

The Seeing Eye Strategic Plan

Executive Summary

Overview

This strategic plan sets the direction for The Seeing Eye and will frame the work of the Board, staff, and volunteers in the coming years. The plan was developed together by the staff Leadership Team and Board of Trustees, with input from the entire staff and some key alumni stakeholders. **The plan's central goal is to enable The Seeing Eye to adapt in a changing environment to stay on the cutting edge and leadership in guide dog schools.** Staff leadership will implement the plan each year as it develops its annual workplans and budgets, prioritizing for implementation key strategic initiatives outlined in this plan.

Building on our Past and Rising to the Challenges of the Future

The Seeing Eye is the oldest guide dog school in the world. Since 1929 The Seeing Eye has been selecting, breeding, and training dogs for lives of service, and carefully matching the dogs with individuals who are blind and visually impaired, teaching them to work together as a mutually supportive team. Since its founding The Seeing Eye has matched over 17,600 specially bred and trained Seeing Eye® dogs with blind and visually impaired men and women from across the United States and Canada. Its nearly 1700 currently active graduates come from all walks of life. They have learned how to handle, work with and care for their dogs at home, on the job, on public transportation, and in all public accommodations.

For nearly a century The Seeing Eye has been distinguished by the clarity of its purpose, excellence of its program, strength of its finances, and stability of its leadership. We built our reputation by setting and promoting best practices that have been emulated by several other guide dog schools and incorporated into international accreditation standards. Our breeding and canine veterinary programs have improved dog health outcomes and the data generated has fostered numerous research collaborations and catalyzed the application of the findings. Building on these strengths, we envision a future in which we leverage this accumulated knowledge and progress while adapting in a changing environment to stay on the cutting edge and leadership in guide dog schools.

The planning process validated the organization's commitment to continuing to evolve, while also staying true to our core mission, our organizational vision, and a culture infused with our core values:

Our Mission:

To enhance the independence, dignity, and self-confidence of people who are blind and visually impaired through the use of Seeing Eye® dogs.

Our Vision:

To be recognized for sustained excellence and continuous improvement as the best guide dog school to attend and to support, as a donor, volunteer, puppy raiser, or employee.

Our Values:

- **Mission Passion**
Our passion for the mission of The Seeing Eye gives each day purpose.
- **Stewardship**
We keep the trust of our constituents and protect their interests through responsible individual action and caring use of the organization's resources.
- **Teamwork and Collaboration**
We hold ourselves accountable for adding value as individuals, being supportive of our colleagues in their work, and working together to foster team success.
- **Respect for Others**
We treat others with the respect and dignity that we desire for ourselves. We do not discriminate. We maintain an inclusive workplace and program, embracing the ideals of equal treatment for all, without regard to race, religion, gender identity, socio-economic standing, disability status, or any other characteristic or group affiliation.
- **Integrity**
We are guided by principles of honesty, integrity, and high ethical conduct in all we do. We will always do what we believe is right.
- **Pursuit of Excellence**
We are committed to excellence now and in the future through a shared commitment to quality, timely responsiveness, and to ongoing improvement in every phase of our operations.

The Planning Process

The Seeing Eye applied scenario planning as the basis for this plan. Scenario thinking encourages an organization to challenge deeply held assumptions and to chart a clear path forward through difficult and uncertain times. Scenario creation is simply a tool for exploring possible futures. It uses early indicators seen in the present that may be borne out. No one scenario is exactly how the world will evolve, but the different possible futures reveal an amalgam of possible outcomes across which robust strategies common to all are seen to emerge. Rather than choosing one scenario and planning toward it, an organization plans around a set of scenarios that elevate the most critical uncertainties it needs to address. The strategies that work across this wide range of future possibilities are robust strategies that create a powerful and adaptive platform for the organization's strategic planning.

The core strategic questions associated with maximizing the organization’s potential toward our mission were used to determine the set of scenarios. Through collaborative workshops The Seeing Eye’s 2035 Scenarios were developed and then explored strategically.

We identified the following underlying core strategic questions:

How do we maximize our potential toward our mission?

- *How does our mission and/or methods need to evolve with the changing times?*
- *How do we maintain our leadership and potentially increase our impact?*
- *What are our priorities to ensure the organization’s financial wellbeing in perpetuity?*

In order to continue to maximize our potential toward our mission, The Seeing Eye must be positioned to evolve within our core mission - not change our mission. In that way we celebrate and build on our history of excellence as we turn to the future. In answering the above three questions, we identified five robust strategies:

The Five Robust Strategies

1. TECHNOLOGY

- ***Further leverage assistive technological advancements that help the students and the organization to enhance the guide dog partnership***
- ***Invest in organizational IT infrastructure and business process improvements and enhance data collection, accessibility, and analysis for strategic decision making***

2. STUDENTS

- ***Enhance our human-centric, high touch service to retain and attract a robust applicant pool of qualified and motivated students***

3. STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

- ***Attract, retain, and develop the best talent to sustain the promise of our brand and position as a leading guide dog school***

4. FINANCES

- ***Ensure adequate financial resources to sustain the delivery of our mission over the long-term***

5. BRAND

- ***Fully embrace, enhance, and differentiate our image, brand, and position***

From these we aligned a set of “core,” “supporting” and “foundational” strategies which together create a path for long-term success in challenging and uncertain times.

Relevance and Value of Guide Dogs: Will the relevance and value of guide dogs be increasing or decreasing in the future? How will this affect enrollment at The Seeing Eye?

Adaptability to Environmental Disruptors: Will society become increasingly adaptive to environmental disruptors such that its progress is evolving and steady or will its

response be erratic and weak?

The scenario set explores a wide range of drivers of change highly relevant to our mission and that could impact the blindness community. We considered some the following current trends that will shape our evolution as an organization:

Student Recruitment and Enrollment:

A small percentage of people who are blind or visually impaired choose to travel with the aid of a guide dog. Partnership with a dog requires training and a dog requires sufficient work and ongoing veterinary care. A certain degree of strength, mobility and determination is necessary for a handler to succeed with a guide. Guide dog mobility is simply not for everyone. It has always been necessary to market to the blindness community and to identify and educate potential constituents about the benefit of training with Seeing Eye dog. The nature of this challenge is evolving. Innovative recruitment, communication and advocacy channels will be necessary to reach new applicant populations.

Changing Blindness Demographics:

The blind population of the United States is changing. Greater occupational safety and medical advances reducing the number of otherwise healthy young people who become blind through injury or disease. There are fewer causes of neonatal blindness and more medical advances to mitigate congenital forms of blindness. The generally more sedentary lifestyle of adults reduces the independent mobility requirements of blind people. Advances in technology have increased telecommuting and therefore lessened the need for mobility. Blindness on the whole is becoming more an accompanying aspect of other illnesses or an age-related degenerative impairment of vision. Many of the people in these categories would not benefit from guide dog mobility. Medical advances such as corneal implants and gene-editing experiments to restore vision could have far-reaching implications. In addition, many states have reduced their services to blind and visually impaired individuals to the point that it is hard for them to acquire adequate mobility and rehabilitation training.

Advancing Technology:

Advances in vehicle and transportation technology hold both promise and peril for blind individuals. Silent and autonomous (self-driving) vehicles could impact the safety and navigation experience of the blindness community. On the other hand, smart cars may be able to sense and avoid pedestrians better. There is growing impact of assistive navigation technologies using remote sensing, global positioning, precise 3D imaging, artificial intelligence/machine learning. The fusion of camera and detection and ranging technology in easily accessible apps could aid navigation, object avoidance, and independent travel. Audible Pedestrian Signals (APS) at crosswalks can make streets safer. Conversely, if not used in a complementary fashion to guide dog handling (which requires situational awareness of one's surrounding environment and competent independent travel), such tech aids could be incompatible with safe guide dog use and many new and exciting assistive technologies have proven to be too expensive for the average visually impaired traveler to afford.

Work and Lifestyle Changes Resulting from the Pandemic:

A clear impact of COVID-19 is that work at home will be a trend for the longer term. This could reduce the demand for active daily guide dog use.

Societal Disability Awareness and Support:

Societal support for and understanding of disabilities should be on the increase, but much more education and training is needed in the general public, places of business, and in law enforcement as to the access rights of guide dog handlers.

Trends in Philanthropy:

With thousands of worthy charities and causes worldwide, there is an increasingly competitive philanthropic market, and many factors that will drive donor behavior and decisions about which charity to support. Human services charities are currently trending downward in percentage of the charitable dollar received. Social venture capital and “B Corporations” offer some private market alternatives to traditional charitable fundraising models.

The full set of drivers of change explored through the scenarios include:

Economy and Financial Markets	Requirement for/ relevance of Guide Dogs
Public / Funder Perception and Behavior	Environmental Disruptors
Mobility and Access, Sense of Place	Advances in Technology
Infrastructure and Design	Equity and Inclusion
Work/life Balance	Educational Models
Human and Canine Health	Animal Rights and Ethics

We explored the strategic implications of each of these scenarios individually. From this work, the Board and Leadership Team identified the robust strategies that worked well across the wide range of scenarios. These robust strategies are the basis for this Strategic Plan as they position our organization to be ready to adapt and act proactively in an and act proactively in an increasingly dynamic and uncertain environment.

Focusing the Robust Strategies for the Future of The Seeing Eye:

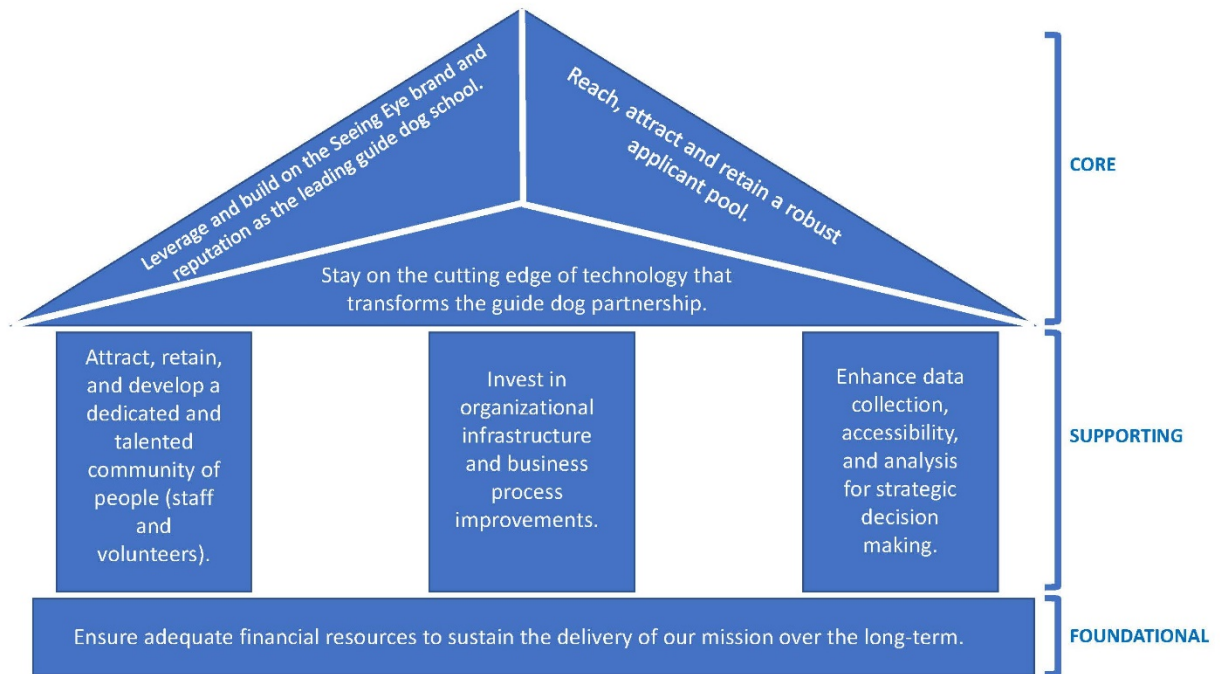
Core Strategies were identified as those strategies that are the strategic core and relate directly to our Strategic Plan goal: *adapting in a changing environment and staying on the cutting edge and leadership in guide dog schools.*

1. **ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY:** Stay on the cutting edge of technology that can be used to evolve, complement and transform the guide dog partnership. Within this – review customer/student service model to serve in the right way and at the right level.
2. **STUDENTS:** Reach, attract and retain a robust applicant pool.
3. **BRAND:** Leverage and build on the Seeing Eye brand and reputation as the leading guide dog school worldwide.

Supporting Strategies are important hygiene factors for our organization. These strategies support and enable the organization to successfully implement its core strategies.

1. **STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS:** Attract, retain, and develop a dedicated and talented community of people. This should focus on staff and volunteers, as well as graduate recruitment for staff positions.
2. **TECHNOLOGY INFRASTRUCTURE:** Invest in organizational IT infrastructure and business process improvements.
3. **DATA AND INFORMATION:** Enhance data collection, accessibility, and analysis for decision making in our programs, to support academic and research partnerships, and for comparative/competitive analysis of our program metrics.

Foundational Strategy pertains to our finances. Ensuring adequate resources to secure the sustainability of the organization over the long-term is the foundational strategy. It consists of 3 elements: growing the endowment; containing costs; expanding revenues.



An implementation plan creates a roadmap for realizing the robust strategies through prioritized and sequenced workplan actions.

Summary --The Path Forward

The Seeing Eye will reach its centennial milestone in 2029. If implemented in a coordinated fashion over the next few years, many of the initiatives in this Strategic Plan will create a thriving, modern, nimble, and adaptive organization that adeptly navigates the pace of change and disruptors in the world and turns them into opportunities. To successfully implement this plan, The Seeing Eye must meet the change challenges facing the organization to further build organizational excellence and distinctive leading capability in the following ways:

- investment in our people (both staff and volunteers);
- embrace new technology and research initiatives and sustain and optimize facilities;
- find creative new ways to diversify our funding streams;
- engage in new partnerships;
- expand our philanthropic activities and brand awareness;
- maintain continuous improvement;
- maintain and evolve our exceptional breeding program and distinctive training methodology;
- continue our focus on cost reduction and streamlining existing operational activities.