



Oregon
Public
Defense
Commission



Oregon Public Defense Commission

STRATEGIC PLAN

2025-2031

ADOPTED

WELCOME

The Oregon Public Defense Commission (OPDC) was established to ensure that every individual, regardless of their financial situation, has access to quality legal representation. Our vision is rooted in the belief that justice should be equitable and accessible to all, and guided by the American Bar Association's Ten Principles of a Public Defense Delivery System. In recent years, we have faced significant challenges, including a shortage of public defense attorneys and the need for modernized systems and processes. These challenges have underscored the urgency of our work and the necessity for a comprehensive strategic plan to guide the next six years.

As we embark on a transformative journey this strategic plan is not just a blueprint for the Agency; it is a commitment to the community and a roadmap to enhance the quality of public defense services across Oregon.

This strategic plan outlines our objectives and initiatives aimed at addressing the public defender shortage, improving operational efficiency, and fostering a culture of excellence within the Agency. It serves as a guiding framework for our efforts to expand our workforce, enhance support for our providers, and implement innovative solutions that meet the evolving needs of our clients.

Our vision for the next six years is clear: we aspire to build a public defense system that not only meets the immediate needs of those we serve but also anticipates future challenges. We aim to create an environment of trust, respect, and inclusivity, ensuring that our Agency reflects the diverse communities of Oregon.

Jennifer Nash
Commission Chair

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Alton Harvey, Jr.
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Robert Harris
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Commission Member

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

VISION

OPDC is a guardian of the legal rights and interests of public defense clients and a champion for effective public defense services.

MISSION

Our mission is to continually enhance the statewide public defense system to deliver highly skilled, independent, timely, and client-focused representation to eligible persons.

VALUES

Our values are the guiding principles that shape the behavior and actions of the Agency, defining our culture and character. These values promote consistency and integrity in how we treat one another, and the communities we serve.

As an organization, we are:

- Client-Centered
- Committed to Excellence
- Effective
- Diverse and Inclusive
- Compassionate
- Adaptive

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

GOAL 1: END THE UNREPRESENTED PERSONS CRISIS

Attract, recruit, and retain highly qualified, diverse, and dedicated public defenders and non-attorney case support personnel to ensure that every client receives effective and compassionate legal representation.



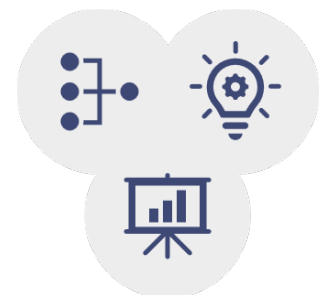
GOAL 2: IMPROVE PROVIDER RELATIONSHIPS

Strengthen our relationships with our providers by fostering a collaborative environment that promotes open communication, mutual respect, and shared objectives.



GOAL 3: CULTIVATE OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Streamline our processes, improve efficiency, and foster a culture of continuous improvement by leveraging technology, investing in staff development, and implementing robust performance metrics, with a strong commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.



GOAL 4: FINALIZE INTEGRATION WITH THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Successfully complete transition activities to move operations to the Executive Branch while maintaining our commitment to excellence and client-centered service.



GOAL 1: END THE UNREPRESENTED PERSONS CRISIS

Attract, recruit, and retain highly qualified, diverse, and dedicated public defenders and non-attorney case support personnel to ensure that every client receives effective and compassionate legal representation.



Objective A: Implement recommendations outlined in the Six Year Plan to Reduce the Public Defender Deficiency, expanding our workforce and ensuring that public defense service providers have the necessary support to represent clients effectively.

- Secure additional funding proposed in the Six-Year Plan to enable the agency to engage the needed public defense service providers, including attorneys, case support personnel, and OPDC staff, to end the unrepresented persons crisis.
- Increase the public defense provider base by recruiting both criminal and juvenile defense attorneys, with a specific focus on increasing the diversity of applicants through targeted outreach of underrepresented communities.
 - Recruit approximately 80 attorneys per year to reach the total needed 980 full-time attorneys to eliminate the Adult Criminal attorney deficiency by 2031.
 - Recruit approximately 50 attorneys per year to eliminate the Juvenile attorney deficiency by 2031.
- Recruit proportionate case support personnel—such as paralegals, investigators, social workers, case managers, interpreters, and administrative personnel—to help meet caseload demands, strengthen the pipeline of professionals entering public defense service, and enable the Agency to better meet its diverse client needs.
- Implement targeted recruitment strategies that incorporate diversity and equity best practices to increase access to the public defense profession through alternative education and career paths, like law school-to-public-defense pipelines, loan forgiveness opportunities, and programs to broaden the labor market and attract lawyers across the state.
- Pursue alternative interventions aimed at reducing the public defender deficit, such use of diversion plans, and advocate for initiatives such as decriminalizing low-level non-violent misdemeanor crimes and repealing certain parts of mandatory minimum sentencing laws that are known to impact social justice and equity across the state.

- Over six years, incrementally reduce annual attorney workload hours to achieve the adopted workload standard of 1,578 case-specific hours per year for full-time public defense attorneys.
 - Strengthen caseload monitoring to ensure that workload expectations and standards are consistently communicated and maintained for all public defense providers.
- Expand the Statewide Public Defender Trial Office to enhance equitable service delivery by increasing access to legal representation for underserved populations, ensuring that all individuals receive fair and adequate defense in a timely manner and contributing to reductions in the unrepresented persons crisis.
- Continue to conduct regular economic surveys in alignment with the contract renewal process to assess hourly rates for all contracted individuals providing public defense services.
 - Regularly update hourly rates to ensure that compensation supports the Agency's recruitment and retention strategies.
 - Regularly review payment practices to ensure equitable compensation for public defense service providers.

Objective B: As outlined in Senate Bill 337, transition the Public Defense Service Delivery Model and develop the required standards, training, data collection, and oversight.

- Work with the public defense community and relevant state agency partners throughout the service delivery transition to develop, review, and launch each component of the program including performance standards and monitoring, selection criteria, case assignment, mentoring, training, and recognition.
- Convene a diverse working group of individuals from various backgrounds, including public defenders and community representatives, to bring an equity lens into the new Public Defense Service Delivery Model by identifying barriers faced by unrepresented individuals in the criminal justice system and proposing targeted strategies to address disparities.
- Provide regular reports on the status of each component of the program to enhance transparency.
- Launch the Assigned Counsel Panel Program and continuously monitor the program to identify areas for ongoing improvement and its impact on the public defender shortage.
 - Create a process to track opportunities for improvement that are identified through monitoring and develop a process to implement updates on an ongoing basis.

- Conduct a comprehensive review of provider contracts on the established cycle to ensure that the defined terms, compensation, and standards contribute to effective service delivery and support recruitment and retention efforts.
 - Perform robust provider engagement that gathers feedback from diverse geographies and demographics throughout the process to improve outcomes.

Objective C: Collaborate with regional public defense office personnel to proactively identify areas across the state where there is a current or potential future shortage of public defenders and develop a strategy to address needs.

- Conduct a comprehensive analysis of public defender distribution across the state, including retirement projections, to inform targeted interventions that enhance equitable service delivery and ensure that public defense services meet the diverse needs of individuals.
- Conduct needs assessments in underserved areas to identify specific challenges and resource gaps.
- Work with the provider advisory committee to develop recommendations on how to best manage shortages regionally.

Objective D: Build partnerships with community groups and state agencies involved in wraparound social services to strengthen the network of resources available to clients.

- Develop a list of primary partners—including community groups and state agencies—that commonly provide wraparound services that are used to support clients. Establish collaborative partnerships with community organizations that focus on addressing systemic inequities by identifying and engaging local nonprofits and advocacy groups with a proven track record in supporting marginalized populations.
- Assign Agency resources to develop relationships with key community groups and state agencies aimed at creating opportunities for collaboration.
- Identify partnership goals and share resources in collaboration with these primary partners that focus on resource sharing aimed at enhancing services for under-resourced communities, ensuring that collaborative efforts lead to tangible improvements in access and support.
 - Develop equity metrics to assess the effectiveness of partnerships in reaching and supporting under-resourced communities.

Goal #1 Key Performance Indicators

- Public defender deficiency ratio
- Provider diversity metrics

- Ratio of case support personnel (e.g., paralegals, investigators) to public defense attorneys
- Workload ratios of public defense providers compared to established standards
- Regional needs assessment report including initiatives to address shortages
- Biennial hourly rate economic survey
- Review of caseload standards in 2028

GOAL 2: IMPROVE PROVIDER RELATIONSHIPS

Strengthen our relationships with our providers by fostering a collaborative environment that promotes open communication, mutual respect, and shared objectives.



Objective A: Develop a communication strategy to share information with providers and solicit their feedback.

- Compile a comprehensive list of all existing communication materials, including newsletters, emails, reports, and digital content used to share information with public defense service providers.
- Engage providers to gather feedback on current communication practices identifying what is working well, opportunities for improvement, and recommendations for new or alternative practices.
- Update communication strategies based on feedback, focusing on opportunities to enhance accessibility (e.g., translations, alternative formats).
- Conduct regular provider surveys and/or focus groups to promote engagement and solicit input on important topics.
 - Create dashboards to communicate engagement results, trends, and important data.

Objective B: Develop an effective system to prioritize and address issues raised by providers.

- Review and update complaint reporting mechanisms to establish clear and inclusive channels for providers to report issues and concerns.
- Develop clear criteria for prioritizing issues based on urgency, impact on service delivery, legal implications, and the number of providers affected.
- Implement a tracking system for reported issues.
- Share outcomes of addressed issues with providers to demonstrate the Agency's commitment to resolving concerns.
- Periodically assess and refine the channels providers use to report issues to ensure they are inclusive and accessible to all. Solicit feedback on these channels to identify areas for improvement.

Objective C: Enhance support for providers and promote culturally competent practices.

- Perform a comprehensive assessment to identify barriers faced by providers, including public defenders and non-attorney case support personnel as well as underrepresented individuals. Gather input through surveys, focus groups, and interviews to understand unique challenges and support needs.
- Update support programs specifically designed for providers, addressing the barriers identified in the needs assessment. This may include mentorship opportunities, networking events, and resource allocation to ensure equitable access to support.
- Partner with the Oregon Criminal Defense Lawyers Association and other training providers to review training requirements for all providers, focusing on the importance of understanding and responding to the diverse backgrounds and needs of clients to equip providers with the skills necessary to deliver culturally sensitive services.

Objective D: Develop a meaningful process to recognize exceptional performance.

- Establish clear and specific criteria for what is considered exceptional performance within the profession, considering both attorneys and non-attorneys.
 - Involve contractors, other awarding entities, and employees, among others, in discussions to gather input on recognition methods and criteria.
- Create a structured program, initiative, or partnership (e.g., awards, public acknowledgments) to celebrate exceptional performance.
 - Consider the evaluation, selection, and award processes, needed personnel, and needed technology to effectively implement an awards program.
- Clearly communicate the recognition process, criteria, and programs to ensure transparency and understanding.

Goal #2 Key Performance Indicators

- Percentage change in providers participating in surveys or focus groups
- Provider feedback rating with disaggregated demographic data
- Open rate or engagement rate for digital communication
- Issue tracking metrics
- Recognition program established

GOAL 3: CULTIVATE OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Streamline our processes, improve efficiency, and foster a culture of continuous improvement by leveraging technology, investing in staff development, and implementing robust performance metrics, with a strong commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.



Objective A: Initiate activities focused on building a strong workplace culture that promotes trust, respect, equity, and employee well-being.

- Engage employees in focus groups that represent all functions and levels within the Agency to assess current workplace culture, define the criteria of what constitutes good workplace culture, and understand the root cause of existing gaps.
- Develop a plan including targeted initiatives and success metrics to evaluate improvements to workplace culture.
- Provide training for leaders and managers on effective communication, conflict resolution, and fostering a positive work environment that is inclusive and equitable for all staff.
- Implement equitable employee recognition programs to celebrate achievements and milestones.
- Create opportunities for peer-to-peer recognition to foster a sense of community and appreciation.
- Ensure all onboarded staff are introduced to the Agency's values and workplace behavior expectations.
- Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of culture improvement initiatives through follow-up surveys and feedback sessions, making adjustments as necessary.

Objective B: Review and update internal communication processes (including the method, frequency, audience, and technology) to improve transparency and keep people informed of important work or changes.

- Gather feedback from staff on the effectiveness of existing internal communication practices including technology, frequency, messaging, and means to identify gaps and areas for improvement.

- Create a communication strategy that outlines goals, audiences, key messages, communication channels, and frequency of updates.
- Explore and implement modern communication tools that facilitate efficient information sharing that is accessible to all staff.
- Regularly assess the effectiveness of communication processes.

Objective C: Implement a comprehensive staff development program that includes training and skill enhancement to foster a culture of excellence.

- Evaluate the effectiveness and equity of the current employee development programs, policies, procedures, and practices considering the impacts of transitioning to the Executive Branch. Determine what is working well and where improvements are needed.
- Establish clear objectives for an updated staff development program that aligns with organizational goals and employee career aspirations.
 - Develop a structured curriculum that includes a variety of training methods (e.g., workshops, online courses, mentorship) tailored to different learning styles to enhance inclusion.
 - Create a training calendar that outlines when and where training sessions will take place, ensuring accessibility for all staff.
- Install the needed resources to implement updates to the employee development framework, ensuring that diversity, equity, and inclusion are core components of all training and development initiatives.
 - Offer follow-up resources, such as coaching or additional materials, to reinforce learning and encourage skill application in the workplace.
- Establish metrics to assess the impact of the training on employee performance and satisfaction, gathering feedback for continuous improvement.

Objective D: Develop and operationalize an Agency-specific Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) plan incorporating all the strategies of the statewide DEI Action Plan complete with goals and timelines.

- Identify champions and early advocates within the Agency to lead planning.
- Engage Agency staff, providers, and clients to identify DEI goals for the Agency.
- Develop a data-informed 3- to 5-year racial equity plan and share the plan with the state's Office of Cultural Exchange.
- Set a realistic timeline for completing the plan, including milestones for expected outcomes.

Objective E: Complete the objectives outlined in the Remediation Plan addressing necessary updates to the Agency's policies, procedures, technology, and staffing strategy.

- Develop policies and procedures for all new initiatives. Ensure they are aligned with the updates to policies and procedures as part of the Executive Branch transition.
- Evaluate and modernize systems and processes related to case management, timekeeping, and billing through the Financial Case Management System (FCMS) project.
- Review positions and ensure they align with classification and compensation standards to promote equity.
- Review, develop, and update the employee onboarding process.
- Develop a process to ensure job descriptions are up to date.
 - Identify opportunities to make updates that avoid screening out qualified applicants by focusing on essential skills and competencies, avoiding unnecessary qualifications, clearly defining the essential functions of the role, and including potential accommodations for individuals with disabilities when listing physical requirements.

Objective F: Improve the Compliance, Audit, and Performance (CAP) program to help strengthen the Agency's program management, performance, and oversight.

- Upon completion of the Agency's DEI Action Plan, review, update, and finalize an Audit and Accountability plan.
 - Incorporate DEI considerations into regular compliance checks, ensuring that all practices, policies, and services provided are accessible, fair, and free from bias.
- Develop and finalize program design, including roles and responsibilities, organizational charts, and goals.
- Provide DEI-specific training for staff involved in the audit and compliance processes, ensuring they are equipped to recognize and address implicit biases and understand the importance of equity in their work.
- Identify and implement performance measures to monitor the success of the CAP program and ensure that program implementation is aligned with the Agency's DEI objectives.

Goal #3 Key Performance Indicators

- Percent FCMS implementation complete
- Percent policies and procedures updated

- DEI metrics
- Workplace culture assessment
- Percent participation in employee training and development programs

GOAL 4: FINALIZE INTEGRATION WITH THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Successfully complete transition activities to move operations to the Executive Branch while maintaining our commitment to excellence and client-centered service.



Objective A: Execute the activities outlined in the Executive Transition Workplan, carrying forward existing processes that are effective and taking advantage of improvement opportunities.

- Facilitate implementation of the Executive Transition Workplan by clearly assigning ownership over activities and outlining individuals who should be included in development, review, approval, and launch.
- Manage deadlines for each activity in the Executive Transition Workplan to ensure timely execution.
- Continue to engage state partners throughout implementation including the Department of Administrative Services, Department of Justice, State Archives, and others to review expectations and ensure that the intended outcomes of each area of work are consistently understood and met.

Objective B: Monitor the transition to adapt to changes as they occur and report on plan progress.

- Assess resource allocation on a regular basis to support ongoing transition efforts, including budget and personnel adjustments.
- Regularly update planning documents with the status, timeline, people, and other resources needed to transition to the Executive Branch.
- Communicate transition plan changes to impacted parties, assess the impact of those changes on impacted parties' workloads, and then adjust accordingly.

Objective C: Regularly engage state partners including the Department of Administrative Services and others to address future operational needs.

- Establish regular meetings with partners to discuss current and future needs and opportunities for collaboration.

- Provide relevant data, reports, and insights on operational performance and future needs to inform discussions and decision-making.
- Seek input from partners on current operations and potential improvements to ensure their perspectives are considered.

Objective D: Develop supportive policies, procedures, and guidelines to ensure the ongoing independence of the public defense function.

- Review existing executive policies and identify improvements needed to ensure ongoing independence.
- Develop or update policies as identified to ensure that public defense providers responsible for direct representation have the independence to do so ethically.
- Review risk coverage and update and write policies to align with the Executive Branch requirements.

Goal #4 Key Performance Indicator

- Progress reporting on completed Executive Transition Workplan activities

APPENDIX A

Strategic Planning Process

This plan was collaboratively developed based on input from the OPDC Commission, OPDC management and staff, Department of Administration partners, and residents.

The OPDC Commission and management team grounded the strategic plan in the history and operating model of the Agency while considering the current conditions, major initiatives in progress, and the future of public defense in the state.

The strategic plan was developed through a series of work sessions, both public with the OPDC Commission and private with OPDC's management team. The plan was presented to the community through an online survey in November 2024 and adjustments were made to account for public input. The plan was presented for adoption by the OPDC Commission in February 2025.

Supportive Planning Documents

This strategic plan is one of several key planning tools that guide the Agency's work and strategic direction. It has been developed in conjunction with other critical planning documents, all of which were carefully considered to ensure alignment with the Agency's overall mission, vision, and goals. Throughout the development process, these documents have been used to inform decision-making, identify priorities, and set clear objectives for the Agency's future. By considering the full scope of these interconnected plans, we ensure a comprehensive and cohesive approach to achieving our long-term goals while remaining adaptable to emerging challenges and opportunities. These documents include:

- 2025-2027 Affirmative Action Plan
- Six-Year Plan to Reduce the Public Defender Deficiency
- Executive Transition Workplan
- Remediation Plan
- Modernization Roadmap
- Quality Management Plan
- IT Roadmap
- CAP Transition Plan

Annual Reporting Cycle

The Agency has established an annual strategic planning reporting cycle to ensure continuous alignment with our long-term goals and to track progress toward achieving

them. This cycle serves as a regular checkpoint for evaluating the effectiveness of our strategies, identifying any emerging challenges, and making necessary adjustments. Each year, we will review key performance indicators, assess completed initiatives, and refine our objectives to stay responsive to changing needs and priorities. This ongoing process fosters transparency, accountability, and strategic foresight, ensuring that we remain focused on our mission while adapting to evolving circumstances in a dynamic environment.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to all the people who dedicated their time and insights during the development of this strategic plan.

State of Oregon Agency Partners

Oregon Residents

OPDC Commission

OPDC Management and Staff