



Rise Up and Thrive: Youth Organize! California 2025 – 2030 Strategic Plan Summary



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Acknowledgments

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Background

Youth Organize! California (YO! Cali) first emerged as a network when a steering committee of twelve youth and multigenerational organizations came together from across the state in late November 2016, just weeks after the Presidential Election. YO! Cali was born during a time of growing youth power building, the outgrowth of more than twenty years of youth organizing that had expanded significantly in the 2010s, and the dire challenges under the first Trump Regime. In May 2017, YO! Cali helped to bring hundreds of young people and organizers to converge on the State Capitol in Sacramento for a youth organizing conference and day of action under the banner of “Cali for All.”

Similar to the time of our origin more than eight years ago, YO! Cali, youth organizations, young people, and our communities face even greater threats and attacks from a more consolidated second Trump Regime and emboldened reactionary, fascist forces. At the same time, youth organizing has seen unprecedented growth over the past decade. There are close to 100 organizations in California that practice elements of transformative youth organizing and power building¹. Just as in the early days of contemporary youth organizing during the right-wing dominance of California politics in the 1990s and early 2000s, we are once again at a pivotal moment, one filled with both great opportunity and serious risk. It is a time to deepen youth and multigenerational power, resist regressive attacks, and boldly advance our shared vision of “a world in which many worlds fit—a world of liberation, wholeness, and abundance.”

From January through July 2025, YO! Cali engaged its staff, board members, and more than fifty close partners from network organizations to create our five-year strategic plan. The plan also draws upon our [Mapping Rivers to Oceans](#) report, published May 2025 based on an assessment of the youth organizing landscape in California that gathered input and perspectives from organizing staff at 72 partner organizations. With an eye towards our long-term, generational vision, the plan focuses on the strategic direction, context, opportunities, and priorities for YO! Cali from 2025 to 2030.

¹ According to the December 2019 report by Dr. Veronica Terriquez, [The California Endowment's Youth Power Infrastructure: An Overview of Youth-Serving Organizations and Intermediaries It Supports](#), 104 out of 171 youth-serving organizations surveyed engaged young people in grassroots youth-led organizing at least once per month.

Vision

We envision “a world in which many worlds fit.”² A world of liberation, wholeness, and abundance. A world of safety and bravery. A world built on mutual support, strength, queerness, and love.

We envision a world where young people boldly lead with purpose and embody power for irresistible transformation connected to liberation movements across the globe. A world where young people are nourished and nurtured to thrive in mutual, sustainable, and reciprocal relationships with community, the land, nature, and all relatives.

Purpose

As a statewide network and hub, Youth Organize! California expands and grows the strategic, professional, and socio-emotional power and political analysis of young people and youth organizers across the state.

We cultivate transformative youth organizing to generate long-term transformation in our communities.

We strengthen the youth organizing ecosystem and grow the capacities of organizations to build power in deep alignment towards a shared vision of liberation, healing, and justice.

We invest in sustainable leadership pathways that center the voices and experiences of the most impacted young people, nurturing a bold, multi-issue movement.

The Context: YO! Cali and the Youth Organizing Ecosystem in 2025

In 2025, YO! Cali’s strengths as an organization include:

- Deep, meaningful, and strategic relationships
- Long-term vision and responsive strategy
- Experimentation, modeling, and practicing transformative youth organizing and healing justice
- Centering youth organizers and young people in multi-issue movements.

Strengths of network organizations include:

- Their work around youth leadership programs and development
- Curriculum development and political education
- Base building, outreach, and retention
- Solidarity and movement-building
- Arts, media, and storytelling.

² The concept of “a world in which many worlds fit” was first popularized by the Zapatista movement in Mexico, particularly through the EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional). See the Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, January 1, 1996, available at: <https://radiozapatista.org/?p=20287&lang=en>.

There are a myriad of challenges, needs, and weaknesses across our four core strategies: Capacity Building, Power Building, Healing Justice, and Field Building.

Key Capacity Building challenges and needs include:

- Consistency and clarity in curriculum and training methods
- Clear definitions for our transformative youth organizing model and framework
- Leadership and professional development that sustain movement leaders at different steps in their pathways

Key Power Building needs include:

- Clarity on YO! Cali's model to advance power building, campaigns, and an issue platform regionally and statewide.
- Training for network organizations on base building, leadership development, campaign strategy, social media outreach, retaining youth engagement, and cultural arts and music making for social change, and direct action organizing and safety for youth members and staff.

Challenges related to Healing Justice include:

- Addressing the tensions and contradictions in healing justice between individual, organizational, and collective needs
- The need to weave and explicitly connect power building in our healing justice and cultural offerings.
- Addressing staff burnout, wellness, and sustainability for organizations
- More resources and tools for organizations to address youth mental health, wellness, and trauma.

Key needs for our Field Building strategy include:

- A formalized and consistent network structure with clearly defined pathways, criteria opportunities, and roles for organizational members
- Different strategies and approaches to field building that address the varied contexts and political and funding landscapes within each of our regions.
- Financial sustainability and long-term fundraising for organizations in the youth organizing ecosystem
- Multi-year unrestricted, general operating support and diversified sources of funding for youth organizations

Alongside the strengths, challenges, and needs within YO! Cali and our network, there are also significant opportunities and threats on the landscape and horizon. Major opportunities to leverage YO! Cali's strengths include:

- The ability to build on our role as a trusted convener and meet the desire of organizations to connect and break out of isolation within and across regions
- Creating infrastructure and nimble systems of action to support proactive efforts
- Holding spaces for collective vision to nourish the movement and achieve what we are fighting for, not just what we're against.

Opportunities in the broader youth organizing ecosystem include:

- Building on ongoing work to fight for full investment in youth and communities as a broad, intersectional approach that includes multiple issues and communities
- Creating shared narratives that promote unity to counter attacks that divide us by issues, ethnicities, identities, and communities
- Bolstering efforts for trust-based philanthropy and shared power between funders, organizations, and young people

The current context is also rife with threats to and attacks on young people and our communities, including:

- The further criminalization and escalated attacks on young people, im/migrants and refugees, the queer/LGBTQIA+ community, and Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) communities.
- The consolidation of facets of authoritarianism, fascism, and attacks on democracy and freedom of speech in many institutions that will last beyond the Trump Regime.
- Heightened conservative opposition in various regions of the state.

Direct threats to organizing, power building, and nonprofits include:

- The lack of safety and security for organizations, organizers, and youth leaders on multiple fronts.
- Rightwing attacks on organizing and nonprofits, especially to im/migrant, Black, Native, Palestinian, queer, and trans organizing, which threaten to prevent community organizing altogether

Internal threats within the youth organizing ecosystem include:

- Racial siloing and anti-Blackness
- A scarcity mindset that reinforces competition and infighting among organizations
- The pattern of falling back into toxic habits in the midst of crises, including moving with unsustainable urgency, mobilizing but not politicizing people, and reacting without building the future we want.

Purpose-Driven Priorities to Meet the Moment and Advance a Generational Vision

YO! Cali staff came together in multiple strategic planning sessions, convened frontline organizers in regional strategy gatherings, and brought together network representatives from across the state to develop five-year organizational priorities and goals that align with our purpose, meet the needs, challenges, threats, and opportunities of the current moment, and advance our shared, long-term vision.

Five-Year Programmatic Priorities and Goals

Priority 1 – Power Building and Healing Justice: Advance priority issues from the [Young People's Agenda](#) by developing and implementing a transformative power-building model rooted in healing justice and supporting translocal campaign efforts.

Goal 1 – Campaign Capacity Building: Build capacity for campaign efforts that weave together Healing Justice and Power Building through shared curriculum, training, toolkits, political education on YPA issues, and hands-on support for campaign strategy development and implementation.

Goal 2 – Shared Strategies for Translocal Campaigns: Collectively accelerate power building on specific YPA issue(s) by creating spaces for network organizations to share lessons learned, develop coordinated translocal strategies, efforts, demands, messages, and plan for collective action.

Priority 2 – Capacity Building and Field Building: Strengthen statewide and regional youth organizing ecosystems by fostering deep relationships and strategic alignment among YO! Cali network partners, building the capacity of organizations, youth organizers, and youth leaders, and organizing funders to increase multi-year funding to the youth organizing field.

Goal 1 – Shared Core Curriculum: Ensure that organizations have access to and are trained in shared resources, practices, and collective knowledge by developing and implementing a standardized and adaptable core curriculum on: (1) Foundational Organizing Skills (base-building, campaign strategy, fundamental elements of youth organizing); (2) Healing Justice; and (3) Political Education connected to the Young People's Agenda and global issues.

Goal 2 – Youth Organizer Pathways: Strengthen and expand youth organizer pathways by implementing Fellowship programs, building out our Fellowship alumni network, and sharing sustainable leadership development opportunities for organizers in the youth organizing ecosystem.

Goal 3 – Organizational Cohorts: Advance youth organizing and power-building in under-resourced communities by providing targeted resources, coaching, and support to regional organizational cohorts, prioritizing organizations that organize and are led by Black, Native/Indigenous, Palestinian/Arab, trans and queer, disabled, and immigrant youth and communities.

Goal 4 – Increase Multi-Year Funding to Youth Organizing Groups: Organize funders to increase multi-year general support funding to under-resourced organizations and regions and

build on the lessons learned, best practices, and model of the Northern California Youth Power Fund.

Engaging Black Organizers and Black-Led Organizations

YO! Cali will weave a strategy and commitment to engage Black organizers and Black-led organizations into our five-year priorities through the following goals:

Priority 1 – Power Building and Healing Justice: Consistently engage a critical mass³ of Black-led organizations and multiracial organizations with significant Black leadership and membership in building capacity for campaign efforts and in spaces for developing shared translocal strategies.

Priority 2 – Capacity Building and Field Building

Goal 1 – Shared Core Curriculum: Incorporate a foundational understanding of movements for Black Liberation and analyses of white supremacy and anti-Blackness in Political Education connected to the Young People’s Agenda and global issues.

Goal 2 – Youth Organizer Pathways: Engage a critical mass of Black organizers in our Fellowship programs, Fellowship alumni network, and sustainable leadership development opportunities. Explore developing opportunities to support peer spaces and pathways for Black organizers to move director-level roles.

Goal 3 – Organizational Cohorts: Provide targeted resources, coaching, and support to a critical mass of Black-led organizations and organizations with significant Black leadership and membership.

Goal 4 – Increase Multi-Year Funding to Youth Organizing Groups: Ensure that a critical mass of Black-led organizations and organizations with significant Black leadership and membership receive multi-year general support funding as part of any increased funds generated by funder organizing.

Priority 3 – Organizational Culture: Strengthen YO! Cali’s organizational culture to support the strategy to engage Black-led organizations and Black organizations by:

Goal 1 – Staff Practices: By June 2026, we will have successfully launched, put into effect, and evaluated the practice of YO! Cali’s conflict transformation policies and collective liberation and anti-racism values, including the ability and commitment of staff to meaningfully and consistently engage Black Organizers and Black-Led Organizations

Organizational Structure, Culture, and Infrastructure Priorities

Priority 1 – Organizational Structure and Culture: Establish a clearly-defined staff structure (positions, roles, supervision, staff development and evaluation, and leadership pathways) and a

³ In “[Paying attention to Critical Mass in Communities & Networks](#),” Fabian Pfortmüller defines critical mass as “that tipping point when a community reaches enough active members to thrive.” For YO! Cali’s goals to engage Black organizers and Black-led organizations, critical mass can serve as a way to set goals and assess engagement that ensures that Black organizers and organizations are not tokenized and isolated in programs and spaces, but thrive and have power and influence in the larger group.

values-aligned organizational culture that reflect the skills, competencies, practices, strategic and analytical alignment, and capacity needed to achieve our long term goals

Priority 2 – Infrastructure: (1) Strengthen YO! Cali’s organizational infrastructure, including its financial, fundraising, people, human resources, and operations systems and staffing, and (2) Establish a clearly defined-network structure, statewide Youth Organizing Hub, and “movement commons” that include back-office, fiscal sponsorship, and support services for youth organizations



“Rise Up and Thrive” Programmatic Priorities and Strategic Goals [2025 – 2030]

Five-Year Priorities

Priority 1:

Power Building and Healing Justice

Advance priority issues from the [Young People’s Agenda](#) by developing and implementing a transformative power-building model rooted in healing justice and supporting translocal campaign efforts

Five-Year Goals

Goal 1: Campaign Capacity Building

Goal 2: Shared Strategies for Translocal Campaigns

Year One Goals [2025 – 2026]

Campaign Capacity and Translocal Strategy:
Refresh and Relaunch the Young People’s Agenda

Priority 2:

Capacity Building and Field Building

Strengthen statewide and regional youth organizing ecosystems by fostering deep relationships and strategic alignment among network partners, building the capacity of organizations, youth organizers, and leaders, and organizing funders to increase multi-year funding to the YO field.

Goal 1: Shared Core Curriculum

Goal 2: Youth Organizer Pathways

Goal 3: Organizational Cohorts

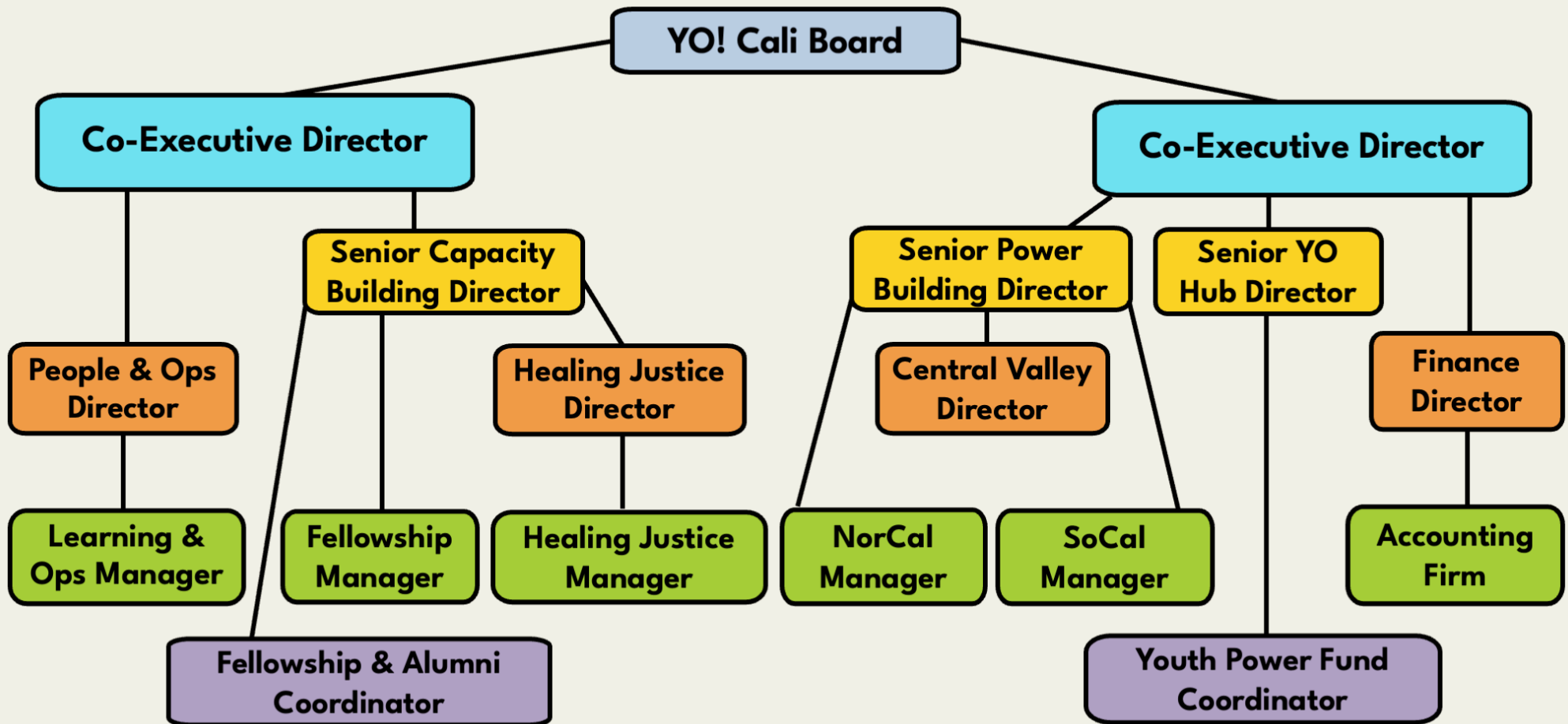
Goal 4: Multi-Year Funding to YO Groups

Shared Core Curriculum:
Develop and Pilot Standardized and Adaptable Core Curriculum

Organizational Cohorts:
Strengthen strategic alignment among network organizations through cohorts that build power in under-resourced regions and communities



Proposed Year One Organizational Chart (by early 2026)





Proposed Year Two Organizational Chart (by early 2027)

