PAINTED BRAIN

FY 21-22 MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR THE BLIND, PARTIALLY SIGHTED AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Access for All Underserved Cultural Communities (UsCC) subcommittee was established under the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA), with the goals of reducing disparities and increasing mental health access for the disabled community in Los Angeles County. They work closely with community partners and consumers in order to increase the capacity of the public mental health system to develop culturally relevant recovery-oriented services specific to the disabled community and also to develop capacity building projects.

Painted Brain was contracted to develop and implement the UsCC Capacity Building Project: Blind, Partially Sighted, and Visually Impaired Community Mental Health Needs Assessment Project virtually. The project period dated July 2021 to June 2022. The objective of this project was to outreach and engage people within this population from the eight (8) service areas across Los Angeles County into a virtual discussion regarding the mental health needs of this community, as well as to reduce the stigma associated with mental health services. This project aimed to increase connections with mental health resources and provide opportunities to address concerns about mental health services. Painted Brain outreached to people within this community and engaged them in one of nine (9) scheduled virtual Focus Groups to assess their mental health needs. Additionally, Painted Brain identified gaps in accessibility to mental health services and determined how to effectively engage community members into mental health services provided by Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (LACDMH).

Simultaneously, Painted Brain was contracted to develop and implement the UsCC Capacity Building Project for the Physically Impaired and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. The deliverable and implementation processes were replicated for all three projects to ensure continuity of data collection. The deliverable process is as follows:

- Deliverable 1 - July 1, 2021 to September 30, 2021 - Development of Focus Group questions, resource guides, flyers and other promotional materials.
- Deliverable 2 - October 1, 2021 to November 30, 2021 - Coordination of virtual Focus Groups for community members for eight (8) service areas and recruitment of Focus Group participants.
- Deliverable 3 - December 1, 2021 to May 31, 2022 - Facilitation of eight (8) virtual Focus Groups to the blind, partially sighted, and visually impaired.

- Deliverable 4 - June 1, 2022 to June 30, 2022 - Final summary report highlighting all data collected.

PROJECT RESULTS

The following summary charts and information have been generated to reflect project results.

Total Number of Focus Groups Facilitated

- Painted Brain facilitated a total number of nine (9) Focus Groups during the contract period. Eight (8) Focus Groups were facilitated for all eight (8) service areas, one (1) Focus Group per service area and one (1) additional Focus Group encompassing all service areas. While conducting the Focus Groups, an issue arose of participants confirming their attendance via email, but would not attend the scheduled Focus Group. This "no show" situation necessitated an additional Focus Group be conducted encompassing every service area. Thus the total number of Focus Groups per disability sector is the required eight (8) plus one (1) additional.
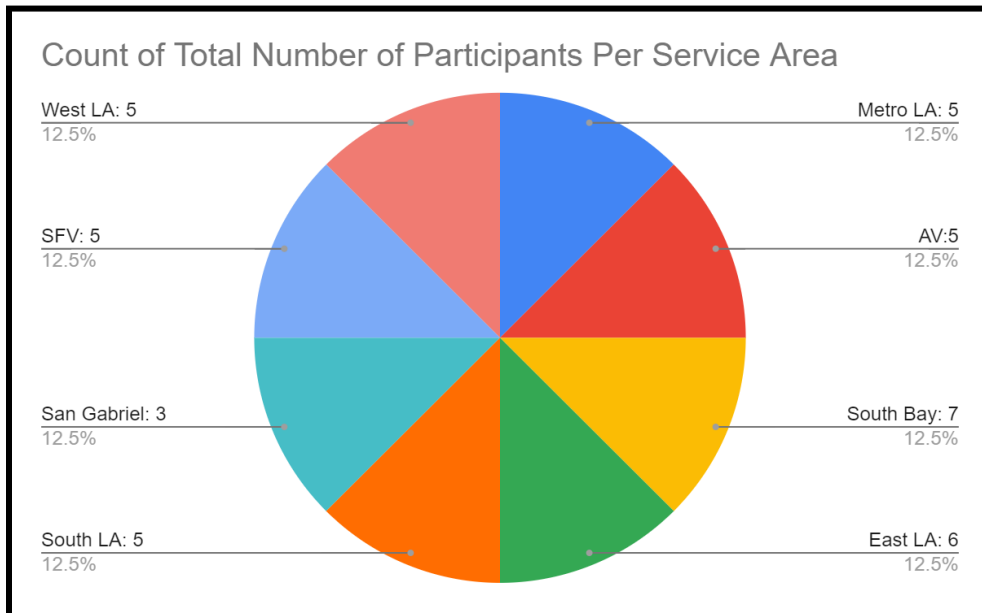
Total Number of Registrants

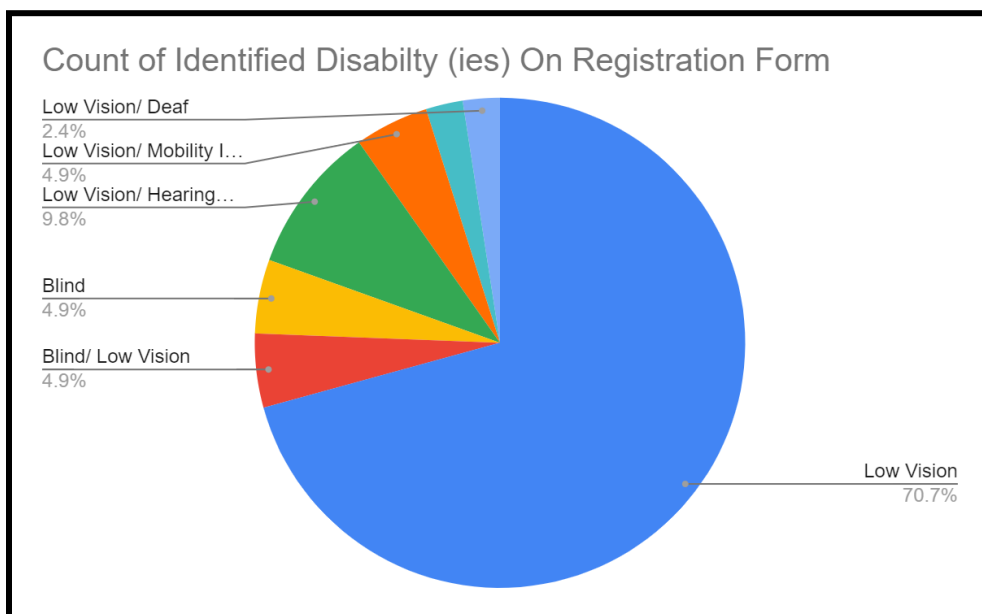- 139 individuals registered to participate in the scheduled Focus Groups.

Total Number of Participants Reached Per Service Area

● A total of 41 participants were reached during the project period.

Count of Total Number of Participants Per Service Area

West LA: 5
12.5%

Metro LA: 5
12.5%

SFV: 5
12.5%

AV:5
12.5%

San Gabriel: 3
12.5%

South Bay: 7
12.5%

South LA: 5
12.5%

East LA: 6
12.5%

Identified Disability(ies) on Registration Form

● Participants identified with one or more service area(s), below is the summary of participants identified service area(s) per their registration form.

Count of Identified Disabilty (ies) On Registration Form

Low Vision/ Deaf
2.4%

Low Vision/ Mobility I…
4.9%

Low Vision/ Hearing…
9.8%

Blind
4.9%

Blind/ Low Vision
4.9%

Low Vision
70.7%

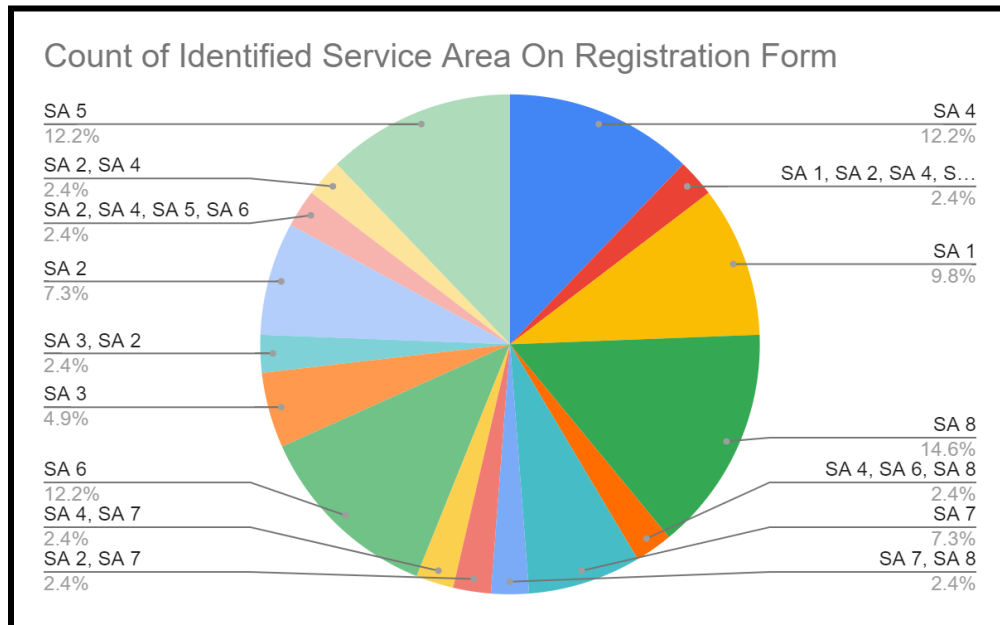**Identified Service Area(s) on Registration Form**

- Participants identified with one or more service area(s), below is the summary of participants identified service area(s) per their registration form.

Count of Identified Service Area On Registration Form

Label	%
SA 5	12.2%
SA 2, SA 4	2.4%
SA 2, SA 4, SA 5, SA 6	2.4%
SA 2	7.3%
SA 3, SA 2	2.4%
SA 3	4.9%
SA 6	12.2%
SA 4, SA 7	2.4%
SA 2, SA 7	2.4%
SA 4	12.2%
SA 1, SA 2, SA 4, S…	2.4%
SA 1	9.8%
SA 8	14.6%
SA 4, SA 6, SA 8	2.4%
SA 7	7.3%
SA 7, SA 8	2.4%

Completed Pre-Surveys

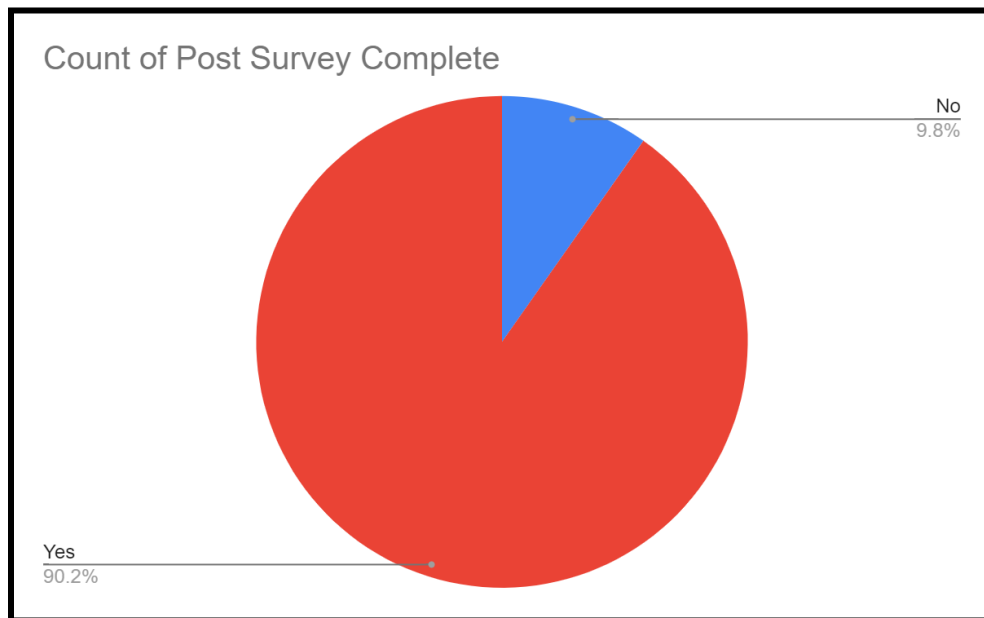- 92.7% of participants completed a pre-survey. Despite follow-up, there were participants who did not complete the Focus Group pre-survey.

Count of Pre Survey Complete

Label	%
No	7.3%
Yes	92.7%
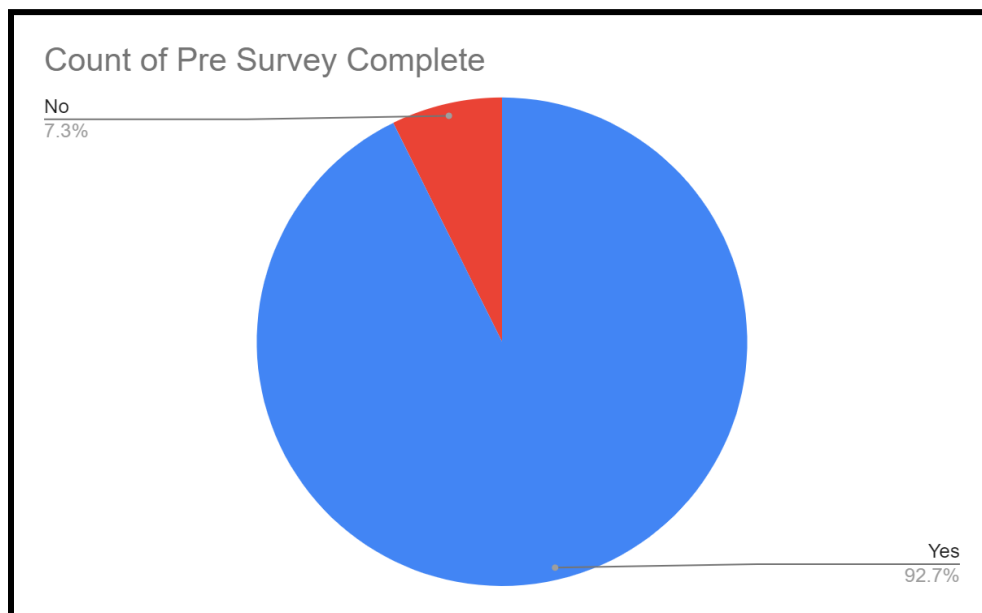
Completed Post-Surveys

- 90.2% of participants completed a post-survey. Despite follow-up, there were participants who did not complete the Focus Group post-survey.

Development of Focus Group Subjects Areas and Questions

The development of the Disability Mental Health Needs Assessment Subject Areas and Questions were co-developed through meetings with the LACDMH and UsCC. Key areas of inquiry for the disability sectors were identified to gauge mental health service use and mental health needs of the blind, partially sighted, and visually impaired community. These key subject areas were then further developed into Focus Group questions that would best illustrate the current state of affairs within the disabilities community in Los Angeles County. The subject areas and questions were uniformly applied across all three (3) Needs Assessment projects to create a continuity of the data collection.

The process of developing the subject areas and the Focus Group questions took place over a series of Access For All meetings until approval of final questions was achieved. The subject area feedback and comments were received from the UsCC members, community stakeholders, and LACDMH staff.

Focus Group subject areas:

- Available Services

- Challenges/Gaps in Services
- Stigma
- Improvements
- Outreach Suggestions

Focus Group questions:

1. What mental health services are you currently using or know of?
2. What are some challenges to accessing mental health services you or the blind, partially sighted, and visually impaired community experience?
3. What stigma related to mental health do you experience?
4. If you could change one thing about mental health service delivery for the blind, partially sighted, and visually impaired community what would it be?
5. What are some suggestions you have for outreaching about mental health services for the blind, partially sighted, and visually impaired community?

The following are results to the Focus Group questions:

<u>What mental health services are you currently using or know of?</u>

Focus Group participants identified accessing mental health services such as one-on-one therapy both in-person and virtually. Many of which indicated that family members supported them in connecting with a treatment team.

- ***Participant quote***: *"I use therapy sessions and sometimes when I can't get there, when there's no one to take me, yeah, do online sessions."*

<u>What are some challenges to accessing mental health services you or the blind, partially sighted, and visually impaired community experience?</u>

Participants of the blind and low vision Focus Groups identified five major challenges in accessing mental health services:

1. Finances
2. Lack of transportation to service centers
3. Navigating insurance
4. Cultural competency: Misunderstanding blindness as a binary experience instead of a spectrum
5. Digital accessibility of services and resources

Finances: Limitations of adequate health coverage contribute to the financial strain participants experience. The cost of insurance deductibles are high and in many cases participants are paying out-of-pocket for mental health services.

- **Participant quote**: *"In the past I used to go for therapy sessions and in the long run it turned out to be expensive. Then I was not able to keep up and had to stop it [paying for therapy sessions]. And now, [I am] basically receiving help from voluntary organizations."*

Lack of transportation to service centers: Participants experience challenges in finding local mental health service providers within their service area, therefore increasing their need for reliable transportation to scheduled appointments in other service areas. Los Angeles County covers a large geographical area and commuting to mental health service providers is difficult with the lack of available transportation services. Public transportation, while affordable and seemingly practical, is not reliable nor convenient creating more challenges to accessing mental health services.

- **Participant quote**: *"Then, yeah, transportation is always challenging especially if you know, cannot drive for any reason. Also just costs trying to, you know, deal with the cost of transportation, you know, like taking like ride share services. Those things [expenses] can add up."*

Navigating insurance: When mental health services are covered by participants' health insurance policies, the challenges experienced are related to navigating and accessing mental health service providers and services that are covered through those policies.

- **Participant quote**: *"I think most challenges that most challenged people first in the community of the blind have is lack of insurance." & "You know the cost, you know fighting financially, especially if we don't have health insurance. And then sometimes even the health insurance doesn't really cover the full cost is like a copay."*

Cultural competency- Misunderstanding blindness as a binary experience instead of a spectrum: Mental Health Service providers do not acknowledge the importance of the local community culture as it relates to the disabilities sector. Participants expressed the feeling that mental health service providers do not relate with the needs and lived experiences of the target population. Service providers show pity rather than empathy, discouraging participants' from continuing or seeking future mental health services.

- **Participant quote**: *"I think another major challenge is being discriminated by probably the service providers or and family members or friends."*

Digital accessibility of services and resources: Navigating online/virtual spaces without assistive technology or the support from family and friends is extremely challenging for this target population. The lack of accessible online spaces, web pages, documents, etc. decreases an individual's ability to stay informed of mental health services and resources available to them, contributing to feelings of isolation.

- ***Participant quote****: "But I believe my biggest challenge is actually the fact that I'm actually visually impaired. What I'm saying is, I believe that we are in a world where it's now technologically driven so most of the information [is] found mostly online. So since my visual "impairedness" is like, make it very hard for me to read tiny letters on the Internet. I now have to rely on friends and family to help research information that would be to my own benefit."*

What stigma related to mental health do you experience?

False perceptions of the target population impacts their potential capabilities, consequently impacting participants' internal self-worth of actual capabilities. The mental health service providers' perceived knowledge of "limitations" and "restrictions" can impact how the participant discerns themselves and their contribution to society. The lack of disability awareness and etiquette contributes to participants feeling excluded, avoided and ignored by the majority of sight-abled individuals. Focus Group participants expressed feelings of social awkwardness and confusion when communicating with others since they are unable to see visual cues related to body language, relying heavily on auditory cues in most cases.

- ***Participant quote: "****Pity from the crowd. People from the community, people around us are in some ways not helpful… Then this pity from people just keeps reminding the person of the problem."*

If you could change one thing about mental health service delivery for the blind, partially sighted, and visually impaired community what would it be?

Listed below are Focus Group participants suggestions that may improve the quality of mental health services provided, they are as follows:

- Improve transportation services so that they are more accessible and offer reliable service delivery.
- Increase diversity/representation of mental health service providers to include service providers that identify with different disabilities. Having diverse mental health service providers will allow for the relatability of lived experiences that can improve the quality of care.

- **Participant quote**: *"Then, yeah, transportation is always challenging especially if you, you know, cannot drive for any reason. Also just costs trying to, you know, deal with the cost of transportation, you know, like taking like ride share services." & "To sort of develop a better cultural competencies, meaning like, language capacities, including sign language and improving the diversity within the hiring of Clinicians."*

What are some suggestions you have for outreaching about mental health services for the blind, partially sighted, and visually impaired community?

The following are Focus Group suggestions to increase awareness of mental health services:
- Consider the use of social media with accessible material/content for the blind, partially sighted, and visually impaired.
- Consider outreach engagement efforts of mental health services provided/available to community gathering spaces that the target population frequents.

PROJECT COSTS

$43,000

LESSONS LEARNED/ RECOMMENDATIONS

Fraud
The presence of a $50.00 gift card incentive may have skewed the demographics of the participants towards a lower financial segment of the disabled population. Further, issues of fraudulent registrations, and participants were a concern.
- *Recommendation:* Marketing the gift cards as a raffle, may reduce fraud. Though marketed as a raffle, all participants would receive a gift card at the conclusion of all Focus Groups.

Vetting Process for Participants
Applying a vetting process for disabled participants is strongly recommended for future LACDMH Focus Groups.
- *Recommendation:* Collaborating with disability service providers and University disabled student service departments, to recruit Focus Group participants may aid in the verification of participant disability and vetting processes. Additionally, we suggest receiving referrals from a trusted source/agency who can vet participants.

Service Area Selection

Having multiple Service Areas able to be selected on the Registration form, caused logistic issues in regards to where a participant would be scheduled for a particular Focus Group. Further, a pattern of registrants selecting multiple service areas & multiple disabilities, raised fraud concerns.

- *Recommendation:* It is strongly suggested that only one (1) Service Area option be selected on the Focus Group Registration form.

Security

The majority of Focus Group participants did not enable their video camera or share their facial image. This raised security concerns, as it was not possible for the Focus Group Facilitators to visually vet the participants.

- *Recommendation:* A discussion of how to best ensure the safety of Focus Group participants is strongly recommended for LACDMH to further develop the balance between privacy and security issues.

Disability Resources

The Disability Resource Guide produced by Painted Brain, that is posted on the LACDMH website is in PDF form with no method of being updated and searched. The resource guide appears as three (3) separate PDF files.

- *Recommendation:* Have the Disability Resource Guide in Web Page template that can be updated and additional resources can be added. Add a search engine feature to the template.

Tutorial Video

Focus Group expectations sent via email communications were not clearly understood by selected registrants.

- *Recommendation:* The creation of a tutorial video on how to register and participate in a Focus Group, is strongly recommended as an outreach tool, to better inform potential Focus Group participants of these processes/expectations. For the disability sector in particular, American Sign Language Interpretation within the tutorial video is also recommended.

Threshold Languages

We did not reach many communities that are native speakers of the 13 Threshold Languages.

- *Recommendation:* Outreach materials translated into the fourteen (13+ASL) currently identified Threshold Languages within Los Angeles County is strongly recommended.

Requirements to conduct translation of outreach materials is suggested as a line item of the contract Scope Of Work.

OUTCOMES

Project Pre-production
- Project planning meetings with LACDMH and UsCC to discuss project and project deliverables.
- Draft of Project Roadmap highlighting all activities to be performed during the project period.

Project Coordination
- Painted Brain internal staff meetings to discuss project deliverables, timeline and activities. 1-2 times per week.
- Meetings with contract liaison to discuss project updates and supports needed. Once (1) per month.

Development of Marketing/ Outreach Materials
- Development of marketing e-flyers and promotional videos (TikTok) for the recruitment of blind, partially sighted and visually impaired participants in each of the eight (8) Service Areas. Marketing flyers were in PDF and Alt Text format. Promotional flyers/videos included voice over accessibility.
- Development of Resource Guide with Countywide resources for the blind, partially sighted and visually impaired community to provide to Focus Group participants.
- Development of a compilation Resource Guide with Countywide resources for all disabilities to provide to Focus Group participants. PDF version posted on LACDMH website, Get Help Now Page - Resources Disabled.
- Printed resources guides (24) in Braille.

Marketing, Outreach & Recruitment for Virtual Focus Groups
- Utilized social media platforms to recruit blind, partially sighted and visually impaired community members in each of the eight (8) Service Areas.
  - Twitter
  - FaceBook
  - Instagram
  - Club House
  - Twitter Space
- Conducted motivational outreach in each of the eight (8) service areas to recruit blind, partially sighted and visually impaired community members.

- Hosted outreach presentations to the following:
    - Braille Institute – Rights & Resources class
    - Service Area Leadership Team – SPA 3, San Gabriel Valley
    - Abilities Expo
- Requested consultation on best practices to outreach to the blind, partially sighted and visually impaired from the following agencies:
    - California State University Northridge– Department on Disabilities
- Conducted outreach efforts via email to Community Based Organizations, Colleges/Universities, Independent Living Centers in each eight (8) service areas.

Focus Group Logistics Coordination
- Conducted nine (9) Focus Groups virtually to the blind, partially sighted and visually impaired community, one Focus Group in each of the eight (8) service areas in Los Angeles County and one (1) Focus Group to all eight (8) service areas
- Developed Focus Group registration form and pre/post surveys on Google Forms.
    - Conducted accessibility testing on phone and computer platforms for the registration form and pre/post surveys.
- Developed Focus Group questions
- Developed slides for the Focus Group presentation
- Developed Focus Group timeline
    - December 2021 – May 2022
- Managed registration list of participants
- Vet participants list
    - Ensured participants selected to join one of the scheduled Focus Groups met criteria
- Email communications to selected participants
    - Confirmation to participate email
        - Introduction to Focus Group
        - Expectations to join
    - Follow-up email
        - Created and provided participants with the Zoom Link and phone numbers to join
    - Post Focus Group follow-up email
        - Distribution of Resource Guide PDF
        - Instructions to receive gift card

- When requested, arrange for the availability of ASL interpretation services at the Focus Group
  - Provide ASL interpreters with Focus Group presentation for review
- Enabled live transcription and closed captioning for all virtual Focus Groups
  - Reviewed keyboard shortcuts for main feature buttons -mute, video etc. at each scheduled Focus Group
- Coordinate gift card distribution to Focus Group participants
- Provide monthly status reports to contract liaison
  - Provide reports at Access For All monthly meetings
- Submit report/ invoice per project delivery phase
- Sort and access Focus Group data to determine results, lessons learned, recommendation, and outcomes.