

**UNITED STATES  
COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS**



**Strategic Plan FY 2014-2018**

**Contents**

I. Introduction ..... 1

II. Mission Statement ..... 2

III. Strategic Goals ..... 2

    Strategic Goal A:..... 3

    Strategic Goal B:..... 4

    Strategic Goal C:..... 6

    Strategic Goal D: ..... 8

    Strategic Goal E:..... 10

    Strategic Goal F: ..... 11

IV. External Factors Affecting Strategic Goals:..... 13

## I. Introduction

Since 1957, the United States Commission for Civil Rights (referred to as the “Commission”) has served as an independent, bipartisan, fact-finding federal agency charged with the responsibility of investigating, reporting and making recommendations on civil rights issues affecting our nation. The Commission was conceived by President Dwight D. Eisenhower and created by Congress as the nation’s first piece of civil rights legislation since Reconstruction. Congress established the Commission as a temporary fact finding agency to investigate and report on deprivations of the right to vote based on “color, race, religion, or national origin”; to “study” and “collect information” respecting denials of “equal protection of the laws” under the Constitution; and to “appraise” federal laws and policies respecting equal protection.<sup>i</sup>

As the civil rights movement evolved, Congress extended and expanded the Commission’s substantive authorization, directing it to investigate fraudulent practices that undermine the right to vote and to appraise federal civil rights policy regarding discrimination based on “sex,” “age” and “disability” and denials of equal protection in the administration of justice.<sup>ii</sup> The Commission operated as part of the executive branch under Presidential control and directive since its inception. Then, in 1983, Congress made structural changes to the Commission designed to ensure the Commission’s independence and bi-partisan character. The present Commission was established by the United States Commission on Civil Rights Act of 1983 as amended by Civil Rights Commission Amendments Act of 1994 (the Act).<sup>iii</sup> Under the Act, the Commission was statutorily mandated to

- “investigate allegations in writing under oath or affirmation that citizens of the United States are being deprived of their right to vote and have that vote counted by reason of color, race, religion, sex, age, disability, or national origin; 42 U.S.C. §1975a(1); and
- “(A) study and collect information relating to; (B) make appraisals of the laws and policies of the Federal government with respect to; (C) serve as a national clearinghouse for information relating to; and (D) prepare public service announcements and advertising campaigns to discourage discrimination or denials of equal protection of the laws under the Constitution of the United States because of color, race, religion, sex, age, disability, or national origin, or in the administration of justice.” 42 U.S.C. §1975a (2) – a(5).

Although the Commission’s substantive mandate is broad, its powers are modest. The Commission is neither an enforcement agency nor a legislative body. It lacks the coercive powers to compel results consistent with its mission and statutory mandate. Yet the Commission continues to meet its mandate while working with a stagnant budget and a reduction in workforce. The Commission’s success lies in its strength and ability to gather facts, study the

law, and then make recommendations. These abilities have been effectively incorporated into the FY 2014 – 2018 Strategic Plan.

## **II. Mission Statement**

The mission for the United States Commission on Civil Rights is to inform the development of national civil rights policy and enhance enforcement of Federal civil rights laws. The Commission pursues this mission by investigating alleged deprivations of voting rights or allegations of discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, age, disability, or national origin, or in the administration of justice. This Commission is committed to quality research, objective findings, and sound recommendations.

The Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years (FY) 2014 – 2018 establishes a framework for continuing to achieve this mission through the pursuit of the strategic goals and objectives listed and discussed below.

This strategic plan articulates the Commission’s vision for executing its vital mission over the next four years and for overcoming administrative challenges during a time of diminishing resources. The current goals and objectives allow us to work within the demands of our legislative and budgetary constraints to build upon the progress we have already made.

## **III. Strategic Goals**

Throughout our history, the Commission has worked towards fulfilling our Congressional mandate to serve as a bipartisan, fact-finding federal agency charged with making recommendations on civil rights issues that affect our nation. With this in mind, the Commission solicited the views of Commissioners, staff members and Congress to identify areas of strength and weakness within the Commission and its activities. This input was then used as the basis for drafting our strategic goals. Congressional input was obtained through meetings with staff from the following committees:

- U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary (Majority & Minority)
- U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights (Majority)
- U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on the Constitution (Majority & Minority)

- U.S. Senate, Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies (Majority and Minority)
- U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies (Majority & Minority)

Key concerns that were identified through this process were the need for the Commission to: produce more data-driven reports; increase the public’s accessibility to these reports; and, to efficiently integrate the SACs into the Commission’s work both as a way to raise public awareness of the essential work that the Commission is doing, and as a way to leverage the state-level resources of our SACs to inform the Commission’s work.

As we move towards implementing our new strategic plan, the Commission’s goal is to incorporate our stakeholders’ feedback into our efforts to shape the nation’s civil rights debate through expanded research, information, and reports generated by agency program activities. Our activities and reports have always been available and accessible to stakeholders. As an information-based, web-linked society and government, our goal is to make our reports and studies even more accessible for everyone in the community, including LEP individuals and those with disabilities. In addition, we will strive to strengthen our research and studies through the addition of an investigative report on a national issue. The Commission will implement Strategic Goals A and B to accomplish this aim.

**Strategic Goal A:**

The Commission will function as an effective civil rights watchdog and conduct studies and issue publications on important issues of civil rights.

Objective	Strategies	Performance Measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen the quality and objectivity of the Commission’s reports.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concentrate studies and research on national priorities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Commission will hold at least three briefings and/or hearings each year.</li> </ul>

**Strategic Goal B:**

The Commission will regularly provide new, objective information and analysis on civil rights issues.

Objective	Strategies	Performance Measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Commission will regularly conduct original fact-finding and/or a novel statistical data review in a civil rights investigation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Commission will include selection of an investigation as part of its annual project planning.</li> <li>• The Commission will strengthen employees' ability to conduct investigations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During its regular project planning process, the Commission will select one investigative project involving original fact-finding and/or statistical data reviews, either as a stand-alone project or in conjunction with a briefing or enforcement report.</li> <li>• Upon approval of an investigative project by the Commission, SACs may be solicited to aid the Commission in state and local fact gathering.</li> <li>• The Commission will train and/or cross-train designated employees on field interview techniques and statistical analysis.</li> <li>• The Commission will amend its Human Capital Plan to prioritize developing employee capacities in the areas of statistical analysis and complaint interviews.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All Commission products will be prepared using</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Commission will</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By 2015, the Commission</li> </ul>

Objective	Strategies	Performance Measures
standards that provide for maximum objectivity.	strengthen its information quality standards and other procedures regarding the process and review of agency products, as well as the implementation of such standards and procedures.	will conduct a review of existing information quality standards, administrative instructions, and other quality control and quality assurance guidelines to ensure its reporting maximizes objectivity.

**DISCUSSION OF STRATEGIC GOALS A AND B:**

**Strategic Goal A:** *The Commission will function as an effective civil rights watchdog and conduct studies, and issue publications on important issues of civil rights.*

**Strategic Goal B:** *The Commission will regularly provide new, objective information and analysis on civil rights issues*

Strategic Goals A & B reflect the Commission’s mandated responsibilities: 1) to study and collect information relating to discrimination or denial of equal protection of the laws; and 2) to appraise the laws and policies of the Federal Government relating to discrimination or denials of equal protection of the laws under the Constitution because of, color, race, religion, sex, age, disability, or national origin.

The objective for Strategic Goal A is to strengthen the quality and objectivity of the Commission’s reports. During the past four years, the Commission held fifteen briefings or hearings and issued accompanying reports for these briefings to inform Congress and the community on important civil rights issues. These briefings, hearings, and reports featured expert testimony from government enforcement and regulatory agencies, numerous advocacy groups, and subject matter experts from academia and the private sector, as well as analysis by our professional staff. In addition, in September 2010 the Commission held a National Civil Rights Conference featuring writers, academics, and civil rights activists to explore emerging civil rights issues of the twenty first century. Based on our output during the past five years our strategy for completing strategic goal A will be to concentrate on studies and research that pertain to national priorities.

Strategic Goal B seeks to reinforce Strategic Goal A through the inclusion of regularly conducted, original fact-finding and/or original statistical data review in a civil rights investigation.

This will be an important contribution toward fulfilling our duty to inform and advise the President and Congress. Research and analysis of verifiable data will be tremendously useful to policy makers and citizens in the ongoing civil rights dialogue.

As part of the statistical data review, the Commission will strengthen our staff’s ability to conduct investigations through expanded training and improvement in our information quality standards and procedures regarding the process and review of agency products.

Our goal for FY 2014 – 2018 will be to conduct an annual, original fact-finding or statistically based investigation such as our 2013 ongoing research project regarding the civil rights implications of *Stand Your Ground* laws.

**Strategic Goal C:**

The Commission will cooperate, where appropriate, with other federal agencies to apprise individuals of civil rights laws and policies and to raise public awareness of civil rights.

Objective	Strategies	Performance Measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen the Commission’s position as a national clearinghouse for civil rights information.</li> <li>• Consult with the civil rights divisions of other</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measure and analyze web traffic data on the clearinghouse web page to identify top three civil rights areas of interest</li> <li>• Maintain up to date information on the USCCR complaint</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yearly updates to the clearinghouse web page.</li> <li>• Review annually (FY) and update, as needed, the Uncle Sam publication, in both English and Spanish.</li> <li>• By FY 2016, issue quarterly data reports that list and rank clearinghouse information hits tabulated by agency (DOJ, EEOC, DOE and DOL).</li> <li>• List the name, URL and contact information for each Federal Civil Rights division</li> </ul>



Objective	Strategies	Performance Measures
<p>agencies to ensure dissemination of accurate information for the complaint referral process.</p>	<p>referral process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simplify the telephone complaint referral process.</li> </ul>	<p>that we refer complaints to on the USCCR website.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact the Federal civil rights divisions that we refer complaints to, semi-annually, to confirm accuracy of civil rights complaint contact information.</li> <li>• By 2014 update the phone lines to allow callers to use a push button system to obtain complaint referral information (ex: push 1 for Employment; Push 2 for Housing, etc.)</li> </ul>

**DISCUSSION OF STRATEGIC GOAL C:**

**Strategic Goal C** seeks to strengthen the Commission’s position as a national clearinghouse for civil rights information through the improvement of our civil rights complaints system and the tracking of requests for information. Such information will provide an important metric not only about the effectiveness of the Commission, but also for other enforcement agencies to measure the volume and frequency of civil rights complaints.

During the past five years, the Commission has tracked complaints received telephonically and through the mail, from citizens in the community and from inmates nationwide. In addition, during FY 2012 the Commission implemented a bi-lingual complaint phone number to vet complaints received from the Hispanic community. Although we have been tracking the number of complaints received on a monthly basis, the underlying challenge is that we are statutorily unable to assist with resolving complaints. The Commission is only able to refer the callers to the Civil Rights divisions of other Federal agencies and to state civil and human rights agencies, and once referred we are unable to track resolution. Faced with these challenges, Strategic Goal C seeks to improve our current tracking system in order to improve access for citizens in the community and increase access to LEP individuals and persons with disabilities.

**Strategic Goal D:**

Improve the Commission’s profile and effectiveness in communicating with the general public.

Objective	Strategies	Performance Measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raise public awareness of the Commission’s work</li>   <li>• Modernize the Commission’s information technology infrastructure to increase access to the Commission’s work products.</li>   <li>• Improve access to agency publications and dissemination of information for all persons including persons with disabilities and persons with limited English proficiency.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand Press Outreach</li>   <li>• Revise and reformat the website to increase web traffic and access to publications.</li>   <li>• Increase access to Commission briefings and hearings using online tools</li>   <li>• Measure and analyze web traffic and written requests for Commission reports.</li>   <li>• Revise and update the USCCR website to make electronic and information technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create and update press list on a regular basis</li>   <li>• Issue press releases (English &amp; Spanish) and update website prior to every hearing and briefing.</li>   <li>• Participate in speaking engagements and public policy symposia.</li>   <li>• Reformat website to increase Google hits.</li>   <li>• By FY 2016, Commission briefings and hearings will be streamed live online and made available on the website for future viewings.</li>   <li>• By FY 2014, issue monthly reports on downloads and written requests for USCCR publications (top ten for each category).</li>   <li>• By FY 2016, the agency shall implement accessible elements on the website, including alt tags, long</li> </ul>

Objective	Strategies	Performance Measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand and clarify the USCCR complaint process for all individuals including LEP persons and persons with disabilities.</li> </ul>	<p>(EIT) accessible to persons with disabilities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze complaint line data and written requests for assistance to identify language access needs.</li> <li>Improve web-based complaint screening process and online guidance to complainants.</li> </ul>	<p>descriptions, and captions, as needed.<sup>1</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>By FY 2016, all documents on the website shall be made available in HTML or a text-based format.<sup>2</sup></li> <li>Maintain log (library and complaint line) to identify which language, other than English, is most often used by callers/writers when they contact the Commission.</li> <li>By FY 2015, update the USCCR website to include direct links to federal agencies' civil rights complaint page.</li> </ul>

**DISCUSSION OF STRATEGIC GOAL D:**

**Strategic Goal D** seeks to improve the Commission’s profile and effectiveness in communicating with the public by raising public awareness of our work through improved press relations, use of social media, improvements to our website, and improved access to our publications. Historically, access to the Commission’s work has been limited to physical attendance at our hearings and briefings, obtaining a printed hard copy of our reports, or downloading an electronic copy of our reports from our web site. Looking forward, earlier this year we began installing the necessary hardware and software to make our hearings and briefings available in real time via streaming web casts as well as providing archival access to previously recorded meetings. We also anticipate making greater use of email, list serves, webinars, and social media to enhance timely communication with our stakeholders as well as our regional

<sup>1</sup> These elements are necessary in order to make web pages accessible for persons with disabilities.

<sup>2</sup> This format is necessary so that a person using a screen reader can access online documents or documents provided by the library on disc.

staffs. We also wish to make our work more accessible to those persons with Limited English Proficiency.

By 2016, following the enhancement of our interactive, electronic communications systems, our web site and multimedia products will also be Section 508 compliant so that they are accessible to persons with disabilities.

**Strategic Goal E:**

Continue to strengthen the Commission’s financial and operational controls and advance the Commission’s mission through management excellence, efficiency, and accountability.

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Performance Measures</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to strengthen the Commission’s financial, budget, and performance policy, procedures, and reports</li>   <li>• Improve the strategic management of the Commission’s human capital</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Align the Commission's budget submissions with the Agency's strategic plan and annual performance plan.</li> <li>• Ensure that the Commission's budget submission complies with OMB Circular A-11.</li> <li>• Enhance financial policy and procedures to ensure reliability of financial reporting.</li> <li>• Monitor and report on the Commission's progress in achieving its annual performance plan goals and objectives.</li> <li>• Update and Implement the Commission's Human Capital Plan to ensure the agency has a highly skilled and flexible workforce to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compliance with OMB Circular A-11</li> <li>• Compliance with OMB Circular A-11</li> <li>• Receive a “clean” or unqualified financial statement audit.</li> <li>• Submit a Performance and Accountability Report that adheres to all relevant guidance.</li> <li>• Implementation of commission’s and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Human capital Plan program, strategies and initiatives.</li> <li>• Results of the Employee</li> </ul>

Objective	Strategies	Performance Measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve administrative and clearinghouse services including information technology, acquisition, and library functions.</li> </ul>	<p>carry out its mission.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct and analyze Employee Satisfaction surveys and develop specific strategies to address issues.</li> <li>Conduct training to increase awareness of acquisition processes and procedures.</li> <li>Comply with Federal information security requirements.</li> <li>Leverage information technology to enhance the productivity and efficiency of the workforce.</li> </ul>	<p>Satisfaction surveys compared to previous surveys.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Annual training sessions, i.e., formal training, issuance of memoranda and/or internal instructions.</li> <li>Annual FISMA audit</li> <li>Comply with OMB Cloud Computing Initiatives.</li> </ul>

**DISCUSSION OF STRATEGIC GOAL E:**

**Strategic Goal E** seeks to continue to strengthen the Commission’s financial and operational controls and advance the Commission’s mission through management excellence, efficiency, and accountability by strengthening the Commission’s financial, budget and performance analysis. We will continue our efforts to be good stewards of the public funds that enable us to continue this important work.

**Strategic Goal F:**

Increase the participation of our State Advisory Committees (SACs) in the Commission’s work.

Objective	Strategies	Performance Measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Include SAC input in the Commission’s program planning process.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Solicit SAC involvement in briefings and hearings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Subject to budget constraints, by FY 2015, SACs will be encouraged to participate in at least two</li> </ul>

Objective	Strategies	Performance Measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance collaboration between and among SACs, regional offices and the Commission.</li> <li>• Strengthen the SAC re-chartering process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand communication and information sharing through the use of a listserv and webinar capabilities.</li> <li>• Achieve and maintain chartered status for all 51 SACs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>briefings/ hearings/fact-finding and/or public forums annually.</li> <li>• Issue monthly updates via listserv (from DC office to Regions).</li> <li>• By FY 2015, Regional offices will have the capability to offer webinars.</li> <li>• Extend SAC appointee terms to 4 years.</li> <li>• Eliminate SAC backlog by FY 2015.</li> <li>• Re-charter SACs set to expire after 10/1/2014 within 60 days.</li> </ul>

**DISCUSSION OF STRATEGIC GOAL F:**

Strategic Goal F seeks to increase the participation of our SACs in the Commission’s work through the SACs’ participation in our briefings, hearings and project planning and execution.

This has always been one of our objectives, but in 2011, the White House appointed as Commission Chairman a man who had been the Chair of our Illinois State Advisory Commission. With his background as a SAC Chair, our new Commission Chair is deeply committed to leveraging the resources and enthusiasm of our SAC members to enhance the Commission’s work.

Our enhanced objectives in this regard are to:

- Include SAC input in the Commission’s program planning process;
- Enhance collaboration between and among SACs, regional offices, and the Commission; and

- Strengthen the SAC re-chartering process, which would include extending the term of the SAC appointees from two years to four years.

#### **IV. External Factors Affecting Strategic Goals:**

The Commission's statutory authorization and organizational structure remains rooted in the past and affects the Commission's ability to align its organizational structure with its statutory mission. Although the Commission's authorizing statute expired in 1996, the Commission has been able to continue its operations by way of annual Congressional appropriation. As a result, the Commission may need to adjust its strategic goals to reflect any changes in funding or mandate, in the future, if subjected to an adjustment in appropriations or a new reauthorization statute.

The agency's current organizational structure, which contains various empty key positions, may require reorganization in the future to improve mission efficiency. The Commission currently has 41 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions and 3 part-time equivalent positions, a significant decline from 1996 when the Commission had a staff of 93. The significant reduction in our programmatic offices, which includes staff shortages at regional offices and vacancies in key positions such as the Commission's public affairs and congressional affairs units, have been a direct response to our stagnant budget.

Overall, the biggest, external factors that affect our mission are the stagnant budget and staffing levels. As with other agencies facing reduced resources, our challenge continues to be the need to accomplish more with less. We have been able to meet this challenge through the following, proactive strategies:

- We have avoided involuntary staff cuts through attrition, thus retaining experienced personnel; and
- Our leaner staff has assumed additional, key responsibilities previously performed by former employees.

While declines in the overall economy have dictated reduced budgets for federal government agencies, federal initiatives to digitize records management and reform information technology continue to place additional demands on the Commission and our stagnant budget. Information technology services, in particular, represent the greatest need for increased funding, as the demands of the digital age and paperwork reduction require the Commission to utilize newer technologies to strengthen statutory compliance and develop an online records management system. As noted elsewhere, we have already begun making modest investments in the modern tools and technologies, which will allow us to continue leveraging our smaller labor pool to

accomplish more. As the Commission continues to face challenges in aligning our organizational structure with our budget, the implementation of this strategic plan will allow us to efficiently and effectively accomplish our statutory mission.

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<sup>i</sup> Civil Rights Act of 1957. Pub. L. No. 85-315. § 101.71 Stat. 634. September 9, 1954. The constitutionality of the Commission was upheld in *Hannah v. Larche*. See 363 US 420, 452 (9160) (holding that Congress may, under the enforcement clause of the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment, establish an investigatory and reporting agency to evaluate instances of discriminatory denials of voting rights and, under the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment’s enforcement clause, establish an agency to investigate denials of the equal protection clause.)

<sup>ii</sup> The Civil Rights Act of 1964. 78 Stat. 241, Pub. Law 88-352, July 2, 1964 (see Amendment in title V. 78 Stat. At 249. adding voter fraud.) [Hereinafter “The 1964 Act”]; The Civil rights Act of 1972, 86 Stat. 813, Pub. Law 92-496 Stat. 1067, Pub. Law 95-444, Oct. 10, 1978 [Hereinafter “the 1978 Amendment”].

<sup>iii</sup> 103 P.L. 419, 108 Stat. 4338, October 25, 1994, codified at 42 U.S.C. 1975a.