



WESTERN CENTER
ON LAW & POVERTY

STRATEGIC PLAN

2023 – 2025

VISION

End systemic racism. End poverty. Ensure justice for all. Everyone thrives.

MISSION

Through the lens of economic and racial justice, Western Center on Law & Poverty litigates, educates, and advocates in courts, cities, counties, the State Capital and the public arena to secure just housing, health care, economy, and legal systems for Californians with low incomes.

Many systems keep people in poverty – from institutionalized racism to inequitable economic structures. We leverage our partnerships, passion, and expertise to transform systems, end poverty, and create a socially just world for today and generations to come.

NORTH STAR

Western Center on Law & Poverty seeks to eliminate poverty and advance racial and economic justice by dismantling and transforming systems so all communities in California can thrive.

WE BELIEVE

- All Californians deserve respect, autonomy, and self-determination.
- Our economy traps many people, especially people of color, in an intergenerational cycle of poverty.
- As a society we can end poverty.
- California's legal, economic, and other systems are rooted in racism and the power of privilege.
- Racism creates a hierarchy of human value that oppresses communities of color and advantages white dominant culture.
- To challenge the status quo, Western Center must change at multiple levels: as individuals, as an organization, in what work we choose to take on, and in how we do that work.
- Progress requires acknowledging and dismantling the existing systems that perpetuate different opportunities and outcomes based on race.
- We are all interconnected. We need each other, regardless of our station in life.
- If the past isn't discussed, it can't be addressed.
- Racial equity ensures that all Californians are afforded legal rights and protections, regardless of race or ethnicity.
- Economic equity provides opportunities for everyone to meet their basic needs and build assets and wealth.
- More focused work brings the clarity to say a thoughtful "no" to use our resources to best advance our mission and sustain staff well-being.
- We are sometimes most effective as leaders. We are more often most effective as partners. We are always more effective together with those most impacted.

COMMITMENTS

Through our decisions and actions we strive to...

- Advance racial and economic equity through every function and decision.
- Aim for equitable access and opportunities to counteract historic injustices.
- Leverage our many assets and share our power to push for bold social change.
- Take a long-term view of success over emphasis on short-term wins.
- Collaborate, listen to those most impacted, course correct when needed, and learn from each other.
- Use direct community experience and voice to shape and direct our approach to systemic change, while also being great partners with other legal service organizations and collaborators.
- Engage in collective decision-making.
- Remain flexible and responsive.
- Stay with the work even when it becomes uncomfortable.

Context for Strategic Planning

Western Center on Law and Poverty (Western Center) faced a turning point in the summer of 2020, as did the whole country. The murder of George Floyd and other Black people at the hands of police amplified the racial injustices that Western Center staff and volunteers fight every day. The board hired Crystal Crawford, a bold racial justice advocate, as our new Chief Executive Officer. The big questions facing the country came alive within our organization.

Widening income inequality in California exacerbates the conditions of poverty and is an obstacle to moving the poverty needle. While Black, Indigenous, and other people of color bear the brunt of California's severe economic inequality, everyone can feel the pressure and see the fallout. In addition, the state's AAPI and Latine populations, not all of whom identify as people of color, face language prejudice, ethnic discrimination, and negative attitudes toward immigrants, regardless of their own status.

As we consider our shared future, every Californian must face these crises and contend with ourselves, our society, and the misplaced values that allow billionaires to proliferate as millions contend with insufficient income, housing, health care, and access to justice.

The board and staff launched this planning process in the summer of 2021 with a commitment to sustain the passion we felt during the 2020 Black Lives Matter uprisings and resulting racial reckoning. We celebrate the changes and progress we have made, and honestly face where we continue to fall short within our own organization.

We recognize there is far more work to be done than our current capacity permits. Therefore, we must expand our resources with robust fundraising goals to expand staff to fulfill our priorities and goals, while carefully focusing our efforts for greatest impact.

We don't do any of this work alone. We commit that the people who will most benefit from our efforts are those who have been most harmed in the past. We recognize that all of the issues we address are interconnected, and that these injustices impact us all.

Western Center works to dismantle and transform oppressive legal and economic systems in California, building on our strengths and expertise. We intentionally and explicitly name and examine how our choices of matters, partners, and actions can prioritize those who have been most harmed so that they may thrive economically, physically, mentally, and achieve both individual and collective health.

Strengths

- Prestigious history, name recognition, reputation, and visibility across California.
- Unique in California, we have robust, successful policy advocacy and Sacramento presence combined with impact litigation and legal services expertise.
- Respected, trusted partner with sought-after staff expertise and knowledge.
- Effective in expanding the capacity of legal services organizations and delivering positive impact for those experiencing and fighting poverty.

Commitment to Racial Equity

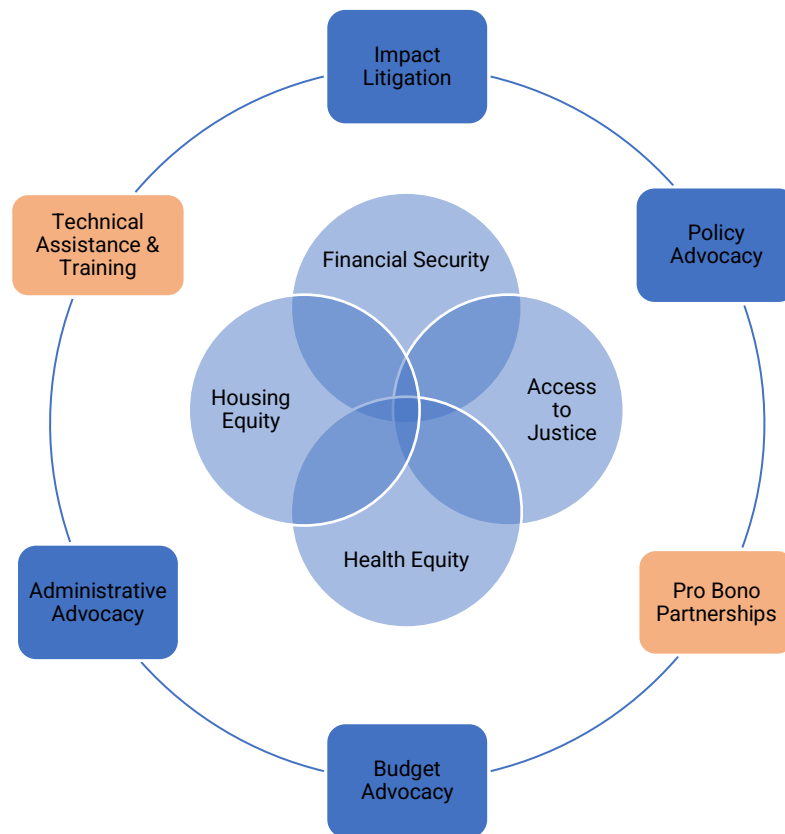
In order to effectively dismantle and transform external systems, Western Center must first constructively confront internal issues of inequity and dismantle our own exclusionary practices. To root out the white dominant culture in our organization, we will develop an Equity Action Plan & Organizational Learning Agenda in early 2023 and begin their implementation.

We recognize that internal Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) work is a continuous process that takes time. We will pace ourselves, being aware of the balance of demands on staff and the importance of sustaining both our DEI progress and our community impact.

As a result, we will review our supervision and management system along with work roles and expectations and establish broad accountability for DEI metrics. We expect to set goals for board and staff diversity that address race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, and non-legal experience, as well as lived experience with poverty.

For Western Center, racial equity is neither a stand-alone effort nor a passing idea. Across our board and staff, we are committed to the necessary individual and collective work.

How We Advance Our Mission



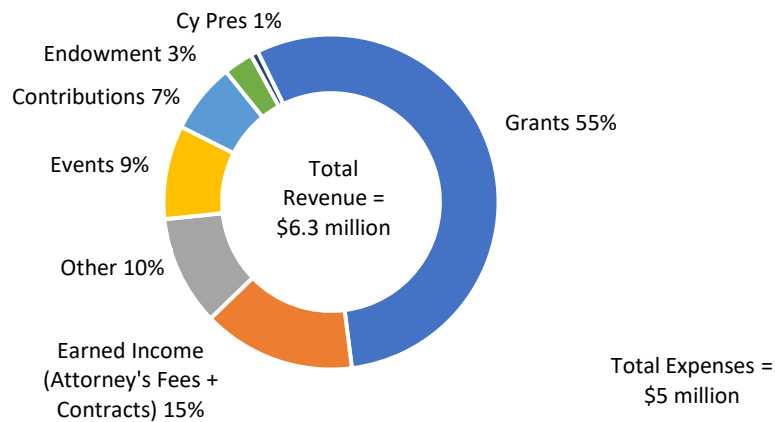
For over five decades, Western Center has advocated in every branch of government on behalf of Californians experiencing poverty— from the courts to the legislature. Through the lens of economic and racial justice, we litigate, educate, and advocate for just and equitable health, housing, financial security, and access to justice.

Western Center’s unique approach in California combines roughly equal amounts of policy advocacy (including budget and administrative advocacy) and impact litigation across all our issue areas along with education and technical support to legal service organizations. This model is different from legal service organizations that provide direct representation to individuals. We are trusted partners to these direct service organizations, providing legal expertise and support. In return, we stay connected to the community’s needs through these partnerships and a wide variety of collaborations.

Robust policy advocacy is Western Center’s market edge. We are recognized among the legal field, courts, philanthropy, and the public for our long history of effective advocacy.

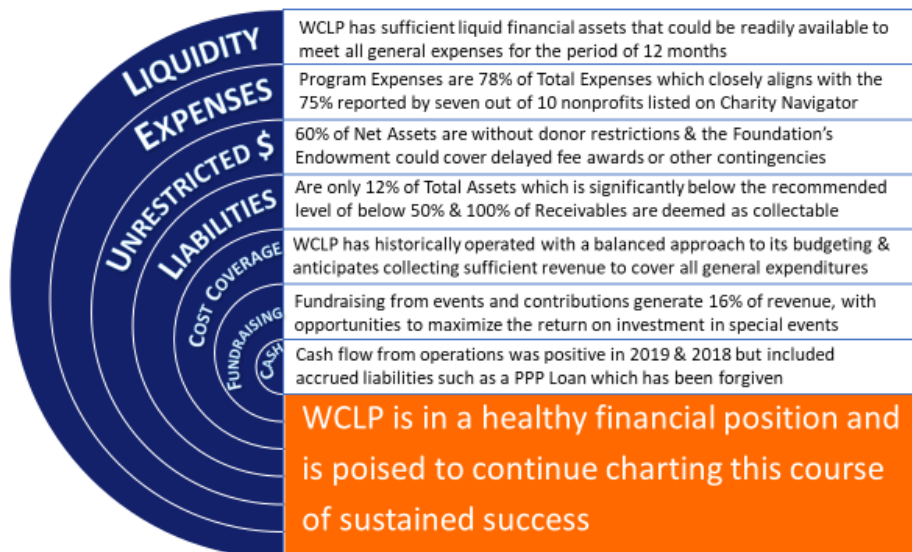
Financial Analysis

2021 Sources of Funds



- Western Center has a relatively diverse mix of funding among legal service organizations.
- Revenue from **grants**, including State Bar funds, is the largest source and has intentionally been grown over time, with leading private foundations, community foundations, and corporate contribution programs often providing multi-year funds.
- Western Center has a compelling case for investment, strong reputation, high net-worth donors especially in Los Angeles and Sacramento, and strong board representation of lawyers from major law firms and corporations throughout the state; building on these factors, Western Center has the opportunity to meaningfully increase **contributions** from private donors.
- **Earned income** from attorney's fees and contracts was historically over half of the budget; over time, in a trend that is not unique to Western Center, lawsuits have taken longer and generated lower awards.

Key Measures of *Overall Financial Health*



Strategic Framework

Western Center builds our strategic plan upon our North Star statement. We establish four Community Strategic Priorities through which we advance our mission, plus four Organization Strategic Priorities to ensure our strength and sustainability. For each Goal, we identify specific near-term Objectives that will be refreshed in our annual planning process.

Components of the strategic framework - *the stepping stones from annual actions to long-term impact:*

North Star

definition: our shared commitment that guides decision making

Western Center on Law and Poverty seeks to eliminate poverty and advance racial and economic justice by dismantling and transforming systems so all communities in California can thrive.

2032 Strategic Priorities

definition: the leading edge of where we are heading

Community Priorities: *WHAT* work we do to advance our mission

Organization Priorities: *HOW* we do the work that advances our mission

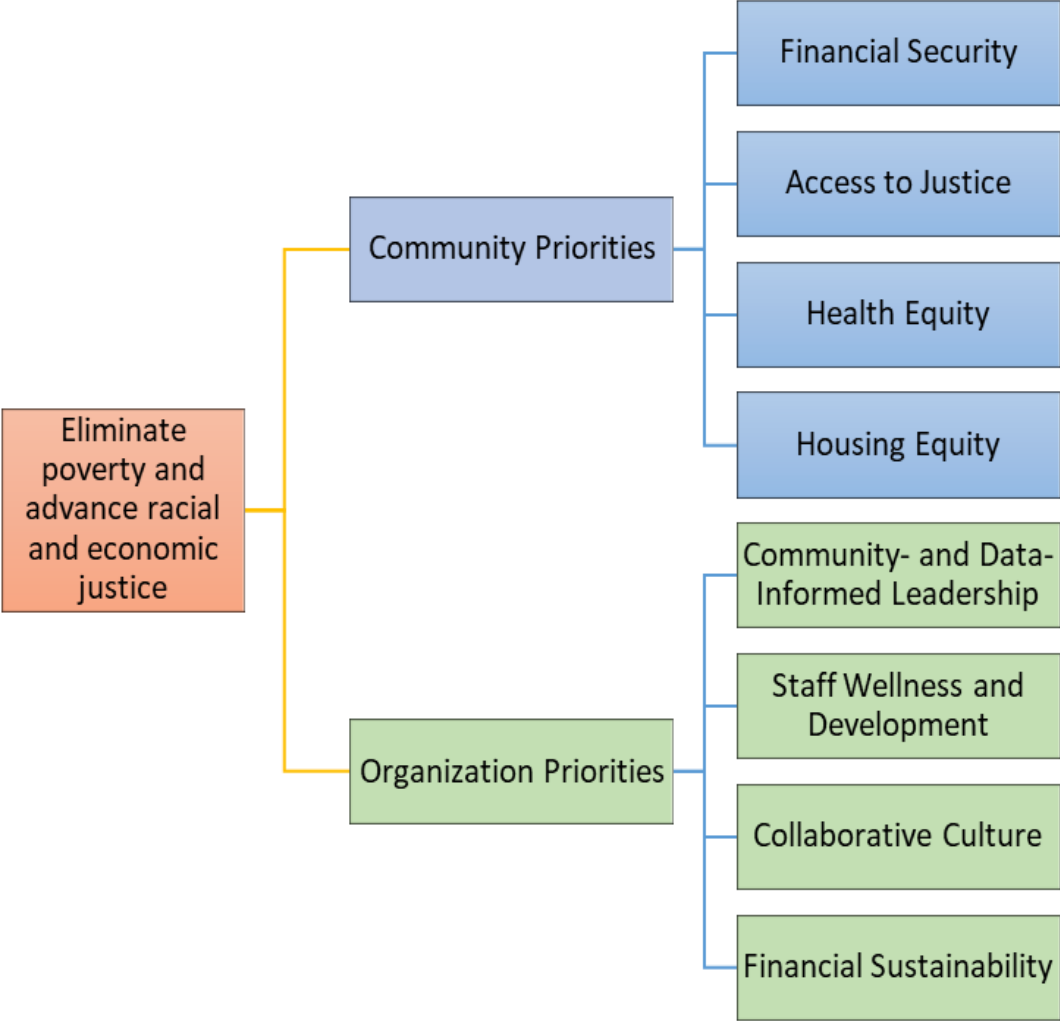
2025 Goals

definition: key areas for change to best advance the mission

Annual Objectives

definition: specific actions for the near term to be developed by staff in annual implementation plans

2032 Strategic Priorities



Strategic Priorities and Goals

Community Priorities

Western Center has deep expertise in four areas of legal impact, grounded in our long history and rich collaborations. Our greatest opportunities for eliminating poverty and advancing racial and economic justice come by leveraging our strengths in these areas, while remaining flexible in our goals and near-term objectives to meet the changing needs of the community.

Priority 1. Financial Security

Every Californian has a living income, access to public services, and opportunities to build wealth to surpass their subsistence needs and to thrive.

- Goal 1.1. Establish the right to guaranteed income, wealth accumulation, and elimination of unequitable fees, debt collection and predatory behavior.
- Goal 1.2. Ensure access to public benefits and services for Californians most impacted by unjust systems.

Priority 2. Access to Justice

Californians with low incomes are treated fairly, have legal representation, and are heard when engaged with courts, in administrative hearings, and in the Capitol.

- Goal 2.1. Advance equal access to a fair and equitable court system.
- Goal 2.2. Build more equitable processes in the criminal legal system with an emphasis on eliminating laws and enforcements that make poverty a crime.
- Goal 2.3. Expand access in administrative hearings and before the legislature, municipal, and county bodies.

Priority 3. Health Equity

Californians have universal access to equitable systems that support health, including food access and security, a healthy environment, as well as health care.

- Goal 3.1. Advance universal affordable health care coverage for all Californians.
- Goal 3.2. Eliminate medical debt in California.
- Goal 3.3. Promote a robust state enforcement system to eliminate racial, ethnic, gender, and age-related health disparities.
- Goal 3.4. Decrease health and food deserts in rural and other underserved areas.

Priority 4. Housing Equity

All Californians have access to healthy, sustainable, and affordable housing in neighborhoods of their choosing.

- Goal 4.1. Advance housing as a human right.
- Goal 4.2. Reduce speculation in the housing market and repeal laws that further institutionalized racism.
- Goal 4.3. Campaign to center very low-income people in land use planning.

Organization Priorities

Western Center must invest our attention and resources in four key aspects of our organizational strength and sustainability to succeed programmatically.

Priority 5. Community- and Data-Informed Leadership

Western Center intentionally uses data and the priorities of the community, especially those with lived experience, in maintaining focus while selecting our own work, in building and tapping the talents of our board, and in advancing legal services statewide as financial resources are available.

- Goal 5.1. Intentionally set annual organization-wide work plans, select cases/legislation, and develop projects that holistically meet community priorities (community lawyering).
- Goal 5.2. Establish a statewide anti-poverty policy advisory network of grassroots leaders and people with lived experience.
- Goal 5.3. Gather, analyze, and use outcome measures to inform program direction.
- Goal 5.4. Tap the benefits of a continuously more diverse board through engagement in strategy, governance, and fundraising.

Priority 6. Staff Wellness and Development

Western Center policies and structures ensure a balanced and equitable workplace for all staff.

- Goal 6.1. Establish a staffing structure, policies, and practices that nurture staff resilience and wellness (staff thriving), enhance staff performance, and promote manageable workloads.
- Goal 6.2. Increase staff satisfaction and retention with stronger compensation and benefits.
- Goal 6.3. Expand mentorship, professional development, and succession planning.

Priority 7. Collaborative Culture

Western Center continues to foster collaboration, both internally and externally, to create the greatest possible impact.

- Goal 7.1. Foster an internal culture of collaboration through cross team efforts.
- Goal 7.2. Amplify collaboration, coalition, equity, and effectiveness among legal service organizations and social transformation movements across all issue areas.

Priority 8. Financial Sustainability

Western Center will raise and utilize its funds to ensure successful implementation of this strategic plan and sustained impact beyond this plan period.

- Goal 8.1. Enhance policies to strengthen long-term financial health.
- Goal 8.2. Develop additional financial resources to support strategic priorities.
- Goal 8.3. Continue to diversify funds with new foundation and corporate support, individual major gifts, support from law firms, and Board contributions.
- Goal 8.4. Approach philanthropy from a place of reciprocity, directing resources and relationships to underfunded community partners.

Implementation and Monitoring

The Board of Directors adopts this strategic plan as part of its governance and fiduciary responsibilities, having incorporated the vital input of staff and stakeholders. On behalf of the board, the executive committee is responsible for monitoring progress toward the plan in partnership with the executive director and the management team.

Success for this plan requires a phased approach to these multi-year priorities. The executive director and management team will develop annual workplans that establish objectives for advancing each of the goals, naming who is responsible with what timeframes, and identifying indicators of success. The board will receive a summary of the staff workplans as information, not for approval. For areas of board responsibility, the board executive committee will lead a process for setting annual goals and monitoring progress.

At least twice each year, the board executive committee will meet with the executive director to review progress, including tracking of indicators of success. Together they will develop a high-level annual progress report and guide a collaborative strategic discussion with the board to address:

- Is our progress toward the plan advancing our mission?
- What areas require board attention to remove barriers, shift resources, or revise priorities?

The strategic plan is a living document, meant to guide decision making and provide direction toward shared priorities. As conditions and opportunities change, the board and executive team together can choose to revise the plan to best advance the mission.

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