



De Novo Center for Justice
and Healing

2022-2026 STRATEGIC PLAN

September 13, 2021

DE NOVO

CENTER FOR JUSTICE AND HEALING



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our strategic plan lays out the focus and priorities for De Novo Center for Justice and Healing in the coming five years. The plan is ambitious, client-centered, and advances a stronger, healthier, and more impactful organization. It is the result of a collaborative and inclusive planning process that engaged our staff, board, volunteers, clients, and many supporters and partners.

Our approach to our work is reflected in the values that we articulate in this plan. Driven by the core principles of human dignity and social justice, De Novo values:

- Compassionate Client-driven Services
- Interdisciplinary Practice
- Volunteerism
- Collaborative Partnerships
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Organizational Integrity
- Staff Well-Being
- Innovation

Weaving these values throughout our organization will support De Novo in realizing the vision to which we aspire: *New beginnings and systemic change through justice, healing, and community engagement.*

De Novo's role in making this vision a reality is described by our mission: *Client-driven integrated legal and mental health services to overcome the impacts of poverty, inequity, and trauma.*

Our strategic plan has four mutually reinforcing goals and related outcomes:

- 1. Strengthen our integrated model** – Interdisciplinary model + Volunteer model + Collaboration – to improve outcomes for our clients, staff, and community.
- 2. Expand the scope of our services and promote our expertise** to grow strategically to meet the emerging needs of our clients, organization, and community.
- 3. Nurture a committed, compassionate, and inclusive organization** to embody our values in all aspects of our organization and operations.
- 4. Achieve long-term financial security and resources to respond to a changing world** to ensure a sustainable financial model that supports our mission, vision, and values.

The following pages detail the process used to develop this plan and arrive at these goals, and the objectives and action steps that will be necessary to achieve them. Additional detail about the objectives and outcomes for each goal can be found on pages 7-8.

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

De Novo engaged in strategic planning in order to develop a shared sense of direction and a roadmap for the next five years that advances our recent growth and change, affirms who we are in the present and provides a bridge from our past to our future, and prepares us to respond to client needs, build on client strengths, and navigate an uncertain future.

Outcomes

Our strategic planning process is one that we are proud of, and, as a result, we have:

- A tangible plan that can be shared with and engages people internally and externally, includes concrete and achievable goals that allow for flexibility, and benefits clients
- Staff and board ownership of the plan and a stronger and healthier organization
- Clarity about where we are now and confidence to move forward
- Alignment – coherence, cohesiveness, and openness – across the organization
- A process for sharing and reviewing with staff and board periodically over time
- Deeper understanding of our strengths and weaknesses informed by our response to and lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic

Process

To realize our outcomes, we started our process with the formation of a Strategic Planning Committee that included staff from across the organization and board members. We hired a consultant to support the process, and we established a framework for our planning process to guide us. We engaged a cross-section of our constituents and stakeholders to elicit their perspectives on where we are as an organization and where we may go in the future; this included interviews and surveys with clients, staff, volunteers, board members, partners, funders, community leaders, and others. We shared the themes that emerged with staff and board, and gathered for a retreat to use that and other organizational data to generate strategic priorities and refresh our vision and mission.

Inspired by the energy and engagement at the retreat, the Strategic Planning Committee began to craft and refine five-year goals and our organizational values, while also revising the vision and mission. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the process paused, as we shifted our attention to responding virtually to the needs of clients while also supporting staff. When we resumed the planning process in late 2020, we reflected on lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, and then picked up with refining our key components. We met with staff and board in early 2021 to share our progress and elicit their feedback, and then integrated their ideas into this final iteration of our five-year plan.

ORGANIZATION PROFILE AND HISTORY

De Novo was founded in 1970 by Dr. Joseph H. Brenner, a psychiatrist and social justice advocate who believed that all people should have access to justice and healing, no matter their economic status. From its inception, De Novo was envisioned as an organization of volunteers, leveraging the donated services of lawyers, social workers, and mental health professionals to improve the lives of vulnerable community members.

Today, De Novo is the only core legal services agency in Massachusetts that provides both legal and mental health services, and our counseling program is among only a few in the region serving adults without insurance or who cannot afford co-pays. De Novo provides legal help in the areas of housing and homelessness prevention, immigration law, domestic violence/family law, and disability benefits. Our mental health and case management services help clients cope with the emotional impact of trauma while focusing on empowerment, resilience, and autonomy. Through strategic partnerships, clients are supported by a large network of community providers. Our integrated model of service means clients not only receive effective legal assistance, but they are also better able to navigate the enormous struggles they face.

The past decade at De Novo is marked by significant growth, with our staff size and budget increasing two-fold. We strengthened and built new community partnerships and expanded our geographic reach. De Novo underwent a major relocation and physical expansion in 2017—the first in its history. The organization rebranded, announcing its new name and visual identity in 2019. We took challenges in stride as our work and community transformed, by intention and in ways that we did not anticipate.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have an unprecedented impact on our clients and the communities we serve. De Novo's work has always centered on racial equity and social justice, and the current crisis has further focused our efforts to advocate for people who are marginalized and underserved. In this tremendously challenging time, De Novo is innovating and creating new ways to protect, advocate on behalf of, and act as an ally to our clients.

GUIDING IDEAS: VISION, MISSION, AND VALUES

Our Vision

New beginnings and systemic change through justice, healing, and community engagement

Our Mission

Client-driven integrated legal and mental health services to overcome the impacts of poverty, inequity, and trauma

Our Values

Driven by the core principles of human dignity and social justice, De Novo values:

- **Compassionate Client-driven Services**
De Novo's trauma-informed and strengths-based approach creates a safe and welcoming environment, promotes empowerment and delivers high-quality services to respond to our clients' needs.
- **Interdisciplinary Practice**
De Novo's integrative and interdisciplinary approach enables us to provide holistic healing in the pursuit of justice.
- **Volunteerism**
De Novo's volunteers are integral members of the De Novo team and agents of systemic change.
- **Collaborative Partnerships**
De Novo fosters partnerships with external organizations in order to better serve our clients and the community.
- **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**
De Novo strives to create a diverse, equitable, inclusive and safe environment that welcomes, encourages, and values everyone's contributions, and fosters an exchange of ideas and mutual learning.
- **Organizational Integrity**
De Novo is committed to honesty, integrity, and transparency as essential elements of a successful and ethical organization.
- **Staff Well-Being**
De Novo provides a thriving and nurturing work environment, a culture of respect, open communication, and just compensation and benefits to support quality of life and opportunities for growth.
- **Innovation**
De Novo values flexibility and creativity in improving services, enhancing staff well-being, and identifying and addressing emerging needs.

STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

To realize our outcomes, we prioritized a high level of engagement with the many people that enable us to do our vital work. We had multiple touchpoints with our full complement of staff and board members, including interviews, surveys, and facilitated discussions at various staff and board meetings. Our Committee members also served as ambassadors to their colleagues throughout our process.

We also engaged our many partners and supporters, and reviewed and integrated feedback provided through:

- Surveys from 20 volunteers
- Surveys from 36 clients
- Interviews with 23 key informants that included representation from funders, donors, service providers, partners (community, university, law firms), and government

We are grateful for our clients, staff, volunteers, board, partners, and supporters and the myriad ways they contributed to this plan.

STRATEGIC ISSUES

In developing this plan, the Committee set out to respond to key strategic questions facing the organization, including:

- Assessing current programs and exploring future directions and possibilities by deepening our understanding of who our clients are now and may be in the future, identifying and staying attuned to new and emergent needs, and deepening our understanding of our community partners now and in the future
- Exploring potential areas of growth and expansion, with consideration of geographic reach and breadth of activities, while also identifying our limits
- Assessing capacities and needs of staff, volunteers, and board, including best practices for recruiting, training, supervision, support, diversity, and compensation for staff, and tenure for board members
- Broadening our funding base, increasing current funding levels, and strengthening financial management
- Assessing and understanding current organizational structure and infrastructure and exploring what may be needed to effectively meet our mission and respond to uncertainty and change

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND OUTCOMES

Goal 1: Strengthen our integrated model

- Objective 1.1: Define, evaluate, and strengthen each component of our model:
 - A. Interdisciplinary model, focusing on developing a shared understanding and completing an evaluation
 - B. Volunteer model, focusing on developing a shared understanding and establishing best practices across the organization
 - C. Collaborations with partner organizations, focusing on interdisciplinary services

Outcome: De Novo's integrated model (Interdisciplinary model + Volunteer model + Collaboration) improves outcomes for our clients, staff, and community.

- A. Interdisciplinary model
 - Increased interdisciplinary collaboration across the organization;
 - Increased client access to ID services;
 - Improved client outcomes.
- B. Volunteer model
 - Increased use of volunteers in all practice areas;
 - Increase in the number of clients served;
 - Increased retention of volunteers;
 - Increased diversity of volunteers.
- C. Collaboration with interdisciplinary focus
 - Increased number of collaborative partnerships;
 - Increased client access to community providers;
 - Increased client access to holistic/wrap-around services.

Goal 2: Expand the scope of our services and promote our expertise

- Objective 2.1: Identify gaps, solidify and strategically strengthen/grow our services and expertise within and across our existing programs and units—mental health services, legal services, social support services, and organizational infrastructure
- Objective 2.2: Strengthen our capacity to respond to emerging needs with flexibility and creativity
- Objective 2.3: Disseminate our model
- Objective 2.4: Explore the feasibility of establishing impact advocacy as one of De Novo's areas of expertise
- Objective 2.5: Systematically assess and strengthen organizational infrastructure and technology to meet the current and future needs of the organization

Outcome: De Novo will grow strategically to meet the emerging needs of our clients, organization, and community.

- Increased capacity to meet the range of client needs (either internally or through partners)
- Effectively disseminate our model
- Infrastructure and technology are effectively meeting organizational needs

Goal 3: Nurture a committed, compassionate, and inclusive organization

- Objective 3.1: Advance an integrated, compassionate organization in which our values are the touchstone for the way we work, communicate, and interact internally and externally
- Objective 3.2: Be a diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization
- Objective 3.3: Provide and promote professional development opportunities for staff, volunteers, and board to improve job performance and satisfaction and develop future leaders inside and outside the organization
- Objective 3.4: Ensure that compensation and benefits are comprehensive, meet people's needs, help people thrive in their work, and enhance their quality of life
- Objective 3.5: Implement organization-wide coverage and succession plan

Outcome: De Novo's values are embodied in all aspects of our organization and operations

- Clients, staff, volunteers, and board experience De Novo as diverse, equitable, inclusive, welcoming, and safe
- Recruit and retain staff, volunteers, and board members who are committed to our mission, integrated model, and values

Goal 4: Achieve long-term financial security and resources to respond to a changing world

- Objective 4.1: Grow year-over-year revenue [i.e. cash plus donated goods and services] to strengthen our financial position and support implementation of goals 1, 2, and 3
- Objective 4.2: Build financial resilience to respond effectively to change and adapt to new and hard-to-predict circumstances while staying true to mission
- Objective 4.3: Promote a transparent, accountable, and inclusive budget and fund development process

Outcome: De Novo has a sustainable financial model that supports our mission, vision, and values

- Increased revenue from new sources resulting in enhanced reserves and improved responsiveness to community needs

- Improved donor satisfaction, retention, and performance
- Increased involvement of and support from current and alumni volunteers
- Improved ability to manage change and adapt to emerging opportunities and challenges
- Increased communication with staff regarding De Novo's financials

IMPLEMENTATION AND ACTION PLANS

We have identified key actions to meet each objective over the next five years, and key people (roles and individuals), teams, and/or units across the organization that may lead or be involved in implementation given their existing focus on, or proximity to, a particular item. We will assign responsibility for advancing these key actions to existing teams where feasible. And, as necessary, we will create new task-specific groups, inviting participation from staff across the organization with an equity focus, and include board members, volunteers, clients, and/or partners as makes sense for a specific objective or action. Our implementation process will be open, engaging, and inclusive.

For year 1 (2022), we anticipate key actions will likely include the following:

Goal 1: Strengthen our integrated model

- Codify and promote shared understanding of each part of our integrated model (interdisciplinary model, volunteer model, and collaborations)

Goal 2: Expand the scope of our services and promote our expertise

- Establish quarterly meetings to discuss emerging need within each unit and process for reporting trends and emerging needs to the Board if appropriate
- Assess infrastructure (including technology and physical space) and space needs of the organization and related trends that may be relevant

Goal 3: Nurture a committed, compassionate, and inclusive organization

- Foster and incorporate De Novo's values across all operations, including recruitment, selection, orientation, and evaluation processes of staff, volunteers and board members
- Advance our commitment to being diverse, equitable and inclusive:
 - Hiring a consultant
 - Developing a recruiting, interview and selection process for staff, volunteers and board members that is reflective of this commitment
 - Expanding opportunities for volunteers and Board members to be involved with DEI initiatives and the work of the Diversity Council

- Establishing a Board standing committee on DEI issues
- Develop a comprehensive orientation process and materials for new staff, volunteers and board members
- Establish organization-wide goals for professional development for staff, volunteers and board members, and develop an individualized professional development plan for each staff and volunteer, and an individualized board participation plan for each board member
- Consulting/ surveying staff and gathering relevant information from comparable organizations as we work to ensure that compensation and benefits are comprehensive, meet people's needs, and help people thrive in their work

Goal 4: Achieve long-term financial security and resources to respond to a changing world

- Continually assess and determine appropriate balance between existing revenue streams (foundations, government contracts, individual donors, and donated services) and explore opportunities for growth within each stream, including beginning to develop approaches to donor stewardship and engagement that enhance the donor experience and inspire deeper loyalty among new and existing supporters
- Further expand the effectiveness and capacity of development and finance to meet the evolving revenue needs of the organization
- Conduct an analysis of all revenue and expenses to ensure the budget, revenue model, and staff structure are aligned with the mission and strategic priorities
- Develop and implement practices that foster regular information exchange, collaboration, and engagement in resource development efforts with board, staff, and volunteers

MONITORING AND EVALUATING IMPLEMENTATION

As we implement this plan, we will monitor and assess our outcomes to make sure that we are achieving what we set out to do and aligning our actions with our values. This includes:

- Ensuring that we have the means to monitor/ track each outcome
- Identifying who is responsible for monitoring/ tracking and when that will happen
- Analyzing the changes are we noticing (and not noticing) in each outcome, and assessing whether these are the changes we intended and want
- Reflecting on why we are or are not realizing the changes that we intended and want, and what we should keep doing similarly and differently

Please see Section 7 for the full set of outcomes.

CONCLUSION

We are excited about the vital impact De Novo will continue to make in the years ahead. Our strategic plan is intended to be a living document that guides and supports De Novo's actions and decisions over the next five years. Our ability to understand and respond to emerging needs of our clients has been and will remain an essential part of our organization. We are committed to a regular process of review that honors the integrity of this plan while maintaining flexibility and responsiveness. As circumstances change, staff, management, and board will conduct periodic reviews of De Novo's progress toward our goals and objectives, review key indicators, and refine, redirect, and adjust our approach to implementation as necessary.

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We are grateful to the many people who contributed to this plan.

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