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TOGETHER

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Dispute Resolution Center
2025-28 Strategic Plan Summary Report
May, 2025



Executive Summary

The Dispute Resolution Center (DRC), in partnership with Nonprofit Enterprise at Work (NEW), undertook a participatory strategic planning process to create a future-forward, equity-centered roadmap for 2025–2028. This process engaged board members, staff, clients, court partners, and community stakeholders in a collaborative effort to shape a vision for the DRC's continued growth, adaptability, and community impact.

The planning process identified four core strategic pillars:

- **Equipping Communities for Restorative Power:** Expand access to restorative practices and build local leadership.
- **Weaving a Restorative Ecosystem:** Strengthen a regional network of partners advancing restorative solutions.
- **Fueling Justice through Financial Resilience:** Diversify and stabilize revenue while keeping services accessible.
- **A Home for Healing & Connection:** Explore options for a welcoming, community-rooted physical space that reflects DRC's values.

This plan provides a framework for aligning programs, partnerships, and infrastructure with DRC's mission to provide affordable, restorative approaches to conflict resolution. It reflects the organization's bold commitment to justice, healing, and collective care.

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Approach to Strategic Planning

DRC's strategic planning process was grounded in Appreciative Inquiry; an asset-based approach that centers what's working in an organization in order to amplify its strengths. Through visioning sessions, stakeholder interviews, and iterative planning meetings, DRC explored four central questions:

- **Where are we now?**
 - We gather data to help us understand the organization's strengths and growth edges, leaning into what you're 'best' at.
- **Where are we going?**
 - We use the data, the organization's mission, vision and values to articulate and position it for future success.
- **How will we get there?**
 - We help design a goals framework that enables clarity and precision focus of the strategic direction of the organization.
- **How will we know when we arrive?**
 - We co-create clear monitoring plans to illuminate your plan progress.

This inclusive, values-driven approach resulted in the development of a strategic framework that reflects the Dispute Resolution Center's core values, builds on its organizational strengths, and establishes a clear direction for growth and impact. It captures the organization's commitment to equity, innovation, and community-centered practices, aligning future efforts with both internal capacity and community needs.

Key deliverables of this process include a bold and inspiring vision narrative, a set of prioritized strategic objectives, and actionable operational strategies. Additionally, a draft implementation dashboard was created to guide execution—outlining initial tactics, performance measures, timelines, and designated responsibilities to ensure accountability and progress tracking.

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A Co-Created & Participatory Process

The development of the 2025–2028 Strategic Plan was guided by a diverse and inclusive planning committee comprised of DRC staff, board members, judicial partners, and community stakeholders. With support from consultants at NEW (Nonprofit Enterprise at Work), the committee met monthly to shape the plan’s direction and ensure broad stakeholder engagement throughout the process.

The planning process officially launched in Fall 2024 with a kickoff retreat focused on visioning and values, followed by stakeholder surveys that gathered input from a wide range of community voices. Over the winter months, the planning committee held structured sessions to review data, define priorities, and build consensus around goals and strategies. In Spring 2025, a draft plan was reviewed and refined in collaboration with the DRC Board of Directors and leadership team, ensuring alignment with organizational capacity and community needs.

The inclusive and transparent process was grounded in collaboration and shared leadership, with a commitment to equity, access, and sustainability at every stage. Planning committee members brought deep expertise and strong connections to the communities DRC serves, including judicial representatives, nonprofit leaders, and organizational staff.

Strategic Planning Committee Members

- Hon. Erane Washington, 14B District Court
- Hon. Karl Barr, 14A District Court
- Hon. Susan Butterwick, Juvenile Referee
- Audrey Anderson, DRC Board President
- LaSonia Forte, DRC Board Vice President
- Sandra Butler, DRC Board Member
- Germaine Smith, Assistant Director
- Belinda Dulin, Executive Director

This collaborative and data-informed process has resulted in a strategic plan that reflects the needs, aspirations, and values of the DRC and the community it serves.

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Where are we now? Stakeholder Insights

The 2024 strategic planning survey engaged a wide range of DRC stakeholders, including staff, board members, clients, funders, court officers, and community partners. The responses affirmed DRC's strong reputation as a trusted community resource and highlighted several key strengths:

Top Perceived Strengths:

- Commitment to restorative justice and conflict resolution
- Affordability and accessibility of services
- Skilled and compassionate staff

Key Priorities for Growth:

- Increase community knowledge about DRC through improved branding and outreach
- Diversify funding sources to enhance long-term sustainability
- Reevaluate the location of the DRC office to increase community accessibility

Respondents emphasized the importance of DRC addressing unmet community needs, particularly among youth in alternative schools and foster care, and the need to expand partnerships with education, housing, and health sectors.

When asked to prioritize DRC services, the top choices included:

- Diversion referrals from Prosecutor's Office
- Conflict mediation services
- Restorative justice programs
- Youth engagement in alternative schools and foster care

In terms of strategic focus areas, stakeholders ranked these highest:

- Branding and awareness
- Strategic partnerships
- Performance measurement and organizational effectiveness

The survey also surfaced a call for more inclusive engagement methods, more timely communication, and deeper attention to mental health and historical trauma. These insights directly informed DRC's new strategic pillars and recommendations for implementation.

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Where Are We Going? Mission, Vision & Values

The Dispute Resolution Center **mission** is to offer affordable, constructive, restorative and healing approaches to conflict resolution for the residents of Washtenaw and Livingston counties.

As part of the strategic planning process, DRC staff engaged in a powerful **100-year visioning exercise**; an imaginative, values-driven process rooted in racial equity and restorative justice. Through storytelling, visual mapping, and collective dialogue, staff articulated a bold, liberated future: one where restorative justice is not the alternative, but the norm. From this creative process, core themes emerged:

The expansion of restorative practices; universal access to housing, food, education, and healthcare; the redistribution of wealth; community-led systems of support; environmental stewardship; and a deep celebration of diversity.

These themes were not abstract, they were grounded in lived experience and strategic insight, forming the foundation of DRC's long-term vision.

By 2029, this vision is taking shape. Restorative justice centers are trusted neighborhood hubs for healing and accountability. Policies prioritize repair over punishment, with restorative practices embedded across schools, courts, and health systems. Communities are moving away from extractive systems and toward regenerative ones—built on mutual aid, cooperation, and local resilience. Access to basic needs is protected as a right, and DRC continues to lead by organizing, training, and amplifying the voices of those most impacted.

This is the world DRC is helping to build –one mediation, one circle, one restored relationship at a time. Over the next three years, DRC will deepen its leadership in restorative justice, expand alternatives to punitive systems, and strengthen its role as a trusted, resilient, and resourced hub for conflict transformation in Washtenaw and Livingston Counties.

Core values are the ethical foundation of an organization. They define what matters most and guide decision-making at every level. For DRC, values like respect, integrity, restorative justice, accessibility, and inclusion are more than principles; they are operational commitments that shape strategy, inform priorities, and set the tone for how the organization engages with community. In moments of uncertainty or complexity, values provide clarity and alignment, ensuring that the organization's growth is both principled and grounded in its mission. DRC's core values are:

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- Respect - An understanding that all people have value and need to be treated with humanity and dignity.
- Restorative Justice -Promoting processes using truth-telling, sharing of information and empowerment with the intent of repairing the harm.
- Integrity - An adherence to the principles of fairness and wholeness, using a transparent consensus process whenever possible.
- Diversity & Inclusion - Promoting and sustaining a sense of community belonging that values and respects the talents, beliefs and backgrounds of its members.
- Accessibility - Being easy to contact or approach and explaining concepts in a way that everyone can understand.

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How will we get there? DRC Strategic Direction

The following **strategic pillars** were developed in direct response to the 2024 stakeholder engagement process and reflect DRC’s commitment to advancing restorative justice, equity, and sustainability. Each pillar addresses key themes identified in surveys, listening sessions, and committee discussions. These four pillars are not only responsive to what stakeholders identified, they are essential for building a more equitable, resilient, and community-led future for the DRC. Following each pillar is the goal and purpose of the goal.

1. Equipping Communities for Restorative Power

Goal: Expand access to restorative practices and build local leadership.

Stakeholders consistently expressed a desire for broader access to restorative justice services, especially for underserved populations such as youth in foster care and alternative education settings. This priority reflects the need to move beyond service delivery toward community empowerment—ensuring that individuals, schools, and neighborhoods have the tools, training, and confidence to lead restorative efforts. By investing in local leadership and accessible education, DRC can expand its reach, reduce reliance on formal systems, and promote healing and accountability within the community.

2. Weaving a Restorative Ecosystem

Goal: Strengthen a regional network of partners advancing restorative solutions.

Feedback from the planning process revealed a strong call for deeper, more strategic partnerships—particularly with sectors such as education, housing, and health. Building a regional ecosystem of aligned organizations will allow DRC to address complex, intersectional issues collaboratively. This priority acknowledges that meaningful systems change requires collective action, shared learning, and consistent advocacy across sectors. It also reinforces DRC’s role as a convener and leader in the restorative justice landscape.

3. Fueling Justice through Financial Resilience

Goal: Diversify and stabilize revenue while keeping services accessible.

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Survey respondents and planning committee members emphasized the need for diversified and sustainable funding to ensure DRC's long-term viability. While stakeholders value the affordability of DRC's services, there is recognition that relying on limited revenue streams creates risk. This priority focuses on strengthening internal fundraising capacity, engaging donors and funders more strategically, and aligning resources with organizational goals, ensuring that financial health never comes at the expense of equitable service access.

4. Creating A Welcoming Space for Healing & Connection

Goal: Explore options for a welcoming, community-rooted physical space that reflects DRC's values.

The physical location and environment of the DRC emerged as a significant area of concern. Many respondents suggested reevaluating the current space to ensure it is accessible, welcoming, and reflective of the organization's restorative mission. This priority reflects the community's desire for a safe, healing-centered space where people feel seen, respected, and supported. It also highlights the importance of place-based presence as a reflection of DRC's identity, values, and commitment to being embedded in the communities it serves.

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How Will We Know We've Arrived? Monitoring Outcomes

The 2028 outcomes define what success looks like for the Dispute Resolution Center (DRC)—where restorative justice becomes the norm, not the exception. Each reflects meaningful, measurable progress rooted in equity, healing, and inclusion. Through education, partnerships, sustainable funding, and a welcoming space, these indicators guide our path and mark key milestones in our journey toward lasting systems change.

Strategic Pillar	3-Year Outcomes (by 2028)	Key Indicators of Arrival by 2028
Equipping Communities for Restorative Power	Communities are equipped with knowledge and tools to access and advocate for restorative solutions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 50% increase in trained community members in culturally relevant RJ practices - 25% more engagement from BIPOC, youth, and low-income communities - 85% report increased readiness - Digital library access and satisfaction metrics show significant growth
Weaving a Restorative Ecosystem	A robust network of partners uses restorative practices to prevent and address harm.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 25% increase in community-driven, non-court referrals - 10 active MOUs with systems and community partners - Strong coordination of RJ efforts across justice, youth, housing, and education sectors
Fueling Justice through Financial Resilience	DRC is financially resilient, with diversified earned and contributed revenue and strong donor relationships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 40% of income from earned revenue - \$60K annual revenue from trainings/consulting - 3-5 multi-year grants or contracts secured - Forecasting tools show 3-5% budget variance margin
A Home for Healing & Connection	DRC has an accessible home that reflects its values and serves community needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vision co-created with full staff/board and diverse community input - 10+ viable space options assessed with feasibility analysis - Strategic MOUs and LOIs with public/private partners - Pilot programming completed to inform space design

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Considerations and Recommendations

In addition to the strategies and goals co-developed with the planning committee, NEW identified critical recommendations to ensure successful implementation of the plan, drawing from comprehensive survey data and deep listening during staff retreats. Stakeholder surveys revealed gaps not only in service awareness, and, Staff retreat discussions surfaced operational and capacity-related themes not captured in the survey data. These behind-the-scenes enablers were not standalone strategies, but essential conditions for success. By layering these cross-cutting recommendations over the defined goals and strategies, NEW ensured the final plan addressed both external impact and internal sustainability, positioning DRC for effective execution over the next three years.

1. Develop clearer internal systems, performance metrics, and shared ownership of strategic goals by staff and board.

- **Recommendation:** strengthen internal infrastructure, such as implementing real-time financial tracking, building robust data systems for evaluation, and aligning team roles with strategic priorities.
 - Gather baseline data to compare 2028 outcomes against
 - Use/create a table that shows year-to-year progress towards outcomes

2. Evolve community engagement beyond traditional methods.

- **Recommendation:** Expand beyond handouts to include accessible digital platforms:
 - Develop short, accessible demo videos on YouTube or Vimeo explaining restorative practices and mediation processes.
 - Create a community engagement section on the DRC website that includes links to existing reputable video demos, FAQs, and infographics.
 - Share content regularly through Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn to reach broader and younger audiences.
 - Translate materials and videos into key languages spoken in the service area to ensure inclusivity.

3. Intentional relationship-building and strategic partnerships are essential for strategic impact.

- **Recommendation:** Create a structured outreach plan with assigned roles, timelines, and a focus on reciprocal value.
- **Actions you can take:**
 - Strategic Outreach Plan

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- Identify mission-aligned organizations (e.g., schools, health providers, legal aid, cultural orgs) with overlapping constituencies.
 - Create a partnership pipeline list with tiers: strategic partners, potential allies, and influencers.
- Relationship Building Protocol
 - Assign specific staff or board members to conduct outreach (e.g., the Executive Director or designated Community Liaison).
 - Request to be added to coalition and partner organization meeting agendas to give brief presentations about DRC services.
 - Set clear goals for outreach (e.g., one partner meeting/month), and report activities to the board quarterly.
- Mutual Benefit Framing
 - Approach partnerships with a focus on reciprocal value—how the DRC can support their goals, not just what they can do for the DRC.
- Track and Evaluate
 - Create a CRM or shared tracking tool for partner engagements, follow-ups, and outcomes to ensure accountability and strategy alignment.

4. Increase systems, structures and accountability for fund development and stewardship.

- **Recommendation:** Develop clear protocols, designate fundraising roles, build board capacity, and diversify revenue streams. Implement KPIs and regular reporting.
- **Actions you can take:**
 - Clarify Roles and Accountability
 - Current State: Assistant Director enters donations into Network for Good (NFG) and reports to ED and Board.
 - Develop a written development protocol that clearly delineates:
 - Who solicits, processes, and acknowledges donations
 - Who monitors donor engagement and retention
 - What reports are shared, how often, and with whom
 - Enhance Transparency and Oversight
 - Present monthly or quarterly donation summaries to the board (segmented by donor type, amount, method of giving).
 - Develop KPIs for fundraising (e.g., # of new donors, donor retention rate, avg gift size) and review during board development committee meetings.
 - Expand Funding Streams
 - Explore foundation grants, corporate sponsorships, workplace giving campaigns, and fee-for-service offerings (e.g., paid trainings in restorative practices).

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- Train board members and staff in relationship-based fundraising and donor stewardship.
 - Donor Communication and Retention
 - Establish a donor communication calendar (newsletters, impact updates, thank-you messages).
 - Ensure all donations are acknowledged within 48–72 hours with personalized messaging.

5. Infrastructure planning, including expansion, relocation, or a new build, carries financial risk in the current political and philanthropic landscape.

- **Recommendation:** Prioritize flexible space options (e.g., shared or county-supported space), and involve community in shaping the vision.
 - Maintain Flexibility
 - Explore partnerships with other agencies for shared reception, office services, or conference room use to reduce overhead.
 - Negotiate short-term leases or county-provided space with built-in opt-out clauses.
 - Consider hybrid and virtual service delivery models to reduce physical space requirements.
 - Model multiple scenarios (e.g., co-located space, subleased offices, shared spaces with other nonprofits).
- **Note:** Should DRC decide to pursue a Capital Campaign (e.g., build your own space):
 - Conduct a Financial and Fundraising Feasibility Assessments
 - Assess readiness of donors to invest in your vision.
 - Assess current and projected operational costs, including utilities, maintenance, insurance, and technology needs.
 - Engage Stakeholders Early
 - Include board, staff, and county partners in conversations about long-term needs and the implications of different space options.

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From our team to
yours, thank you for
your partnership.

Transforming the future, together.

Our team envisions a just and thriving society full of **empowered leaders, flourishing nonprofits, and vibrant communities.** We know we can't get there quickly, and we can't get there alone. It takes a communal effort. It takes deep relationships. And it takes practicing new ways of being.

Thank you for being courageous with us. Thank you for being adaptive with us. Thank you for working with us to usher in the future we want to see real.

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