Perkins School for the Blind

GuideStar Nonprofit Profile Charting Impact Report * Last Updated on 03.26.2018

This report represents Perkins School for the Blind's responses to Charting Impact, a joint project of BBB Wise Giving Alliance, GuideStar USA Inc, and Independent Sector. Charting Impact uses five simple yet powerful questions to encourage strategic thinking and help organizations share concise information about their plans and progress toward impact.

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<td>175 North Beacon Street, Watertown, MA 02472</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.perkins.org/">http://www.perkins.org/</a></td>
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Mission:
The Perkins School for the Blind mission is to prepare children and young adults who are blind, deafblind or visually impaired, including those who have additional disabilities, with the education, confidence and skills they need to realize their potential.

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1. What are we aiming to accomplish?
Perkins School for the Blind is a progressive, multifaceted organization committed to improving the lives of people who are visually impaired. Since our founding in 1829, we have been a national and international leader and resource providing state-of-the-art education and services to infants, toddlers, children, youth and young adults who are blind, deafblind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities, their families and the professionals who serve them. More than 4.5 million children around the world are not in school simply because they are blind. In the United States, 75 percent of people who are blind are unemployed. In the near term, our goal is to help change this status quo by preparing students through academics and vocational training, by training educators, and by sharing our know-how with organizations that serve the blind community around the globe. Our ultimate goal is to provide children and young adults who are blind with the education, tools and skills they need to realize their potential. We strive for a world in which every person who is blind has the skills, opportunity and confidence to discover and fulfill his or her own potential.

2. What are our strategies for making this happen?
As stated above, our ultimate goal is to provide children and young adults who are blind with the education, tools and skills they need to realize their potential. To this end, we are currently focused on three important initiatives: transition to adult living, literacy and innovation. From independent living skills to vocational readiness, transition to adult living is a part of everything we do at Perkins School for the Blind, and is the foundation of the educational approaches we share with educators, professionals and families in the 67 countries we serve. We want to help individuals who are blind, deafblind or visually impaired become productive and engaged citizens. To this end, we customize education programs for every student according to their needs and abilities, seize every opportunity to prepare students for life beyond the classroom, and blend appropriate assistive technology into students’ daily living and learning habits—teaching them how to compensate for vision loss and function in a world designed for those with sight. We think of literacy as being able to read and write. For people who are blind or visually impaired, that concept has historically been synonymous with braille. But when you consider today’s rapid advances in technology, that definition inevitably falls short. That’s why we’ve committed to taking a fresh look at what literacy really means to people with disabilities today. We’re taking our questions to people living every day with blindness and visual impairment, to observe their needs first-hand and better understand how we can help. While braille will undoubtedly remain a vital tool in the portfolio of literacy solutions people use, we know that new research and data will help us build a deeper understanding of literacy in the digital age—and inspire our solutions for tomorrow. Innovation is key to our success—from assistive technology to online education to creative approaches to teaching. It’s our responsibility to stay connected with societal shifts and in touch with the rapid pace of changing technology. We want to better understand the needs of people today, and embrace the most promising ideas as we take steps to develop global, innovative solutions for tomorrow. Our insights begin with the individuals we serve, in the classroom and around the world. We’re also convening proven innovators from public and private sectors to ignite the discussion. By taking a fresh, human-centered approach to the challenges of the blind community, and by adopting new technologies, we will offer better products and services and reach a larger population.

3. What are our organization’s capabilities for doing this?
Our experience, expertise and commitment to serving people who are visually impaired are demonstrated through the work of Perkins School for the Blind’s five distinct lines of business that collaborate on local, national and global levels and work together every day to change what it means to be blind. Though their services may be specialized, each line of business is grounded in five key focus areas: education, accessibility engagement, community and empowerment. As the heart of the organization, Perkins School for the Blind serves approximately 200 students on campus and also operates as the headquarters for our Community Services programs, including itinerant services, independence courses for public school students, evaluations and assessments for communities, and training for professionals. Perkins International works to
4. How will we know if we're making progress?

Fundamental to our mission are the individual achievements made by our students every day. Once a student is admitted into one of our on-campus programs, an Individual Education Plan (IEP) is developed by an interdisciplinary team including members of the student's family. Annual goals in an IEP describe what the student will focus on and help guide instruction in the upcoming school year. Effective goals are specific, measurable and easily broken down into manageable steps to track progress throughout the year. As our students progress, their educational program changes to accommodate their age and ability level. Program success can be measured by individual student achievement on standardized tests and assessments, as well as progress towards goals and earning a graduation diploma or certificate of accomplishment. The newly-created role of Director of Graduate Services will further allow us to track our students’ progress after leaving Perkins. Perkins Outreach Short Courses, part of our Community Services programs, hears from former participants at key points in their lives such as graduation, weddings, children and new jobs. Reports and surveys are sent out after each Outreach Short Course is completed. Feedback from families, state agencies, teachers of the visually impaired and other school/agency personnel helps us to monitor effectiveness and develop new programs. As one of two state funded libraries serving people with disabilities in Massachusetts, the Perkins Library submits monthly reports to the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners. Programmatic success is also measured against the American Library Association Standards for Braille & Talking Book Libraries and annually set management goals. Each year our Training and Educational Resources program, in conjunction with Perkins eLearning, develops SMART goals that support our Strategic Plan. Progress toward meeting established benchmarks are reported quarterly. Our staff members conduct annual surveys with specific audience segments to solicit feedback and get suggestions for new topics and formats. Staff members also solicit feedback and evaluations from professionals who participate in face-to-face as well as online training. New offerings are peer reviewed as a regular part of the development process and attendance is monitored to gauge success. Perkins International measures the success of its programs based on their quality and long term sustainability. Our Regional Coordinators have developed a set of quality indicators for programs serving people who are blind with additional disabilities. These indicators measure both short term and long term success. This tool is used by implementing partners for the purposes of self-reflection and internal planning, and also by our staff as an evaluation tool. We use these indicators to assess the capacity of our partners in order to continually provide proper levels of technical assistance and support.

5. What have and haven't we accomplished so far?

Possibility. We have built our reputation on this guiding principle since 1829 when we opened our doors as the nation's first
chartered school for the blind, setting the stage for the inspirational stories of Anne Sullivan and Helen Keller. Since then we have continued to grow and innovate, adding programs for individuals of all ages and abilities and adapting and expanding technology available to those who are blind, deafblind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities. We have found new ways to inspire, teach and spread excitement about what is possible, and we have continued to seek out those in need around the globe. For over 180 years, dedicated educators, therapists and staff have worked tirelessly to give every student the tools necessary to become contributing, involved members of their communities regardless of their disability. Thanks to their efforts and the support of countless generous donors, today Perkins School for the Blind impacts the lives of more than a million individuals in 67 countries. It's not enough to be the oldest chartered school for the blind in the U.S. Our challenge is to stay relevant. We are always looking for new ways to get students out of the classroom and into the "real world" to put the skills they're learning to the test. That's why we have embarked on a real world curriculum of our own. The coursework requires research and reflection on some of the biggest challenges facing those we serve. Transition is the first, most pressing issue. Literacy is another. Transitioning to the real world means communicating with those around you. What do our students need to know? How can we prepare them? To find out, we are interviewing young adults who are fluent in today's digital mediums to understand how they process information in their daily routine, whether at home, work or school. This kind of knowledge will benefit not only students in the U.S., but thousands of children with multiple disabilities and visual impairment around the globe who are learning to read, write and communicate, thanks to our international partners. At the heart of all this is innovation. Tackling real-world challenges takes a willingness to revisit, reimagine and reinvent. That's why we are convening proven innovators from public and private sectors to ignite the discussion. We want to better understand the needs of people today, and embrace the most promising ideas as we take steps to develop global, innovative solutions for tomorrow.