly objectives for each department and team to create more tangible steps to reaching the annual objectives. The S2 custom scoreboard will provide transparency into the performance of AFB at all levels. AFB's existing project planning and management and staff performance evaluation processes will be revised to further reinforce and complement S2 as part of our Goal 4 initiatives.

The SLT will deliver a quarterly KPI report to all staff and the Board of Trustees. At the end of the fiscal year, the SLT will present an Annual Report to the Board, highlighting significant achievements, progress toward the Strategic Goals, and areas for improvement or adjustment. AFB will report on its accomplishments and share upcoming goals and priorities annually at the AFB Leadership Conference.