



Tennessee Disability Pathfinder
a program of Vanderbilt Kennedy Center
2022 – 2025 Strategic Plan

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Introduction:

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder is a program of Vanderbilt Kennedy Center and has existed for more than 20 years as a statewide information and referral agency for individuals with disabilities, their families, and those who care for them. Remarkably, Pathfinder has had incredible success supporting many people and institutions across the state. Some notable successes include receiving multi-year federal funding, as well as a year-to-year commitment from state funders, collaborating with six state agency partners, creating a dedicated and comprehensive online referral website, expanding the multicultural team to serve more communities, and participating in the initial Tennessee Disability Services Study. In addition to the successes of the past, it is also important to highlight the incredible pivoting, tenacity, and resilience that took place during the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in 2020 and continuing currently. It should be noted that in addition to supporting the vast array of challenging issues throughout the pandemic for individuals, families, the community, and partners, Pathfinder team members were also impacted by pandemic related concerns.

All of this has occurred with a committed team who are now ready to embark on the next chapter of growth. This three-year Strategic Plan is the first of its kind in the Pathfinder history and serves to provide a road map for partnerships, funding, outreach, equity, and sustainability. It is a living document that should be flexible to changes which enables Pathfinder to remain nimble and responsive particularly in what continues to be an unpredictable period. Use this document as both a guide and a learning tool that will set priorities, establish baseline data, and provide a clear path towards improvement.



TENNESSEE DISABILITY PATHFINDER

Mission:

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder (“Pathfinder”) helps people with disabilities, their family members, the community, and professional support partners find and access resources, support, and services available to meet their needs.

Vision:

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder is the leading resource for accessible information that supports people of all ages with disabilities.

We...

CONNECT individuals with disabilities, their families, and others who support them with appropriate resources.

Raise awareness and **EDUCATE** the community on issues and resources that impact people with disabilities.

LEAD the conversation on accessible disability resources within culturally diverse communities.

VALUES

“Our collaborative culture will be inclusive and will reflect the diversity of the communities we serve.”

- VUMC



The value of the organization is expressed through the following attributes / actions:

We value whole-person care – We care deeply about our team, the people we serve, and the community that cares for them.

We value inclusion – We honor everyone and how they contribute to our work; we value individuals across the scope of disability as productive contributors to our community.

We value collaboration – We believe collaboration is the key to our resourcefulness; our collaborative approach benefits everyone and helps build relationships across agencies, community partners, families, and individuals.

We value effectiveness – We are most effective because of our experience, responsiveness, and commitment to accuracy to meet the needs of the individuals we serve.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

1.

Leverage collaborative partner relationships across Vanderbilt—the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, Vanderbilt University Medical Center and Vanderbilt University—and statewide agencies and other organizations to strengthen referrals, outreach, and funding.

Challenge:

Pathfinder is a part of an expansive network of collaborators like Vanderbilt University and the State of Tennessee. Through these partnerships, Pathfinder is able to access more resources and referrals that helps build the capacity to reach more people across the state, even going beyond the three grand divisions. As the program expands and the demand of individuals, families, and the community become greater, it will be important to deepen these existing relationships, as well as forge new ones. Continuing to build a stronger collaboration will allow for a less siloed support system across the varied and often complicated network of disability services.

Indicators of Success:

- Increased involvement by partners in outreach opportunities
- Increased number of multi-year funding opportunities

- Collaborations with partners logged into the appropriate software (RedCap, Excel, etc). Discussion of goals/outcomes are discussed prior and after the meeting(s).

- I. Align more strategically with programs, partners, initiatives, and resources across the Vanderbilt network.
 - Seek opportunities to collaborate across VKC, VUMC and VU in support of complementary programs / initiatives.
 - Along with the VKC, be considered a thought partner and resource across VUMC and VU regarding disability policies, external partnerships, internal practices, messaging, and equity.
- II. Enhance relationships across existing and new partnerships to strengthen referral process.
 - Coordinate frequent meetings with new and existing

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- partners to determine ways to strengthen the relationship.
- Host collaborative outreach opportunities and cross-promote within communication and marketing platforms.
- Increase personal referrals by individuals who have previously used Pathfinder.

- III. Seek and maintain diverse, innovative, and collaborative funding opportunities that provides multi-year support.
 - Advocate for multi-year funding from all funder contracts—local, private, state, and federal.
 - Collaborate with existing and new partners to increase funding and resources.
 - Design a process with key partners that supports communication. Expand coordination for joint grant or funding opportunities.

2.

Expand referral and information database of disability services and community resources.

Challenge:

Pathfinder has done a great job creating a database that is user friendly and highly effective. To continue supporting individuals with disabilities, their families, and those who care for them, Pathfinder will need to continue the ongoing maintenance, refining, and updating to the database.

Indicators of Success:

- Review and update all referral listings at least once a year
 - Increase the number of new listings added each year
- I. Increase referral partners in the database.
- Evaluate database content and accuracy on a regular basis to match the changing or updating disability landscape.

- Increase community resources available in the Pathfinder's database, with input from State Agency Leadership Group.
- Develop process to provide updates to individuals and families on new resources available in the database.
- Design a process that identifies new agency and organization partners to include in the database.
- Ensure that all agencies know that they are on our website and send a follow up email with promotional materials to use with their clients/individuals.
- Refine the process for partners to become more familiar with the website and how to create an account.

3.

Increase outreach efforts to further engage statewide relationships in non-English speaking, rural, and other under-resourced communities.

Challenge:

Tennessee has one of the fastest growing immigrant populations in the country. Though not large in overall percentage, the significant growth within a short time span can present challenges in providing adequate and effective support for those communities. In addition, there are other historically marginalized communities that are under-resourced and require specific strategies to ensure they are best supported. By setting forth intentional strategies and key activities, Pathfinder can serve the entire state and its residents with accurate disability resources.

Indicators of Success:

- I. Define, document, and prioritize Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access for the Pathfinder team—including state agency leadership group, that provides dialogue, training, and tools to increase cultural competencies.
 - Develop an equity, inclusion, diversity, and access plan that incorporates responsibilities for the entire team.
 - Review and utilize the diversity and inclusion replication guide in other counties.
 - Implement Pathfinder’s rural outreach replication guide.

- Assess existing policies, practices, and messaging to ensure it’s in accordance with the plan and / or equity lens.
 - Further develop and promote an archived webinar and in-person trainings for cultural competence.
- II. Nurture relationships throughout the state to improve and support under-resourced communities across the range of disabilities, including but not limited to: rural, multicultural, and age.
 - Develop an outreach plan that supports statewide engagement with priority on under-served communities that historically or demographically have less access to information or have cultural factors that discourage them from receiving information.
 - Strengthen partnerships with organizations that already have instilled trust within key communities to better connect with individuals and families that have historically or demographically been under-resourced. Those community partners could include faith institutions, community centers, healthcare offices, nonprofit organizations, and schools.
 - Continue developing relationships with organizations

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- that support non-English speaking communities to increase program and resource referrals in the database.
- Coordinate ongoing trainings with the multicultural team and potential or existing partners about key disability issues and highlight the relevant resources from the database.
 - Develop a virtual training series for non-English speaking families to learn about disability resources and obtain support from fellow participants.
 - Coordinate virtual and in-person outreach that includes hosting a booth at existing events or planning collaborative events with Pathfinder, the VKC and key referral partners.
 - Design opportunities for safe and culturally relevant community building within marginalized communities that include community meet-ups and social media groups.
- III. Continue amplifying messaging and visuals that support storytelling from people across the range of disabilities and highlights other inter-sectional identities (ex: Afro-Latina mother with a disability).
- Update and implement the existing marketing communications plan that will support statewide outreach and engagement, including implementation of tools to reach a variety of multicultural communities.
 - Coordinate with multicultural and rural media (radio, TV, newspapers, social media) to promote Disability Pathfinder and its multicultural and rural services in Middle, East and West Tennessee.
 - Continue strengthening the TN Disability Pathfinder en Espanol Facebook page; relaunch the live interviews and create and moderate a Facebook group that shares resources with Spanish-speaking families.
 - Design marketing materials for partners to distribute or display in their offices.

4.

Strengthen data tracking and utilization to enhance resource development, referral opportunities, and overall quality of services.

Challenge:

In 2021, the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities provided funding to support the surveying and development of the Tennessee Disability Services Study. The study examined what matters most to disability communities across the state, to ask how they currently find needed information, and to solicit their recommendations for making this process easier. Now that the interim report is complete, it will be important for Pathfinder to evaluate how it would like to increase tracking of information and providing supportive services based on that data.

Indicators of Success:

- Increase awareness of Pathfinder as a resource
 - Survey funders and partners to measure the consistency of data being shared about the referral process
- I. Conduct a review that tracks the quality of referrals and resources through Pathfinder for individuals, families, community, and organizations.
 - Create and distribute an annual user survey to receive feedback from individuals and / or family members about the quality of referrals, resources on the website, and client support from the Pathfinder team.
 - II. Utilize the data from the Tennessee Disability Services Study to close the awareness gap between the resources individuals with disabilities, their families, and professionals need, and how to access and connect with those referrals using the database.
 - Meet quarterly with the State Agency Leadership Group to review data and accomplishments and use it to discuss emerging issues and needed improvements.
 - Share suggestions for improvements to website listings and empower agencies to claim and correct their listing.
 - Create and distribute an annual user survey to receive feedback from partner organizations about how to strengthen referrals to them, user experience with the website, resources and communication, and overall support from the Pathfinder team.
- o This should include an online survey for anyone using the online database, as well as a survey sent via email or text to those who have used those the email, text, or chat functions to receive referrals.
 - Ensure the survey reflects questions about receiving access to resources versus receiving resources.

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- Evaluate the existing data from the Study to provide input on any necessary program, outreach, or communications needs.
- III. Track and showcase the cycle of a client using the Pathfinder database.
 - Use narrative storytelling to enhance the use of and showcase the accessibility of the website.
 - Develop case studies using actual clients that showcase the process of navigating the database from initial inquiry to follow-up*.
 - o *Though connection with a service provider is not Pathfinder's responsibility, showcasing delays in services or discrepancies in an organization's profile could provide a case for funders to support. Additionally, highlighting successful connections could also support the value of Pathfinder's database.

5.

Expand awareness of Tennessee Disability Pathfinder to support the overall growth of the organization, and the vision of being the leading resource for information and referrals for the disability community in the state.

Challenge:

Based on feedback from partners and funders, as well as data reflected in the Tennessee Disability Services Study, there is still a great opportunity for more organizations, families, and individuals to know about Pathfinder. There are many websites and referral sources for the disability community. However, none of those resources are as comprehensive, easily accessible, or reliable as those found on Pathfinder. The challenge will be for Pathfinder to narrow the information gap between what resources are available and those who need access to that information.

Indicators of Success:

- Website traffic increased by 10% each year
- Increase in partner engagement with the website, including profile updates
- I. Continue to build awareness about the value of Pathfinder and increase visibility among individuals and families looking for information and referrals, in collaboration with the State Agency Leadership Group.

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- Based on Pathfinder data from the website and staff, along with data from the Tennessee Disability Services Study, develop marketing plans to be responsive to the needs and interests of multiple audiences.
 - Coordinate a “Community Education Series” in collaboration with agency representatives using topics based on needs determined by trends in Pathfinder data and input from the State Agency Leadership Group.
 - Attend community-based meetings to increase knowledge of available services to families and providers.
 - Help website users learn how to use the website most efficiently including how to search and how to find and evaluate the quality of their search.
 - Provide the community with education tools like visuals—photos and videos—to better understand the inclusive and wide range of disabilities.
 - Feature clients with disabilities and families on the website alongside a testimonial of their experience.
- Use available tools and platforms to promote activities, trainings, and events.
 - Monitor Google Analytics (or other tools) to evaluate effectiveness of outreach campaigns as well as usage trends.
- II. Continue to build awareness for professionals, community, and practitioners looking to share information about Pathfinder with their audiences.
- Provide a minimum of 15 trainings or presentations annually to key stakeholders, including state agency personnel and provider networks, about using, and making referrals to Pathfinder.
 - Train state employees connected with disability services to use the database system.
 - Build relationships with school leaders to develop a training / series of trainings on how to use Pathfinder for teachers of students with an IEP or 504 plan.

6.

Build and manage an organizational resilience process that supports Pathfinder's sustainability.

Challenge:

After more than two years in a global pandemic that have affected every aspect of a person's life, the Pathfinder team would like to explore ways to strengthen its organizational resilience. It is important to incorporate tools and plans that will ensure Pathfinder can withstand challenges—internally or externally—that may threaten its ability to serve its audience.

Indicators of Success:

- Amount of virtual and in-person culture building activities
- Collaboration across Pathfinder teams

I. Maintain and support team culture, innovation, and collaboration while continuing in a virtual environment.

- Conduct annual review of job expectations and provide feedback frequently for areas needing improvement.
- Alongside the team, discover and implement opportunities for celebration and recognition.

II. Build organizational resilience.

- Conduct an organization risk assessment to outline any vulnerable areas.
- Draft a leadership succession plan to support any changes in key leadership.
- Design a process for mitigating known and unknown risks.

Equity Statement:

As a program of the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, Pathfinder adopts the Community Advisory Council's Equity Statement that was drafted June 2021. Our commitment to equity will not only live in the words in the statement but in the actions that support its implementation.

The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center Community Advisory Council is a collective of individuals with and without disabilities who believe in the broadest definition of equity and access for all people living with disabilities and their families.

- We honor the individuality, talents, resilience, and strengths of all people with disabilities.
- We are committed to working together with people with disabilities and their families to ensure that all people with disabilities can live and thrive with dignity.
- We acknowledge that ableism (discrimination or prejudice against individuals with disabilities), institutional racism (the ways in which policies and practices create different outcomes for different racial groups), poverty, implicit bias (an unconscious association, belief, or attitude toward a group of people), and gender/sexual identity bias are root causes of unequal quality of care and access to resources and services.
- We value lived experiences and strive to truly engage and empower all people with disabilities and their families.
- We advocate for radically inclusive and restorative practices.

Equity Lens:

Equity is a journey, not a destination. An equity statement is a great starting point in the equity process. It expresses a written commitment to acknowledge both history and the fullness of a person's humanity.

We define equity as the recognition that some communities have not received access to the necessary resources to thrive. Both an action and an outcome, equity requires us to do more than make a simple decision but rather examine the root causes of decision making—who has been left out, who we prioritize, and how we distribute resources.

An equity lens is a tool that helps to operationalize equity within policies, programs, and practices.

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder seeks to advance a people-first approach to decision making, resource distribution, and collaboration. To be both actionable and accountable, Pathfinder will use this tool to guide the implementation of this strategic plan and other key initiatives.

Though there are many steps in the equity journey, asking a series of questions provides an opportunity to begin with curiosity rather than judgment or rigidity. Questions help shape constructive dialogue that push us to go deeper or outside of the normal parameters of conversation or decision making.

These decisions will be outlined in the primary categories that impact the policies, programs, and practices within Pathfinder.

Below are a series of questions that will support the team. This list is not meant to be exhaustive but effective. While

there are many questions asked under each heading, it is important for the team to determine which one or two questions should be used within the process before making decisions.

Like the strategic plan, these guiding questions should be reviewed annually and modified as necessary.

Policies

- Does this policy explicitly consider and mention people with disabilities?
- Are people with lived experience—as a person with a disability and a caregiver—a part of the decision making?
- What steps could we take to address additional barriers that could prevent various racial/ethnic groups from accessing the policy fully?

Communications

- Is disability defined? Who sets the definition for disability?
- Are we using person-first language and simple language?
- Have we translated this message for language and cultural awareness?
- Are our visuals highlighting the diverse scope of disabilities?
- Are we asking individuals how we can care for them as a person with a disability?

Accessibility

- How will those who need visual, hearing, mobility, learning or other accessibility considerations become active participants?
- How can we ensure that our technology and communication resources are accessible in writing, on screen, and in person?
- Are we asking for feedback about how to make more of our resources more accessible?

Cultural Awareness / Intersectionality

- Are we aware of how implementation would play out differently based on a person's intersecting identities – race, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic, education, orientation, gender, or faith?
- Is there an audience that has been historically left out?
- What barriers exist because of intersecting identities?

Outreach

- What steps could we take to prevent or minimize adverse impacts or unintended consequences?

Sustainability

- Is this process adequately funded to support historically under-resourced communities?
- Has the team been cross trained on how to manage this program or process for continuity?

Glossary of Terms:

Diversity – a recognition of differences in one’s identity—both visible and invisible.

Equity – recognizes that some communities have not received access to the necessary resources to thrive. An action and an outcome, equity requires a redistribution of resources—money, power, policies, and systems—to right historic wrongs.

Inclusion – creates a safe, welcoming environment where a person can be their authentic self. Inclusion honors the strength in another person’s differences, including honoring their voice, culture, and seeing them as a valued contributor to the organization.

Replication Guide – the guide is a standard process that supports staff’s ability to replicate an idea within a community.