



# Empowering local government to better serve their communities

## STRATEGIC PLAN 2019–2024



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# Introduction

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This strategic plan guides MRSC's work from 2019-2024. The ***Vision Statement*** communicates our overall aspirations for local government public service. The ***Mission Statement*** expresses the work that we do, and what we plan to achieve in doing this work.

The ***five goals of the plan*** are the pillars of MRSC. They communicate both:

What we exist to do; and,

How we sustain a healthy workplace in which to do this work.

We exist to provide outstanding customer service to local governments (Goal 1), and we must be financially sustainable to continue this work (Goal 5). We exist to anticipate and respond to the emerging challenges that local governments face (Goal 2), and we collaborate and maintain a great place to work in order to effectively accomplish this (Goals 3 and 4).

The strategies under each of the goals establish the work that we will continue, modify, or initiate to accomplish our goals. The strategies will be accomplished over the next five years.

## Implementation plan

A separate implementation plan will include a detailed matrix with roles, timeline, additional resource needs, and performance measures. The implementation plan will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis. Each year, in developing the MRSC annual work plan, we will review the implementation plan and determine which of the strategic initiatives to include in the annual work plan based on the timeline within the implementation plan and MRSC's organizational capacity.

# Vision & Mission

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## **VISION**

Empowering local government to better serve their communities.

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

Trusted guidance and services supporting local government success.

## **SUMMARY OF GOALS**

**Goal 1: Provide Outstanding Customer Service**

**Goal 2: Anticipate Emerging Challenges**

**Goal 3: Connect and Collaborate**

**Goal 4: Build a Great Place to Work**

**Goal 5: Ensure Financial Sustainability**

# Goals and Strategies

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## GOAL 1: PROVIDE OUTSTANDING CUSTOMER SERVICE

Our mission and top priority is to provide trusted guidance and services to support local government success. We are committed to providing trusted, objective and reliable advice on municipal issues. Over the past five years MRSC has expanded its service offerings, particularly in the areas of training, in-depth web content development, and rosters. These strategies strengthen our connections to our customers and align our services to our mission and to customer needs.

### A. Align all of our services to our mission, goals, and guiding principles

1. Develop criteria based on MRSC's mission and goals to evaluate existing and new program ideas.
2. Periodically evaluate existing programs and sunset or modify those that are not as strongly and strategically aligned with our mission and goals as other opportunities arise.
3. Include the strategic value of programs and projects to customers in the evaluation. Acknowledge that different types of customers have different needs.
4. Seek input from customers via focus groups or other methods in evaluating programs.

### B. Improve MRSC content and communications to meet customer needs

1. Define our customer audiences and develop greater understanding of their needs through regular interactions that identify resources and information that would be helpful to them. Solicit feedback from customers on a consistent basis.
2. Develop new program ideas from the perspective of how the program will be understood and used by the customer audience.
3. Deliver content in plain language that is clear, concise, and visually easy to read.
4. Consistently improve the visual quality of training presentations and web content through design and use of images.
5. Analyze and measure inquiry, training, roster usage, and web trends to identify the most sought-after services and information and develop content to respond to those needs.

### C. Invest in MRSC's website content, including making it easier for the customer to find what they are looking for

1. Implement MRSC's improved web search project. Continue to monitor and modify search results so that the most relevant information appears at the top of the search results.
2. Develop and test a frequently asked questions (FAQs) portion of the website to help customers find answers quickly and to develop standard answers to frequent inquiry questions.

3. In acknowledgement that most MRSC customers access our information through the website, continue to curate all of MRSC's web content. Maintain priorities for updating topic pages, with clear standards for the substance of the updates.
4. Assess the currency and accuracy of MRSC's web content, with the understanding that our content will evolve over time by adding new pages and eliminating others. Considerations in curating web content include: customer needs and interests; MRSC's areas of expertise; and, MRSC's capacity to maintain the content.

**D. Improve the efficiency and transparency of the inquiry service**

1. Implement process improvements consistent with the priorities identified by the inquiry project team.
2. Evaluate whether a new platform for the inquiry intake, distribution, and/or database would provide better service to our customers.
3. Maintain objectivity in inquiry responses and encourage collegiality and open information sharing when key personnel within a local government are in conflict..

**E. Use metrics to guide service decisions as appropriate**

1. Before settling on performance measures, first clearly identify the organizational problem to be solved or the goal to be achieved. Define the initiative that would be an effective and valued way to achieve the goal and determine how performance measures contribute to implementing the initiative.
2. Identify the specific measures that will help to inform decisions related to the problem to be solved or the goal to be achieved. Examples of problems to be solved that are aligned with this strategic plan include (1) balancing workload capacity with the work program demands; and, (2) getting a better understanding of who our core customers are and what their interests and needs are.
3. Determine the best use of customer demand and workload measures to tell MRSC's value story and to help prioritize MRSC programs, while allowing space for testing innovations and responses to emerging issues.
4. Consider the cost of obtaining and measuring data along with the return on investment to determine whether a particular metrics effort is worth doing.

## **GOAL 2: ANTICIPATE EMERGING CHALLENGES**

One of the most valued roles that MRSC fulfills is anticipating the challenges that local governments face and getting them the information and training that they need to respond effectively. MRSC relevance to local governments depends on keeping up with both emerging issues and new channels of communication.

### **F. Identify and provide timely information on emerging issues**

1. Develop more systematic approaches to identifying and responding to emerging issues.
2. Develop a rapid response plan to ensure that MRSC distributes timely information about important decisions or events, including judicial decisions, federal or state rule-making changes, and new federal or state legislation.
3. Coordinate with our partners, including AWC, WSAC, and WACO to identify emerging issues of importance to their members.

### **G. Innovate with new channels for disseminating information to local governments**

1. Explore expanding our use of media, such as short videos, visual animations, podcasts, and other tools to disseminate information to local governments.
2. Explore the potential for using new customer support tools, such as website chat or mobile apps to enhance responsiveness to web searches or information requests.
3. Explore the use of online networking spaces where local governments could ask questions and share information about programs, projects, and innovations.
4. Seek expert advice and training on new ways to push information out to our audiences.

## **GOAL 3: CONNECT AND COLLABORATE**

One of MRSC’s challenges is encouraging a team approach while also acknowledging that much of MRSC’s work is done on an individual basis. We value collaboration, and we are striving to improve it in practice. We also value connection and are seeking deeper connections with our customers and partners. These strategies focus on strengthening collaboration, outreach, and partnership.

### **H. Enhance internal collaboration**

1. Strengthen and expand opportunities and systems for sharing information internally and providing effective internal communications centered on a collaborative approach.
2. Inventory internal skill sets and encourage informal sharing of skills through staff workshops or brown bag meetings.
3. Provide project management training with a focus on internal communication and establishing clear roles and responsibilities.

### **I. Provide opportunities for more in-depth connections to customers and partners**

1. Explore pilot outreach programs to introduce MRSC services and to solicit feedback from customers.
2. Identify systematic ways to do targeted outreach to new staff and elected officials that are entering into public service in Washington for the first time.
3. Continue to be in dialogue with our partners on our respective roles in order to explore opportunities for collaboration and avoid duplication of effort.
4. Explore expansion of consulting services to local governments related to MRSC’s core areas of expertise, with an emphasis on providing lower cost services to local governments that would otherwise not be able to engage consulting services.

### **J. Convene conversations to explore differences and find common ground on challenging issues facing local governments**

1. Work to find the resources to convene diverse groups of government leaders to engage in civil discourse on issues that tend to be a source of public policy conflict.
2. Focus this work on facilitated conversations that lead to insights into emerging issues and that build capacity to sustain collaborative approaches to policy-making.



## **GOAL 4: BUILD A GREAT PLACE TO WORK**

We will continue to make investments in our people to provide effective service to our customers. Our strategies affirm our commitment to creating a great place to work. We will attract and retain quality staff members who find deep satisfaction in doing work that aligns with our mission.

### **K. Align our work around a culture of continuous improvement**

1. Encourage identification of areas for improvement, and support taking risks without fear.
2. Engage staff in cross-functional work teams, such as the Finance Team, to advance Strategic Plan implementation.
3. Improve management skills and tools, including communication, project management, and bringing people together to solve problems.

### **L. Empower staff to be their best**

1. Ensure that each staff person has the tools, resources, support, and training to effectively perform their responsibilities.
2. Implement effective and financially sustainable compensation and staffing models, with clear roles and responsibilities for individual positions.
3. Strengthen processes for staff professional development and encourage the pursuit of professional growth opportunities within MRSC.
4. Enhance internal communication and clarity of purpose throughout the workplace, including regular updates from individual teams.
5. Assure transparency of internal decision-making so that staff understands the decision to be made, who is making the decision and how staff are involved.
6. Ensure that personnel policies are aligned with building a healthy, safe place to work.

### **M. Maintain a Sustainable Workload**

1. Include quantitative allocations of staff time across the workplan to ensure staff capacity to complete the workplan.
2. Monitor capacity to take on new projects and make decisions to do new projects in alignment with capacity. When starting a project, discuss fair and realistic boundaries on workload in advance and stick to them.
3. Identify where staff are experiencing overload and either find additional resources to assist, reprioritize work items, or redefine the level of service to bring it into alignment with available resources.
4. Develop clear criteria to balance requests from strategic partners to do non-revenue activities with our own revenue-generating activities.

## **N. Work Life Balance**

1. Plan fun social activities for staff that help staff get to know each other better and to help ease the daily stressors we face.
2. Encourage staff to give due attention to all of the things that enrich and fulfill us, including work and career, health, family and relationships, and rest and recreation
3. Support flexible work scheduled and telecommuting opportunities.

## **GOAL 5: ENSURE FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY**

Strong financial management is essential to our long-term sustainability and health as an organization. This goal focuses on sound, responsible financial management and thoughtful diversification of our revenue base.

### **O. Assure long-term stable funding**

1. Continue to build relationships with the Washington State legislature through meetings with members and legislative staff, presentations to legislative committees on topics of interest, and training presentations to staff.
2. Support the training and rosters programs and invest in their development to ensure they continue to meet customer needs.
3. Continue to diversify funding sources by building new partnerships with special districts and providing more customized services including custom training and consulting services.
4. Continue to expand the MRSC sponsorship program and explore other opportunities for individuals, businesses, and local governments to support MRSC's work through direct contributions.

### **P. Align services to customer needs**

1. Continue to define our value proposition to our customers, with emphasis on the cost-effectiveness of our services and MRSC's positive impact on communities.
2. Develop criteria for taking on new projects and to eliminate or scale back programs that do not add sufficient value to the customer.
3. Explore new offerings in our Rosters program that respond to customer needs and generate self-sustaining revenue.
4. Be a good steward of MRSC's resources and continue to align services to the level of service that is within our capacity to provide.