

# LINKS

Learning • Innovation • Networking • Knowledge • Sharing

## Lee Nasehi, VisionServe Alliance's New Leader



Nearly twenty years ago, I attended my first NCPABVI Conference as a brand-new Executive Director of the Center for Independence, Technology and Education, better known as CITE. I was eager to help strengthen

our organization and extend its reach. Many of the CEO's I met at this conference were giants in the field of vision rehabilitation, yet all were approachable and eager to help each other and especially those of us who were just starting our executive careers. It quickly became my best resource as an emerging leader.

Years later, Roxann Mayros became NCPABVI's first President and CEO and really made a difference for all of us. We were becoming a community of leaders and collaboration was becoming our best weapon in the fight to improve services for people of all ages living with low vision and blindness. CITE became Lighthouse Central Florida and NCPABVI became VisionServe Alliance and it remained my best resource through the years – and its members were now my colleagues and national partners.

When Roxann announced her retirement earlier this year, I let myself imagine what it would be like to have the opportunity to continue her legacy as its second CEO. To stand on the shoulders of all those leaders who were and continue to champion specialized services for people with blindness and low vision seemed like a far reach. Earlier this month I opened my eyes to that dream becoming a reality.

While the ache of leaving my beloved Lighthouse Central Florida and Lighthouse Works family in February is fresh and ever present, I am extremely excited and honored to have been selected to lead VisionServe Alliance in its next chapter. The thought of working with all members to gain traction in our missions is thrilling. There is tremendous need across this country and I know that together we are going to make a difference.

Members, know that I am anxious to know what you think our priorities ought to be, your thoughts on effective leadership and how you want to help VisionServe Alliance move forward. Nevertheless, I respectfully request your patience as I prepare Lighthouse Central Florida and Lighthouse Works for the important transition to new leadership. I'd like to thank the members of the Search Committee of the Board of Directors of VisionServe Alliance for their tremendous efforts throughout the last several months and for the full BOD placing their trust in me. Together, we will hit the ground running on March 1, 2019!

# Chairman's Message

*Mark G. Ackermann, Executive Vice President & Chief Operating Officer, Lighthouse Guild International*

It has been the highest honor of my professional career to serve as chairman of this great organization for the past two years and as a member of the Board of Directors since 2012. I had hoped to continue serving on the board, but a unique opportunity caused me to announce that I will leave Lighthouse Guild in December to become President/CEO of a new Catholic Foundation in New York.



I first joined VisionServe in 2009, and as I became more involved (which I encourage you to do), I met incredible leaders - some of the giants in our industry who listened to me and answered so many questions. Sometimes I learned more by listening to others ask questions and receive sage advice from colleagues. All of this is to say, the more you put into VisionServe, the more you will get out of VisionServe.

I want to thank Roxann and Wendy - our only staff members. Roxann, who is retiring after almost fourteen years of impeccable leadership, has helped me every step of the way. More importantly, she has worked tirelessly to make VisionServe what it is today. Wendy has become our most crucial staff member as she manages conferences, handles office operations, and effectively posts to social media. She is the behind the scenes force that keeps everything going.

This has been a busy year for our Alliance. We now have a strong relationship with another great national vision organization, Prevent Blindness. We have elected a new chairman, John Mitchell of the Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired, who is a proven leader who I know will bring our association to new heights. Perhaps the accomplishment I am most proud of though is the successful completion of our search for a new President and CEO.

Filling Roxann's shoes was an incredible task. Our search committee put in hundreds of hours sifting through 200+ resumes, conducting interviews, and carefully questioning finalists. Thank you to Bernadette Kappen, Miki Jordan, Steve Pouliot, and Erika Petach for their incredible expertise and tenacity. In the end, we chose the perfect candidate - Lee Nasehi of Lighthouse Central Florida/Lighthouse Works. The board unanimously and enthusiastically concurred with the recommendation and officially appointed Lee to the role during our Portland Conference. Lee has formally accepted the position and will start in her new role on March 1st.

In my forty-year not-for-profit career, I have belonged to many professional associations. I have never been part of an association like VisionServe. The professionalism, comradery, mentorship, richness of learning, are all second to none. This doesn't happen without an incredible and hard-working staff and board. There is one other important ingredient that makes VisionServe so special, that is a vibrant membership. Each and every member plays a role in continuing the great traditions of this organizations. I implore each of you to be active participants in all that VisionServe offers and to challenge each other to become even better professionals every day.

Thank you for the unique privilege of chairing this incredible Alliance. I am humbled to have had the opportunity to serve.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**Your year-end donation impacts quality leadership and provides board training to member organizations.**

# CEO Corner

Roxann Mayros, VisionServe Alliance, St. Louis, MO

It is with a deep sense of peace that I head off into retirement, not only because Lee Nasehi will be your next leader, but because together we have accomplished so much. NCPABVI's board voted to hire me on March 10, 2005, so I will have spent almost fourteen years leading this amazing organization. The minutes of that meeting report that we had 54 members and \$47,000 in assets. Today, we have 115 members and \$440,000 in assets. Conference attendance has increased from around thirty to nearly 130 in Portland.



Here are just a few examples of what we did together: NCPABVI merged with the National Vision Rehabilitation Association, endowing us with national leadership of the Medicare Demonstration Project. We rebranded to VisionServe Alliance to better describe our unique alliance of organizations serving and supporting people who are blind. We have knocked down doors to public health and medicine to tell them about what your organizations do every single day. We influenced action to update and reprint the one textbook used in the VRT Master's programs and fostered a continuing dialogue to create one inclusive title for vision rehab professionals. We administer/publish the only compensation and benefits survey in our field. We perfected leadership support through professional conferences, high-level networking, informative news, board training, and strategic planning. We provide member benefits that put money into members' pockets. We have created VisionRefer! – a high-tech patient referral system. And so much more, but I believe the most important accomplishment during my time with VisionServe Alliance has been the strengthening of this strong community of leaders.

VisionServe members serve more people with vision loss than state agencies and the VA combined. As leaders within this network, we are still not using to the full extent possible our combined power as leaders to influence and change policy, funding, and service delivery systems. So, with much accomplished and much yet to be done on behalf of people with vision loss, I bid you adieu with a quote from Dr. Seuss: "Don't cry because it's over. Smile because it happened!" I thank you for allowing me to serve in the "best job in the field!"

Several have asked for my contact info. I can be reached at [roxannmayros@gmail.com](mailto:roxannmayros@gmail.com) or **727-505-5801**.

## 2018 Board of Directors

**Chair:** Mark Ackermann, Lighthouse Guild

**Vice Chair:** Bernadette Kappen, New York Institute for Special Education

**Secretary:** John Mitchell, Cincinnati Association f/t Blind and Visually Impaired

**Treasurer:** Steve Pouliot, Vermont Association f/t Blind and Visually Impaired

**Immediate Past Chair:** Miki Jordan, Wayfinder Family Services

**Michael Bina,** Maryland School for the Blind

**Lauren Branch,** NewView Oklahoma

**Roxann Mayros,** VisionServe Alliance

**Mike McGowan,** NOAH

**David Morgan,** Future In Sight

**Thomas Panek,** Guiding Eyes for the Blind

**Erika Petach,** Blind and Vision Rehab Services of Pittsburgh

**Shari Roeseler,** Society for the Blind-Sacramento

**Dennis Steiner,** VisionCorps

**Renee Vidrine,** Lighthouse Louisiana

Your donation will help implement our new VisionRefer! app and allow VisionServe to introduce members to public health

# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## New Partnership With Prevent Blindness

Prevent Blindness and VisionServe Alliance have agreed to pursue opportunities for partnership and consider an even more unified organizational approach for the future in order to address the full continuum of vision and eye care. Here are the items the two organizations have agreed to focus on:



1. Expand and co-brand Prevent Blindness-owned website, Living Well with Low Vision, to be a shared resource, potentially including an advisory panel to guide its content and promotion.
2. Merging each organization's areas of expertise to expand the impact of the National Center for Children's Vision and Eye Health on topics related to low vision in children; specifically, to increase the utilization of evidence-based vision screening protocols.
3. Partnership initiatives to impact and contribute to the newly developing Center for Vision and Population Health related to low vision and blindness from a population health perspective.
4. Partnership opportunities between VisionServe Alliance member organizations and Prevent Blindness affiliates. Collaboration and cooperation across both organizations' Federal advocacy/policy efforts.
5. Pursue funding opportunities for cooperative projects between Prevent Blindness and VisionServe Alliance.
6. Pursue opportunities to increase eye care provider referrals to vision rehabilitation, including promotion of VisionServe Alliance's VisionRefer! resource.
7. Pursue opportunities to collaborate in conference presentations, where appropriate.

In addition to the above partnership opportunities, the parties will work to detail and undertake a process through which the organization will consider whether a more formal alignment may be of mutual interest in the future.

## Become an OrCam Training Center

OrCam is pleased to offer the following opportunities exclusively to VisionServe members. Offer expires February 28, 2019



- Purchase an OrCam MyEye 2 demo unit at the special price of \$2,300.
- OrCam will train and certify your staff free as OrCam trainers.
- Partner with your local OrCam representative to organize and market an open house for the community to see the OrCam MyEye.
- \$450 paid to VisionServe members for training each purchaser.
- \$250 for each referral that results in a sale of OrCam device.
- Optional - join OrCam's sales network and earn up to \$1,000 for each OrCam MyEye unit you sell and train the user.

**Contact Motti Attia ([motti.attia@orcaml.com](mailto:motti.attia@orcaml.com)) or Anat Nulman ([anat.nulman@orcaml.com](mailto:anat.nulman@orcaml.com)) for more information**

## New Discounts from Aria

Aira is pleased to offer the following opportunities exclusively to VisionServe Alliance members:



1. 10 free one- or two-day trials of Aira Access to provide opportunity to test and showcase Aira for staff and clients.
2. 20% discount off commercial cost of Aira Access minutes to add Aira Access at member's facility.
3. 20% commission on Aira Access sales when member helps create an Aira Access sale through promotion, collaboration, or any significant support leading to an Aira Access purchase (airports, libraries, colleges, etc.).
4. 20% commission on sales to consumers of Aira products and services plus a Horizon Kit (contingent upon availability) for demonstration purposes.
5. 10 Back-to-School scholarships (9 months of Aira services) for the 2019-2020 academic year.



To take advantage of these offers, contact:  
**Marty Watts, Director of Sales, 617.905.8784, [marty.watts@aira.io](mailto:marty.watts@aira.io)**

## Vispero Offers VSA Members an Optelec Buying Group

Vispero (previously known as VFO Group) is offering VSA Members optimal discounts on Optelec professional products such as:



- Illuminated/Non-Illuminated Magnifiers
- Telescopes
- Spectacles
- Loupes
- Absorptive Lenses
- Lighting for Low Vision
- Video magnifiers
- Scanning and Reading Devices

Even if you already have any account with Optelec, they will assure that every maximum discount is applied due to your membership in VisionServe Alliance. Simply call the Optelec Professional Accounts Team at 800-826-4200 today and reference, "VSA Buying Group," and they will set up your new account, or apply to your current account, the deepest available discount. After setting up your account, order online at **[www.ShopLowVision.com](http://www.ShopLowVision.com)**

**Your donations allow VisionServe to create new innovative member programs and create opportunities to talk across various disciplines in blindness**



**This year's 30th Annual Executive Leadership Conference broke attendance records as we came together to connect, learn new skills from exciting speakers and network in the beautiful surroundings of Portland, Oregon.**



**Erika Petach with her friend Christina and baby Brianna**



**Keynote speaker Anna Liotta and Mark Ackermann**



**Laura Park-Leach explores Portland's forests**



**AFB Panel with George Abbott, Adrianna Montague and Kirk Adams**



**Lee Nasehi, 1st-time attendee Kelly Harris and Elly du Pre**



**Nancy Miller and Sharon Giovinazzo**



**Outgoing board members Steve Pouliot and Mark Ackermann with Roxann**



**Retirees Pam Brandin and Lou Tutt were honored**



**Dave and Roxann joined by BOTH daughters, Lauren and Toni, enjoying the Columbia River gorge**



**The two Johns—John McInerney and John Mitchell**

*Thanks for coming!  
See you next fall in  
Atlanta, GA  
Nov. 3-6, 2019*



**Thomas Panek piloting our Awards Night boat**

# Power of Roxann Campaign

We'd like to thank the following Individuals and Member Organizations who placed ads in our Executive Leadership Conference program booklet as a tribute to Roxann's 13 years of leading VisionServe Alliance. Altogether, your donations raised \$5,750. Thank you!

## Organizations

Association f/t Blind & Visually Impaired Grand Rapids  
Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh  
Bosma Enterprises  
Florida Agencies Serving the Blind  
Lighthouse f/t Blind St. Louis  
Prevent Blindness  
San Antonio Lighthouse  
Society f/t Blind Sacramento  
Tampa LH f/t Blind  
Visually Impaired Preschool Support

## Individuals

Pam Brandin  
Bernadette Kappen  
Toni & Lauren Mayros  
Mike McGowan  
Lee Nasehi  
Erika Petach  
Lou Tutt  
Brenda Wendling  
Kathie Zeider



# Scholarship Recipients

Thanks to member support and an anonymous donor, we continue to award an average of two scholarships for each of our conferences. This fall, we awarded two Rachel Rosenbaum Conference Scholarships to members which funded their attendance at the conference in Portland. We offer this scholarship specifically to enable leaders from our smaller member agencies with limited budgets the chance to take advantage of the incredible learning at our conferences. Here are some take-aways from this fall's scholarship winners:



### **Denny Moyer, President & CEO, Enight Skills Center**

"This year for the first time I was able to attend and bring my Development Director. This has been very helpful in that directly following the VSA conference Enight had its annual retreat and so many of the topics and presentations were used as a reference. I especially enjoyed and learned from Anna Liotta's generational presentation as this affects everyone from clients to the board members. Following VSA's conference, I had a conference call which included many of the same people who were in Portland and by the comments and responses to the call I could actually identify (for the most part) the baby boomers and gen Xers. It was eye opening."



### **Pete Benavidez, President & CEO, Blindness Support Services**

"Aside from the networking with colleagues in the field, the things that I learned while attending will definitely prove beneficial to the future of the agency I am so privileged to be a part. For me, I most enjoyed the workshops and to hear what others think about Older Individuals Who Are Blind which is a timely topic for my organization."

## Donors to the Conference Scholarship Program in 2018

ABVI Rochester NY	Future in Sight	St. Louis Society for the Blind
ABVI Grand Rapids MI	Lighthouse for the Blind	The Blind & Visually Impaired -
Anonymous	Lighthouse Guild International	Monterey
BVRS Pittsburgh PA	Lighthouse Louisiana	The Carroll Center for the Blind
Braille Institute of America	Louisiana Association for the Blind	U.S. Association for Blind Athletes
Center for the Visually Impaired	MAB Community Services	Vermont Association for the Blind
Earle Baum Center for the Blind	Metrolina Association for the Blind	Visions Services for the Blind
Enight Skill Center	NY Institute for Special Ed	Vista Center for the Blind

*Thank you to everyone who donated to the conference scholarship program.*

# AWARD WINNERS

## MEMBERS HONORED



**Robert Kelly, Florida Conklin Center**, was presented with **VisionServe's Excellence in Leadership Award** which honors a member for contributions at the local, regional or national level. The Florida Agencies Serving the Blind (Florida ASB) nominated Robert for his thirty-plus years improving employment opportunities for people with multiple disabilities in South Carolina and Florida. Under his direction, the Conklin Center was one of the first in the nation to develop residential supported employment and supported living programs. Robert has held leadership positions (sometimes more than once) at Florida ASB, State of Florida Rehabilitation Council, and the Blind Services Foundation of Florida, sharing his knowledge and influence to make the organizations stronger and better. Robert is also a thoughtful and concise writer, developing position papers and professional articles used to this day in policy discussions. Elly du Pre wrote, "The blindness system in Florida and especially for those with multiple disabilities is better today thanks to Robert's tireless work over the last thirty years."



**Laura Park-Leach, Metrolina Association for the Blind (MAB)**, is the first recipient of **VisionServe's Cathy Holden Excellence in Managerial Leadership Award**. Laura was nominated by CEO, Bob Scheffel. Laura began her work at MAB in 1990 as an orientation and mobility specialist. She was quickly promoted to Vice President, Vision Rehabilitation Services and in 2014, she became Senior Vice President. Laura supervises a comprehensive rehabilitation team that includes optometrists, occupational therapists, low vision therapists, vision rehabilitation therapists, social workers and support personnel that served in excess of 1,700 people with varying degrees of blindness/low vision. Bob wrote, "I know Laura to be tireless in her dedicated work on behalf of our agency and the people we serve. Such dedication has produced numerous benefits for MAB, including a streamlined billing system that has increased our revenue from Medicare and third-party insurers, an improved low vision clinic that has moved our brand from a charitable environment to a medical environment, and a solid foundation on which to build our contributed revenue stream."



**Cathy Holden, NewView Oklahoma**, was honored posthumously with **VisionServe's Lifetime Achievement Award**. This award is not given annually, but only when the Board of Directors identifies a leader who has achieved professionally or personally throughout their lives and/or careers. In 2018, VisionServe's board unanimously voted to honor Cathy Holden who led NewView Oklahoma's vision rehabilitation program to one of excellence, made untold contributions to our field, gave unwavering personal support to so many, generously shared her knowledge and abilities, and was totally committed to VisionServe Alliance. We were honored to have Cathy's family with us to receive the award, including her husband Mike, daughter and son-in-law Mykala and Jonathan, son Mikah, mother Sue, sister Kristine, brother Patrick, and nephew Toby.

# WHAT I WISH I HAD KNOWN

There's nothing like hindsight, coupled with experience, to show you important milestones in one's career. An extended career tends to bring perspective and appreciation for what you may have undervalued in the past. We asked our members what they wish they had known as young professionals. Although their answers may be valuable to today's young leaders, these lessons are worth heeding at every career stage.



**John Mitchell, Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired**

"I wish I had known that to grow your organization, you need to trust more and delegate leadership, and that a leader's focus should always be on the future."



**Mike McGowan, NOAH (National Organization for Albinism and Hypopigmentation)**

"I wish that I wasn't so afraid of fundraising. Like many, I never saw myself as a person who could easily ask for money. What I learned is that if you have a worthy mission

and can clearly demonstrate need, donors are glad to support your organization. Most important is that you have to demonstrate real commitment to and passion for your mission."



**Ken Warkentin, Valley Center for the Blind**

"I wish I had known earlier how to value and charge fees when dealing with other businesses/agencies for our BVI services as the heart and mission for individuals is to not let financial means dictate services

offered. I also wish I had spent more time learning about other EDs/CEOs and their agencies."



**Thomas Panek, Guiding Eyes**

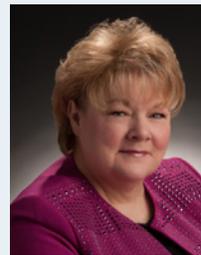
"If I had to tell my younger self something, I would say spend less time looking internally within your organization alone to solve challenges and more time working externally with others to find answers."



**Shari Roeseler, Sacramento Society for the Blind**

"Wish I'd known then that it was okay to say, "I don't know." Too often we think just because we are managers, directors or executive directors that we are supposed to have the answers, when in reality, we can't possibly know

all of the answers! Today, I have no problem saying, "I don't know, but I'll look into it and get back to you." With fundraising it gives you an opportunity to follow-up with a prospect or donor with the answer."



**Libby Murphy, Louisiana Association for the Blind**

I wish I had known decades ago that failure isn't fatal, to use the wise words of Winston Churchill. I spent too much time being afraid without realizing fear was holding me back as much as or more than any other

factor. Now I see failure and mistakes can be great teachers, if one is willing to learn. As for stress, it isn't all bad—in fact, stress keeps bridges from failing!



**Bernadette Kappen, New York Institute for Special Education**

"I wish I'd known how many great colleagues I would meet. These relationships are so important and helpful."



**Erika Petach, BVRs Pittsburgh**

"As a young executive without children of my own, I didn't recognize the importance of flexibility and family time. Since having my own children, I have seen how allowing flexibility to employees so they can focus on work and family needs is the

best thing I can do! I get the best of both worlds... happy employees and productivity."

## Member Spotlight – Ken Fernald, AVRE (Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment)

### What is your best childhood memory?

*Spending one-on-one time with my father. I frequently went with him on evening service calls around the Tampa Bay area (where I grew up), and have very fond memories of those times, especially now that he has passed away.*

### What are you reading, watching and/or listening to right now.

*Among heroes, written by Brandon Webb and John David Mann*

### What do you do in your down time?

*Boating and fishing have become my passion. I spend as much time as I can in my boat fishing with my son on the beautiful lakes of upstate NY.*

### Tell us about one item on your bucket list

*Fly fishing for Bonefish, Tarpon and Permit in the Florida Keys with my son.*

### And for Winnie, please ask her “What is her favorite thing to do in her free time?”

*She said she loves guide running with me, but she is still technically working then... so she picks playing fetch with her favorite “planet” ball.*

### What is your best guilty pleasure?

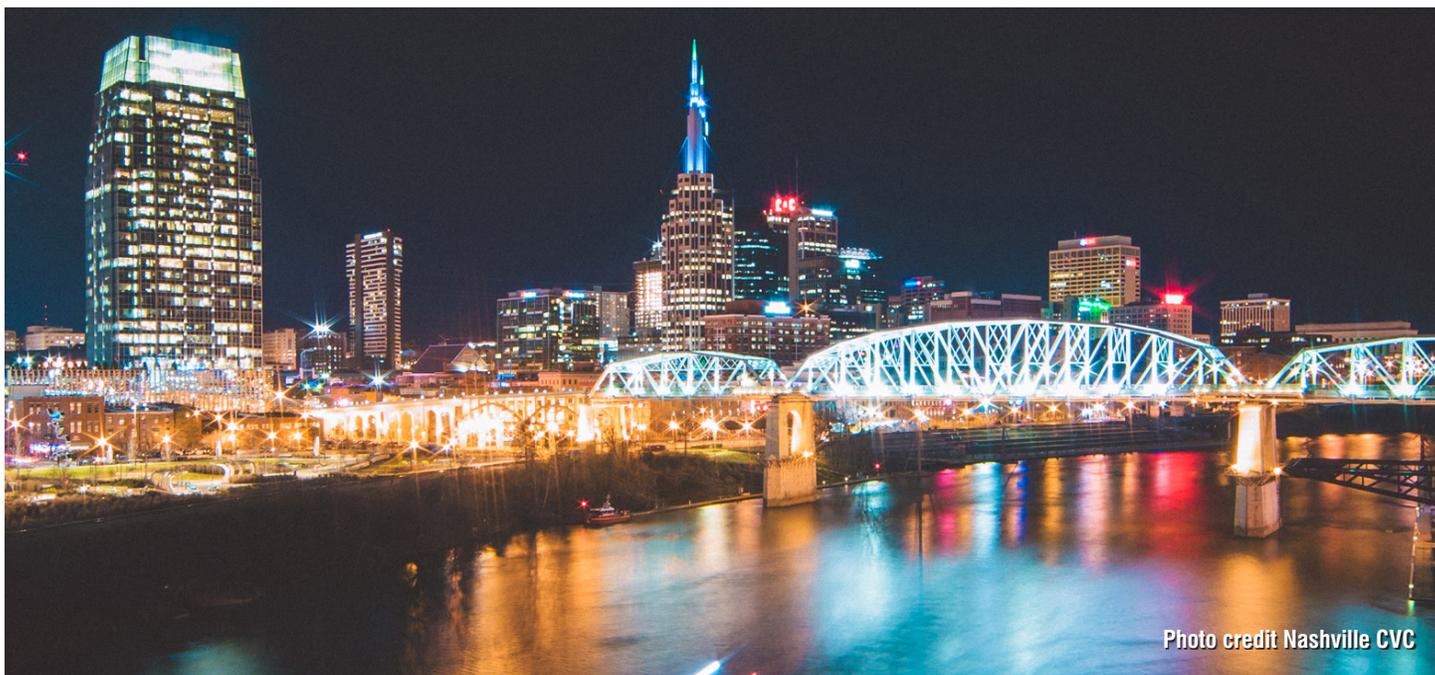
*I don't eat many sweets, so occasionally, a nice slice of key lime pie really hits the spot.*

### Tell us what you value about your membership in VisionServe,

*Opportunities for networking and learning with colleagues from varying disciplines across the blindness field*



2019 CEO Summit, Nashville, TN | May 5 - 8



## 2019 Fall Executive Leadership Conference Atlanta, GA | November 3 - 6



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- MISSION:** To engage leaders in building a better world through services for people with vision loss.
- VISION:** To be a leader and a unified voice in the field of services for people with vision loss for advocacy, education, ethical management, professional growth, and enhanced services.
- PURPOSE:** To build and nurture a diverse core of future and current leaders within a healthy and vibrant network of private nonprofit organizations throughout the United States and Canada whose commitment is to enrich the lives of those living with vision loss and to remove the barriers to the pursuit of opportunities.



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