

STRATEGIC PLAN

OVERVIEW

2023-2024

Our Dual Mission

To provide free legal services to low-income seniors and persons with disabilities who reside in Chicago and suburban Cook County, Illinois.

To foster the spirit of pro bono service throughout the Chicago and Cook County legal communities.



Center for Disability
& Elder Law

CORE VALUES - THE "CDEL DNA"

➤ **SHARED COMMITMENT TO EQUITY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL**

Our focus on seniors and people with disabilities is rooted in the recognition that these groups are specifically vulnerable to inequities and injustices. We work with the common purpose of solving the legal needs of our clients and creating an organization that is conducive to people of all experiences, abilities, and backgrounds across our programs and within our organization.

➤ **COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP AND VISIBILITY**

We best serve our clients by making our services easy to access, visible, and free. Our community partnerships are core to connecting with our clients, better understanding their needs, and serving people in familiar, affirming, and trusted spaces. We are committed to strengthening these partnerships and expanding them within social service and other pro bono spaces in order to increase effectiveness in removing barriers to legal assistance.

➤ **NOURISH THE SPIRIT AND PROMISE OF VOLUNTEERISM**

We recruit and connect a diverse network of volunteers who are guided by a passion for public service and are inspired and driven to help positively transform communities and the law by supporting people in need of legal assistance. We recognize and appreciate the reciprocal value of our client/community relationships – affording our volunteers exposure to people, practice areas, communities, and stories they may not otherwise encounter – and the development of a more connected society.

➤ **CLIENT-CENTRIC COLLABORATION AND EMPOWERMENT**

We take time to fully assess and understand the needs of our clients and customize the relevant information, tools, and services to promote safety, maximize trustworthiness, and equip them to make decisions and take actions that are a best fit for their lives. Approaching our work with care, compassion, and empathy is essential to its effectiveness. We are committed to CDEL clients, staff, volunteers, and Board members working together, in mutually satisfying and autonomous ways, to realize the outcomes clients determine matter most.

➤ **SOLUTIONS FUELED BY KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCE, AND INNOVATION**

We foster a culture of continuous learning, development and creative endeavor that capitalizes on the diverse skills, perspectives, and capacities of people in our organization. We are committed to the ongoing evaluation of current programs – and innovating and funding new models of service delivery and volunteer engagement that are responsive to the needs of our clients.

➤ **SUSTAINABLE IMPACT FOR INDIVIDUALS, COMMUNITIES, AND SOCIETY**

Our work positively impacts the individual lives of our clients – and we recognize that our client communities deserve more equitable and just systems. We are committed to identifying and challenging structures and practices that continually harm our clients and contributing to systemic change.

OPPORTUNITY AREAS

MAKE CDEL AND ITS PROGRAMS MORE VISIBLE IN COOK COUNTY AND BEYOND

- Become better storytellers about our positive impact on the lives of the people and communities we serve, including using new digital mediums to amplify our voice.
- Capitalize on team member and volunteer expertise and experience by actively seeking local and national opportunities for speaking engagements and guest articles.
- Leverage relationships with our partner communities to advertise within hyper local markets and for the cross-promotion of events.
- Utilize the 40th Anniversary to highlight our impact, re-connect with our support network, and forge new connections with others aligned with and committed to our mission and desired results.

PROVIDE MORE ROBUST AND EXPANSIVE SERVICES TO CDEL'S CLIENTELE

- Develop an evaluation framework to support data-based decision-making for continuous program improvement, equitable program innovation, and an assessment of the impact of our investment.
- Expand our capacity to serve non-English speaking individuals by identifying the most needed languages in targeted communities and adding supports for translation.
- Make available more internal social service supports to address clients' complex needs.
- Strengthen connection with our top communities by being more present and active in community-initiated efforts and activities.
- Utilize needs assessments to identify opportunities for us to expand our work with the disability community and ensure fidelity to our value for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

STRENGTHEN CDEL'S PROGRAMS AND ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH

- Budget for future needs and growth, including increasing our allocation for fund development.
- Ensure employee compensation is competitive for recruitment and retention of a talented team.
- Foster increased volunteerism within the legal community by enhancing our intern program, relationships with pro bono volunteers, and a focus on the development of new connections.
- Increase unrestricted gifts by focusing on major gifts from individuals and corporations.
- Recruit diverse individuals to our Staff and Boards to broaden the perspectives, skillsets, and experience we can bring to understanding and meeting the legal needs of our clients.

USE CDEL'S INFLUENCE TO IMPACT SYSTEMIC CHANGE

- Allocate staff time and resources for focused policy work.
- Become more active in policy initiatives that directly relate to our mission and enable us to capitalize on our network connections and organizational strengths.
- Support community initiatives by offering our expertise and resources to aligned goals.
- Use our presence in communities to deepen our understanding of the systemic challenges clients face and the policy changes and innovations necessary to overcome those barriers.

CDEL FLYWHEEL

In co-creating our strategic blueprint, CDEL stakeholders shed light on the underlying architecture of our current success as an organization – the foundational elements that we want to continue to sustain, renew, and extend as we move into our future.

We're labeling this architecture "our flywheel". It makes clear the intersection of what we're passionate about, best at, and what drives others to give of their time and resources to partner with us in doing this work.

