



Strategic Plan

Mississippi Early Learning Alliance

2020 to 2023



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Mississippi Early Learning Alliance (MELA) was established in 2018 through the vision and support of the Tallahatchie River Foundation (TRF). It is the evolution of the *Thrive by 3rd* statewide early childhood advisory committee, which was convened by TRF in 2015. MELA's founding was guided by the potential to bring partners together for the purpose of driving systemic change for Mississippi's children, ages 0–8. The need to create a strong, focused, and mission-driven organization led MELA's leadership to undertake a strategic planning process to further increase impact and build a path of success for the organization's first three years.

The strategic planning process began by forming a planning team comprised of MELA staff and board members. This team then collected stakeholder perspectives, and reviewed local, state, and national trends across the Mississippi early learning landscape. The planning team then analyzed the collected data to identify key opportunities for mission-aligned, sustainable impact.

The planning team identified **three high-impact goals** for MELA to pursue:

1 Form a statewide coalition that will identify, pursue, and achieve shared goals for positive early childhood system change.

Coalition members will be wide and diverse with organized working groups that are focused on member-driven priorities. MELA will provide the backbone support for the coalition, ensuring that it has the resources and logistical support necessary to collectively accomplish meaningful early childhood system coordination and positive change. The coalition work will also include a comprehensive statewide communications effort spearheaded by MELA so that information about the system is readily available and accessible for coalition members as well as stakeholders beyond the coalition.

2 Serve as a Mississippi-focused information hub with a clear communications plan to disseminate information about the statewide early childhood system.

Through this goal, MELA will address the statewide identified need to draw organizations together by highlighting their work, impact, and best practices. By collecting, curating, and disseminating information about the Mississippi early childhood system, MELA will strive to be the trusted resource for comprehensive, up to date information. It will accomplish this by acquiring and operating the Mississippi Early Learning Resources site, partnering with existing research institutions to disseminate critical information to multiple audiences, and uplifting local examples of high-quality early childhood practice.

3 Develop multiple, differentiated funding streams to sustain MELA's statewide efforts.

As MELA moves through its launch phase, it will maximize the work accomplished through Goals 1 and 2 to build its long-term sustainability. It will accomplish this by forming partnerships with diverse funding sources including foundations, corporations, donors, and other programmatic partners. The actions that MELA will take to meet its mission as a convener and true backbone organization include securing sponsors and partners for key initiatives such as Capitol Day and the Early Learning Resources site and identifying and pursuing shared grant funding opportunities with coalition members. MELA will guide this work by creating a comprehensive fundraising plan that aligns initiatives with clear outcome metrics that will foster and cultivate key partnerships.

These goals will be realized through the four high-impact strategies articulated in this plan. The planning team will continue to meet regularly throughout the three-year planning horizon to both review and reflect upon progress made, refining the plan as needed.



INTRODUCTION

While Mississippi strives to improve educational outcomes for all students, there is significant opportunity to make additional progress in this area. One promising example of improving educational outcomes through early learning is the Tallahatchie Early Learning Alliance (TELA). TELA is a locally focused non-profit organization that drives collective impact with community stakeholders to achieve systematic change. This change leads to the holistic development of children across Tallahatchie County for the first eight years of life. TELA was established before MELA by the Tallahatchie River Foundation.

TELA has two programmatic components – The Early Learning Collaborative and Tallahatchie County collective impact work. The Early Learning Collaborative is a state-funded Pre-K program consisting of two school districts, three licensed childcare centers, and a Head Start partner. TELA serves as the backbone organization. Together, the collaborative works to ensure that all four-year-olds in Tallahatchie County have access to high-quality pre-K programs. As the backbone organization for collective impact, TELA guides vision and strategy, establishes shared measurement, supports aligned

activities, cultivates community engagement and ownership, advances policy, and mobilizes resources for a group of organizations.

TELA has shown significant promise for affecting local change. Building on this momentum in an effort to affect statewide change, the Tallahatchie River Foundation chartered the MELA. Upon MELA's successful establishment, TELA has become a MELA initiative and will serve as an entity that can cultivate, develop, and field test Mississippi focused early learning innovations.

To fully realize the promise of its mission, MELA's leadership mapped the landscape of players in Mississippi and drew upon national lessons learned to craft a strategic approach that is both impactful and sustainable. Accordingly, Civitas Strategies, a national management consulting firm, was engaged to develop and facilitate a strategic planning process with MELA board leadership and staff to 1) collect and analyze key data to inform MELA's efforts; 2) define MELA's strategic direction, including a detailed three-year plan for execution; and 3) identify the actions necessary to ensure the smooth transition from planning to execution.



LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

The development of the 2020 strategic plan was conducted in three essential phases: Discovery (Phase 1), Planning (Phase 2), and Finalization (Phase 3). In order to provide the strategic planning team with the data needed to determine the goals, strategies, and activities that the organization will pursue, MELA leadership, with partner firm Civitas Strategies, engaged in a comprehensive analysis of the current state of MELA's startup, operations, and governance, as well as key growth opportunities.

Specifically, efforts of the Discovery phase sought to develop answers to the following key questions:

- What could be MELA's critical value?
- What are the most significant unmet needs?
- What are MELA's greatest strengths and vulnerabilities?
- How could MELA be differentiated from other Mississippi early learning organizations?
- What are the relevant regional, state, and national ecosystem trends that could affect MELA's success and sustainability?
- What is the greatest potential impact MELA can have?
- How will existing resources need to evolve or be transformed to realize the desired impact?
- What new resources are needed to achieve impact?
- Who are the key partners required for MELA's success?
- What role can MELA play in catalyzing statewide change?
- How can MELA's leadership continue to adeptly navigate a shifting landscape?

During the Discovery phase the following data was collected and reviewed:

- A variety of relevant documents (including current action planning documents, board Bylaws, the MELA concept paper, the MELA Public Voice report, and other prior research reports commissioned by MELA).
- 28 one-to-one interviews with MELA leadership, staff, Board, current and potential partners, and national leaders.
- 22 surveys from additional potential partners and early learning providers in Mississippi.

Upon collection, the data was analyzed by the planning team to identify opportunities for greatest impact that were best aligned to MELA's mission, core values, and current assets. As the result of this process, the following findings were discovered:

- There is an opportunity to bridge a divide in the Mississippi early childhood system and address existing tension around access versus quality that can sometimes make collaboration more challenging.
- There is an opportunity to differentiate MELA as a state-level convener from TELA's pursuit of place-based programmatic work.
- Stakeholders recognize the need for MELA to chart a clear, multi-year course and commit to that direction.
- There is a need to develop MELA's stable state business model and articulate its long-term funding structure as it moves beyond the launch phase.

In November 2019, Civitas Strategies presented these findings to MELA's Strategic Planning team, which was comprised of MELA leadership, staff, and board members. During the session, team members had the opportunity to review the data, ask questions regarding the collection process, and rank various possible strategic plan objectives. Through this process the team established three strategic priorities for the next three years: forming a **statewide coalition**, building MELA's identity as a trusted **information hub**, and developing multiple, differentiated **funding streams** to sustain MELA's statewide efforts.

The team then engaged in a series of planning sessions, working collaboratively with Civitas Strategies to develop a list of Design Principles to guide the process (see the section below entitled "Mission, Core Values, and Design Principles" for a full list of established Principles). Using the principles and previously identified priority areas, the team came to a consensus on the following three goals:

- **Form a statewide coalition that will identify, pursue, and achieve shared goals for positive early childhood system change.**
- **Serve as a Mississippi-focused information hub with a clear communications plan to disseminate information about the statewide early childhood system.**
- **Develop multiple, differentiated funding streams to sustain MELA's statewide efforts.**

Finally, the team identified the strategies and specific actions most likely to result in attainment of the above goals, as well as the measures of success that the team will use to determine progress throughout the three-year planning horizon. Both the goals and the aligned strategies are outlined in greater detail below in the section entitled "Strategic Goals" found on page 6.

MISSION, VISION & DESIGN PRINCIPLES

MELA's current mission, vision, and core beliefs, in conjunction with the priorities identified above, were used by the planning team as guidance towards identifying the strategic planning process' design principles.

MELA's mission is as follows: **MELA drives collective impact with diverse stakeholders to achieve systemic change leading to the holistic development of Mississippi children in their first 8 years of life.**

MELA's vision is as follows: MELA will work with alliance members and partners to bring about systemic change for Mississippi's children lasting well into adulthood, which leads to a more skilled workforce and better economy. MELA and its partners will accomplish this by increasing community buy-in on policy creation or change, more informed decision making, and breaking down silos. Ultimately, the work will result in a more informed Mississippi and a more knowledgeable electorate, ready to hold decision-makers accountable.

MELA's holds the following core beliefs:

- The early years of a child's life are very important for later health and development. Research has shown that healthy development in the first 8 years of life can build a foundation for future learning, health, and life success.
- The holistic development of children is essential. Children need access to high-quality learning environments, comprehensive physical and mental health services, and informed families and communities that are connected to beneficial resources to achieve optimal development.
- Improving outcomes for children is a public issue that everyone is responsible for. It is the single most important thing we can do to improve the quality of life in our state.
- The most positive systemic change can happen for children (1) when decision-makers engage with communities and understand the complexities that impact the lives of children and (2) when a diverse group of stakeholders — state leaders, practitioners, and community members — work together to create solutions and drive for change.

Reflecting upon MELA's mission, vision, and core beliefs, the planning team created a set of design principles. The team determined that the creation of all systems, strategies, and supports within the 2020 Strategic Plan will adhere to these principles, both in designing planned strategy and identifying any emergent strategy that may arise in the future. Specifically, every MELA strategy must be::

- 1 Tied to research and a theory of change.
- 2 Conveyed clearly so multiple audiences, from grassroots to grass tops, can understand it.
- 3 Endorsed and supported by the Board and Executive Director.
- 4 Complementary to the work of existing organizations across Mississippi.
- 5 Tied to the organizational capacity and resources needed to realize execution.
- 6 Bound by "clear lane lines" on limits (particularly advocacy), meaning that opportunities and activities should not be beyond the scope of the mission or purpose of the organization.
- 7 Linked to core capacities or the engagement of a partner (i.e. if MELA wants to pursue an action, but doesn't have specific capacity, build a partnership with an organization that does).
- 8 Inclusive of measurable near-term wins to build momentum in support of long term goals and objectives.



CORE VALUES

At the start of her tenure, MELA's Executive Director and her team established a set of five core values to guide all MELA efforts. These values helped inform the planning process and will continue to provide guidance throughout the implementation process. The five values are as follows:

- **Asset & Possibility Oriented:** We start with and look for what is good. We are committed to looking beyond what is probable and focusing on what is possible for children, families, and communities in MS. We are not afraid of taking risks and sharing new ideas to reach our goals.
- **Collaboration:** We recognize that no single group of people, program, or group of programs working in isolation from each other can tackle the barriers that prevent children from meeting readiness benchmarks as they enter school. We commit to seeking out, working with, and learning from others.
- **Diversity, Equity & Inclusivity:** We hold the conviction that only from diverse backgrounds and divergent points of view can we find the best solutions. We acknowledge that current social and economic systems and structures benefit some groups while harming others. We leverage our resources to encourage equitable opportunities and outcomes for all. As we do so, we actively examine our roles in perpetuating inequitable systems.
- **Responsible Stewardship:** We are strategic about how we leverage our resources so that we reach our goals (and help others reach theirs).
- **Connection:** Work of equity is unequivocally about relationships and people. Therefore, we make space to understand, connect, and build meaningful relationships with one another. We are invested in the success of others, we treat each other with respect and kindness, and we will work diligently to lift each other up.



STRATEGIC GOALS

MELA will realize its vision by focusing resources and efforts on three long-term goals, which are strategically aligned with its design principles and organizational mission, vision, and core values.

Goal 1: Form a statewide coalition that will identify, pursue, and achieve shared goals for positive early childhood system change.

Goal 2: Serve as a Mississippi-focused information hub with a clear communications plan to disseminate information about the statewide early childhood system.

Goal 3: Develop multiple, differentiated funding streams to sustain MELA's statewide efforts.

GOAL 1

Form a statewide coalition that will identify, pursue, and achieve shared goals for positive early childhood system change.

During the data collection process, stakeholders consistently noted that the Mississippi early learning landscape is somewhat divided, generating tensions focused on access to child care versus quality. They also reported that while progress and innovation is happening, it is siloed and often does not receive statewide awareness among all levels of the early childhood system, from providers to system level decision makers. This presents a significant opportunity to bridge these silos by convening stakeholders across the state together as members of a coalition with an eye to pursuing specific common goals.

Stakeholders pointed out that MELA is guided by trusted and respected early childhood leaders and board members with the potential to help MELA act as a strong convener, bridging relationships with early childhood organizations across the state at every level. Interviewees recommended that in order to successfully build these relationships, MELA's initial approach should be "to really learn about what all the other organizations are doing and to show them the ways that MELA can enhance and align existing goals and missions." Evidence of enhanced statewide collaboration in pursuit of a common goal also has to the potential to attract funders who are

interested in supporting statewide, system level progress and change. Stakeholders reported that funders do not currently require organizations to work together, and "right now, when money comes in, it is reinforcing the perspective that organizations should just focus on their niches and not a full systems approach." Pursuing shared goals through a coalition approach could shift this siloed ecosystem and result in support for projects and policy change leading to more cohesion across the state.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

MELA will use the following metrics to measure progress made in regard to Goal 1 of this Strategic Plan.

- The coalition will have 80 members by Year 3.
- The accomplishment of one significant goal set by the coalition.
- Evidence of increased capacity for member organizations to work in communities and advocate effectively. To accomplish this, MELA will actively "matchmake" at least one set of partners per quarter. Also, MELA will offer a leadership series session once per quarter.
- The *Thrive by 3rd* texting system will enroll 30% of Mississippi households with children under the age of eight (10% each year).

GOAL 1 STRATEGIES

STRATEGY 1

Create a wide and diverse coalition with organized working groups for specific purposes.

Rationale

Stakeholders across the state of Mississippi agree that in order for meaningful system level progress to be made, silos must be broken down and more organizations need to work together toward common goals. In January 2020, MELA took a major step towards building a statewide culture of collaboration by successfully convening over 30 early childhood organizations for the first annual Capitol Day, "Power the Future." MELA will build upon this momentum by creating a statewide coalition that is inclusive and diverse. Its policy work and priorities will be member-driven with established decision-making processes and procedures, as well as defined feedback loops to ensure that all voices are heard. Additionally, MELA will provide critical support as a backbone organization, offering resources

and managing the logistics of coalition building, the lack of which can often derail even the best-intentioned collective impact initiatives.

Year 1 Actions

- Board approves a brief on the scope and objectives of the coalition.
- Develop a decision-making process for the coalition to determine member driven priorities and actions.
- Onboard staff so MELA can effectively serve as a backbone organization supporting coalition building, specifically a Coalition Manager and a Communications Manager.
- Collect feedback from the first annual Capitol Day “Power the Future” and plan and execute the second annual event.
- Design and begin to execute quarterly leadership series to build knowledge and capacity around key issues effecting the advancement of member organizations. (e.g. resource development trends, best practice developments in the field).

Year 2 Actions

- Create coalition-identified values and criteria for coalition membership (anyone who subscribes to the values should be able to join).
- Continue to plan, execute, and collect feedback from coalition members to support the annual Capitol Day.
- Continue to execute quarterly sessions in the leadership series.

Year 3 Actions

- Host a statewide and regional convening to lay out a framework for coalition-building and collaboration.
- Develop working groups based on issues important to the majority of coalition members.
- Continue to plan and execute the annual Capitol Day with a defined policy agenda backed by the coalition.
- Continue to execute quarterly sessions in the leadership series.

STRATEGY 2

Launch statewide communications efforts.

Rationale

One of the gaps in the Mississippi early childhood system identified by both stakeholders and the planning team is that there is not an accurate, comprehensive resource documenting the parts of the system and the organizations that comprise them. Therefore, MELA will endeavor to fill this information gap by becoming the go to resource for knowledge about the early childhood system, including the mission, geography, and priorities of each of its players.

As this information is synthesized, it will be shared broadly with multiple audiences throughout the state. These audiences will span “grassroots to grass tops” and will include parents and caregivers, childcare practitioners, community-based organizations, business leaders, local and statewide government officials. In order to ensure that this information is shared efficiently and effectively, MELA will create a specific communication planning approach that will be applied to each developed initiative. This will ensure that communication is thoughtful, intentional, and that the impact of the information being shared is maximized. This communication approach will include personally engaging with organizations across the state to connect them with information the early childhood system and the coalition’s work.

Year 1 Actions

- Create a MELA communication planning approach so that each future initiative has a developed communications effort (including a specific plan of engagement for the Mississippi Early Learning Resources site, Childcare Desert Map, and the Unstuck report).
- Build an effective website highlighting MELA and the information it shares.
- Create a framework and “living” visual illustrating the early childhood system, the current players in each part, and a resource guide with a description of each organization’s work and contact information that can be used in other communications on the early learning system. This visual will be accompanied by a robust database of contact information, geographic focus, and service priorities.
- Create *Thrive by 3rd* marketing materials and communication plan to encourage parent subscription to the text messaging information service.
- Develop partnerships with providers (Head Starts, licensed childcare providers, and school districts) to disseminate information to parents.

Year 2 Actions

- Create tools and communications pieces for the Early Education Capitol Day “Power the Future” highlighting opportunities for the state, ways coalition partners can convey the messages, and resource guide of organizations serving the state and districts.
- Undertake a statewide engagement tour to encourage coalition membership and participation.
- Update the “living” visual of the early child system as engagement increases and new relationships are built.
- Continue to work with providers to share information and materials with parents encouraging them to sign up for the *Thrive by 3rd* text messaging service.

Year 3 Actions

- Commission an evaluation of the coalition’s impact to determine effectiveness and how implementation could be improved by engaging with member organizations in their communities to collect feedback.
- Continue to update the “living” visual of the early child system as engagement increases and new relationships are built.
- Continue to work with providers to share information and materials with parents encouraging them to sign up for the *Thrive by 3rd* text messaging service.

GOAL 2

Serve as a Mississippi-focused information hub with a clear communications plan to disseminate information about the statewide early childhood system.

The life-long benefits of quality early learning are not only experienced by children and families, but also by communities and local economies. One of the areas of need identified throughout the data collection process is ensuring that the importance of early learning to every sector of society is communicated clearly across the state from a trusted source. Stakeholders agree that serving as this “learning champion” should be one of MELA’s core functions. In this role, MELA will provide comprehensive information on innovations and up-to-date evidenced based practices and research in early learning that is specific to Mississippi. Stakeholders also emphasized that this information should be accessible to multiple audiences, including early childhood professionals, parents and caregivers, business and philanthropic leaders, and local and statewide government officials and policy makers.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

MELA will use the following metrics to measure progress made in regard to Goal 2 of this Strategic Plan.

- MELA is considered the trusted resource for comprehensive up to date information about the Mississippi early childhood system as reflected by the citation and communication of research and materials.
- MELA website is used frequently by different audiences to obtain information on the early childhood system (providers, families, policy makers, business leaders, and other stakeholders interested in early childhood progress).
- Approximately 50% of childcare providers across the state of Mississippi are enrolled in and are using the shared services site, Mississippi Early Learning Resources evidenced by website traffic and activity.

GOAL 2 STRATEGIES

STRATEGY 3

Build MELA’s capacity to collect, curate, and disseminate information about the Mississippi early childhood system.

Rationale

The state of Mississippi currently benefits from institutions and organizations that are specifically focused on conducting original early childhood research. Therefore, the planning team established early on that MELA will not conduct its own research, but rather will partner with research institutions, commissioning projects that seek to build greater understanding of community needs and complexities regarding young children and families in Mississippi. Through these research partnerships, MELA will seek out and uplift local work across Mississippi that illustrates best early childhood practices and key innovations. Also, stakeholders emphasized the importance that early childhood information be accessible and relevant to diverse audiences. In response to this need, MELA will ensure that the Mississippi-focused research it collects and curates will be communicated multiple ways to diverse, cross-sector audiences. This will result in information that is accessible, understandable, relevant, and actionable for each audience.

Year 1 Actions

- Engage a research analyst to lead overall efforts.
- Finalize and release the public voice report “Unstuck.”
- Collect statewide feedback and build a dissemination plan for the child care desert map created in partnership with Childcare Aware.

- Acquire the Mississippi Early Learning Resources (a shared services site that serves childcare providers across the state of Mississippi) and customize it for optimal engagement this statewide audience.
- Work with the communications director to build a plan to disseminate early childhood information to multiple audiences both within and beyond the coalition.
- Issue an RFP and approve an evaluation plan to support an evaluation of TELA that investigates both the impact of the program as well as its organizational structure.

Year 2 Actions

- Establish the framework for a research agenda with the coalition focused on understanding community needs and complexities regarding young children and families in Mississippi.
- Work with Childcare Aware to update the childcare desert map and disseminate the resulting document statewide.
- Embark on an engagement campaign to maximize and grow the current user base for the Mississippi Early Learning Resources.
- Complete the TELA evaluation and disseminate findings around best practices statewide and nationally.
- Create a plan that incorporates the findings and recommendations from the evaluation into a strategic plan for TELA.

Year 3 Actions

- Commission/partner with existing research institutions to disseminate key Mississippi-focused early childhood research to multiple audiences cross-sector, making information more accessible.
- Continue to manage and grow the Mississippi Early Learning Resources site.
- Continue to update and disseminate the childcare desert map.
- Execute TELA's strategic plan.

GOAL 3

Develop multiple, differentiated funding streams to sustain MELA's statewide efforts.

As MELA transitions from its launch phase to stable state, stakeholders identified a specific need to determine the funding structure of the MELA business model beyond its initial startup. The planning team determined that this model

should include both fundraising and revenue goals, as well as roles and responsibilities that are critical for organization viability and stability. Additionally, the team articulated the importance of building a portfolio of successful work and impact during the startup phase in order to increase the likelihood that investments will be made by funders to continue and grow key initiatives. Therefore, the successful implementation of Goals 1 and 2 is essential for the achievement of Goal 3. By the end of Year 3, MELA will have moved from startup phase to stable state as an organization.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

MELA will use the following metrics to measure progress made in regard to Goal 3 of this strategic plan.

- MELA has secured at least two large, multi-year grants from foundations.
- MELA has at least three corporate sponsors for a key initiative.
- MELA is able to offset its operating costs through contributed or earned income.

GOAL 3 STRATEGIES

STRATEGY 4

Build a fundraising plan focused on a set of key initiatives with outcome metrics that attract investment.

Rationale

MELA is currently in startup phase and is making progress toward stable state. To further this progress, the planning team identified the specific need to determine the funding structure of the MELA business model. The business model should have two primary targets, 1) to leverage current funding that has been allocated for MELA's start up and 2) to build diverse and sustainable partnerships that will ensure sustainability beyond the organization's launch phase. This includes building a solid fundraising plan and revenue goals aligned with staff and organizational capacity. This fundraising plan outlined in Year 1 will focus on identifying funder priorities and aligning key initiatives with those priorities. It will also lay the foundation for understanding where opportunities for joint funding exist and how coalition members can collectively pursue them.

Year 1 Actions

- Pursue a grant funding source for the Mississippi Early Learning Resources site.
- Seek out and apply for capacity planning grant opportunities.
- Conduct a funding landscape analysis to identify foundations, corporate sponsors, and individual donors and their funding priorities.
- Develop corporate sponsorship incentives package and materials.
- Seek out corporate sponsors for Capitol Day.
- Plan and execute an annual report showcasing all supporters and impact for MELA's first year.

Year 2 Actions

- Apply for programmatic grant funding utilizing the landscape analysis and fundraising plan developed during Year 1.
- Identify possible collaborative grant opportunities among coalition members.
- Secure corporate sponsors for the Mississippi Early Learning Resources site and statewide and regional coalition convenings that will happen during Year 3.
- Continue and grow sponsor relationships for Capitol Day.
- Revisit and refresh the funding landscape analysis.
- Issue second annual report.

Year 3 Actions

- Apply for collaborative grants with coalition members.
- Continue to cultivate and grow corporate sponsorships.
- Revisit and refresh the funding landscape analysis.
- Issue third annual report.



INSTITUTIONALIZATION & IMPLEMENTATION

The new strategic plan will need to permeate every level and activity undertaken by MELA staff. The move from strategic planning to execution requires the facilitation of three distinct phases: Design, Launch, and Implementation.

DESIGN PHASE

The Design phase was completed as part of this plan development. In this phase, key internal and external actors were engaged in the planning to ensure buy-in, relevance, and practicality. Specifically, this was achieved by:

- Collecting and assessing information on the state of the organization and the landscape from a cross-section of management, staff, members, and stakeholders across the state;
- Engaging leadership, board members, and staff in the planning effort;
- Sharing key elements of the plan with critical partners for feedback;
- Testing the plan as it was being crafted with additional MELA staff and leaders; and
- Engaging the Board of Directors in the final review and approval of the plan.

INITIAL LAUNCH

Once this plan is completed, the next phase — the Initial Launch — will be implemented within 30 days of finalization. In this phase, the Executive Director will review the plan and its implications with the:

- **Staff** — This will provide a chance for all full-time staff to hear about the plan and its vision and scope.
- **Key partners, supporters, and donors** — Using one-on-one meetings and a group conference call.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

During the Implementation phase, the Executive Director will track plan progress at least quarterly with the Executive Committee. These sessions will review progress on implementation, evaluate the indicators of success, and identify and problem-solve implementation risks and challenges. The Executive Committee will be required to consider the strategic plan when making any major organizational decisions. Finally, the Executive Director will provide an update on implementation to the Board of Directors every three months at regular board meetings.



MELA LEADERSHIP

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