



The Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) mission hasn't changed. It's "to open the world of communication to people with hearing loss by providing information, education, support and advocacy."

# Strategic Plans

BY KEVIN H. FRANCK

A central role of a board of directors of a nonprofit organization is to build a strategic plan. A strategic plan enables an organization to achieve its mission. The plan has a freshness date of two or three years. After then, strategic plans are revisited and adapted to reflect a changing reality.

The Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) mission hasn't changed. It's "to open the world of communication to people with hearing loss by providing information, education, support and advocacy." But America is quite different than it was before in important ways that shape our strategy.

Three years ago, we didn't know what Over-the-Counter hearing aids were going to be. We knew they were coming, as the FDA Reauthorization Act of 2017 (FDARA) compelled the FDA to begin the process of defining them. Today we have a clearer picture. Three years ago, we hadn't heard of George Floyd, and the nation hadn't gone through the largest protests in United States history against systemic racism.

These events (and others) shape HLAA's board of directors' work on setting our current strategic plan. In this column, I'd like to focus on our first of five themes in the plan — to "Expand our Engagement." This strategic theme calls out HLAA's need to represent everyone with hearing loss. Stereotypically, I think of HLAA's constituents as being mostly older, mostly Caucasian, mostly communicating using spoken language and mostly with more severe amounts of hearing loss. This stereotype is confirmed in the 2022 HLAA membership survey results. Demographically, this stereotype indeed represents a large group of people. But it underrepresents other important people.

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The 2020 Census reported that the population of non-Hispanic whites in the U.S. has gotten smaller in the past decade, and for the first time, most of the population under age 16 is nonwhite. While there are epidemiologic studies that show differences in hearing loss by skin color and race (less hearing loss with more skin pigmentation), nonwhites are underrepresented in health care, hearing health care and HLAA's representation of people with hearing loss.

The first *World Report on Hearing* from the World Health Organization (WHO) on deafness and hearing loss calls out one billion young adults at risk of hearing loss due to unsafe listening practices. While there are fewer younger people with hearing loss than older people, younger representation is crucial to the vitality of the organization. WHO estimates that by 2050, nearly 2.5 billion people will be living with some degree of hearing loss.

Expanding our engagement as an explicit strategic theme means that HLAA will focus on race and age diversity. This isn't in the exclusion of other forms of diversity (such as LGBTQ+, multiple disabilities, etc.) but focuses on these two. In truth, HLAA has been working on this for some time. But such

explicit inclusion in the strategic plan raises the importance of and accountability to the work.

Members of the HLAA board of directors themselves have already been active in increasing race and age diversity within HLAA. The board recently recruited a member who expressed his interest in serving because his Black and African American community did not talk about hearing loss, and he wished to help change this. Another board member's nonprofit work and research has shown the success of urban (largely Black and African American) Baltimore community-contextualized hearing health care. Another's advocacy focuses on content availability in Spanish. At this year's convention, board members organized a medical symposium led by physicians with diverse racial backgrounds. As it pertains specifically to a younger demographic, younger members of our board have helped to set up and contribute to the Young Adults Hear (YAH) Chapter which is developing resource guides for school to college, and college to employment transitions. A board must recruit new members. We are explicitly seeking nominations of interested individuals who identify as people of color, including individuals who identify as Black or African American.

Michael Meyer, vice chair and incoming board chair of HLAA, summed this up well: "At its heart, HLAA is all about inclusivity. We're trying to make the world a more inclusive place for people with hearing loss. In other words, every person at HLAA with hearing loss knows what it's like to feel left out, to feel left behind, to feel misunderstood, to be perceived as something less than we are. That experience should give us empathy with lots of people who go through the same thing because of their race, gender, etc. Today, our organization does not look like the universe of people with hearing loss. That's true of our board, our supporters, the people who go to the convention, etc. We're not aiming to exclude anybody, of course, but how hard are we trying to reach everybody with hearing loss? Some of our board members are motivated to do this and we should follow their lead."

Well said, Michael! **HL**

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## Are you a veteran living with hearing loss, tinnitus or other auditory issue?



HLAA stands ready to help our nation's veterans live successfully with hearing loss and related issues. In addition to a complimentary Online Membership and first-time convention registration, you can participate in the HLAA Veterans Across America Virtual Chapter.

The mission of the HLAA Veterans Across America Virtual Chapter is to provide education, be an advocate for veterans with hearing loss and to provide a support system to help them return to civilian life.



For more information, go to [hearingloss.org/Veterans](http://hearingloss.org/Veterans) or email [chapters@hearingloss.org](mailto:chapters@hearingloss.org).