



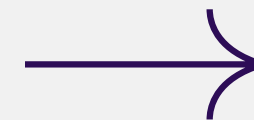
Environmental Scans

Practical Vision

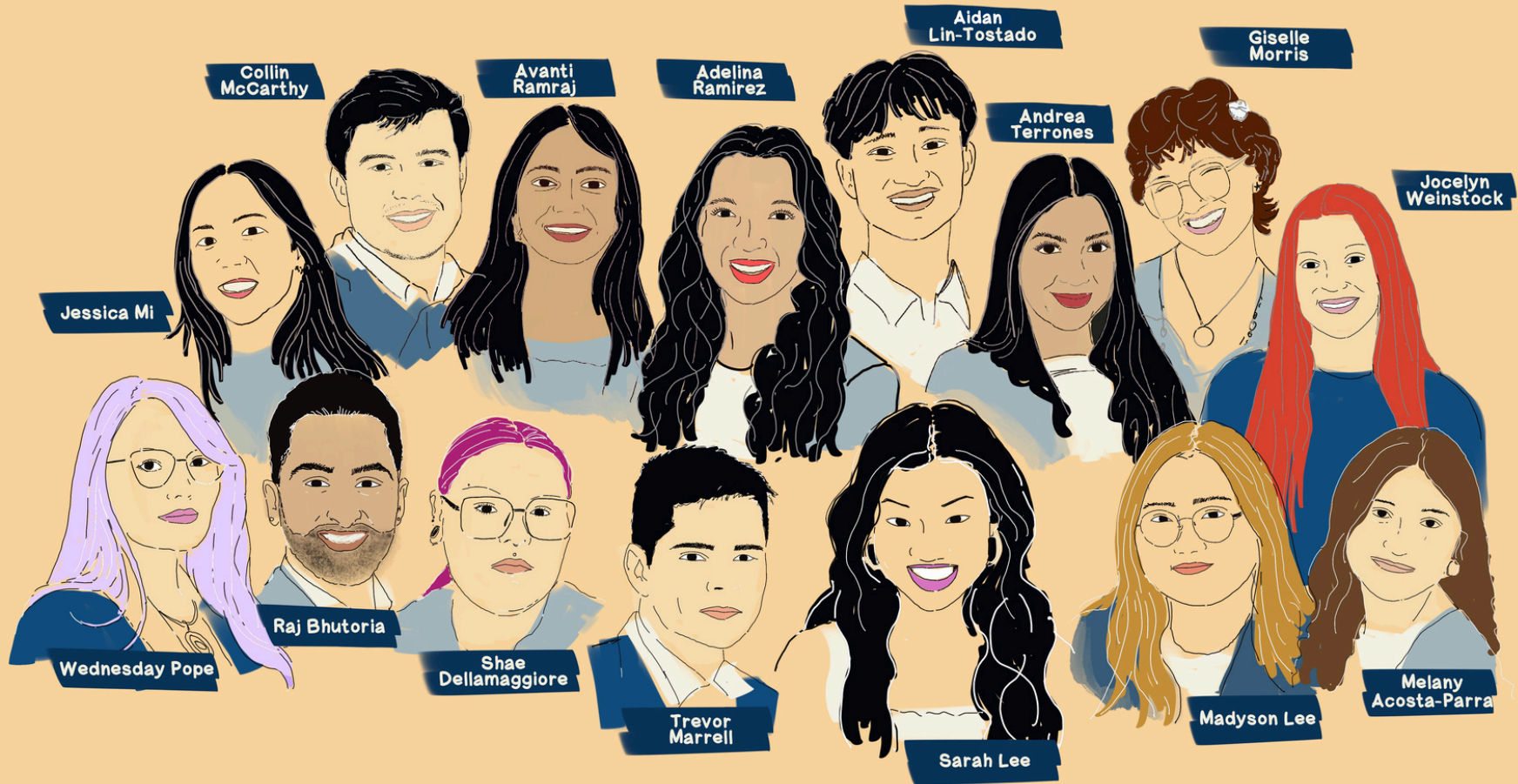


Underlying Contradictions

Strategic Directions

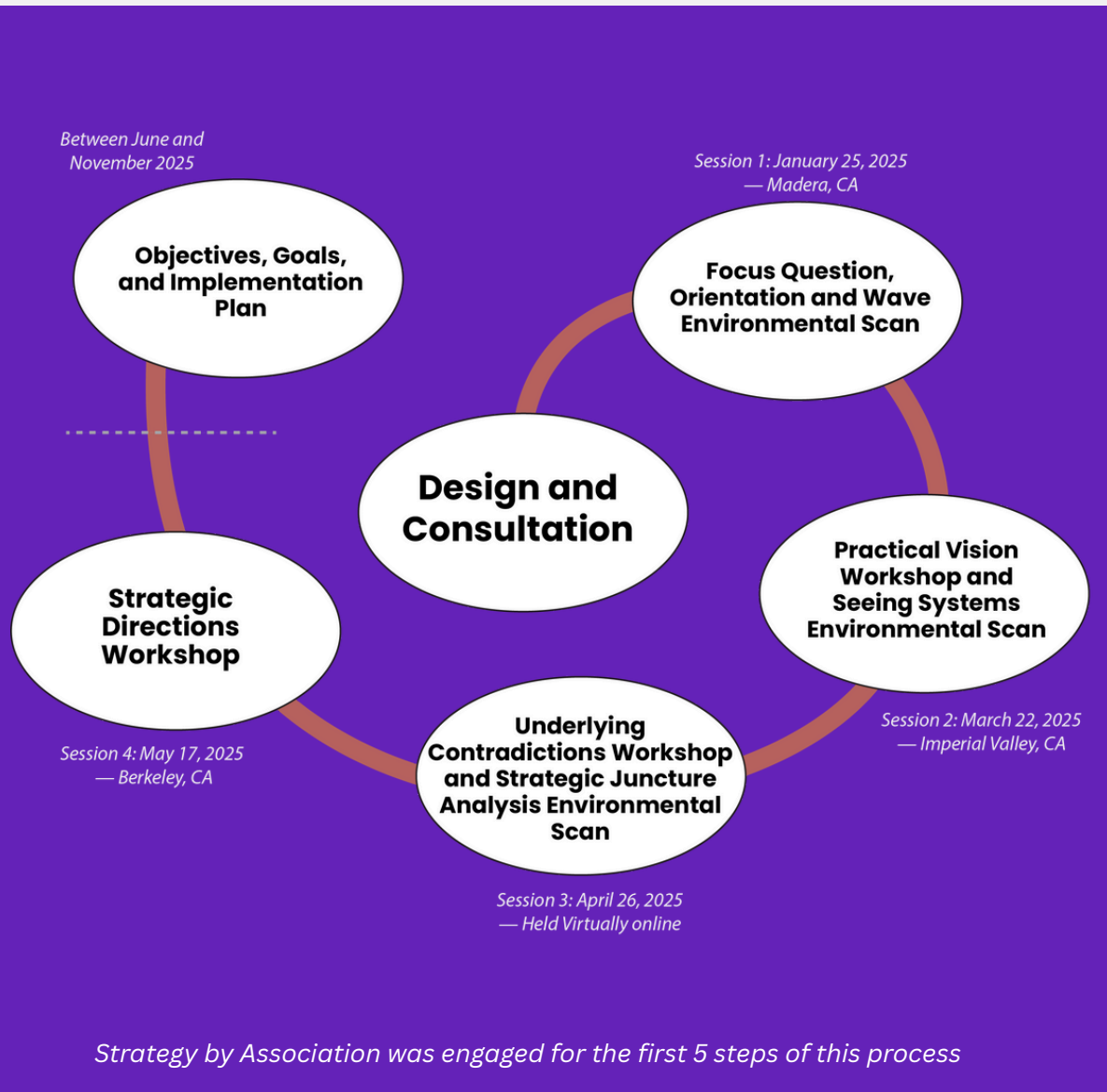


In order to improve the quality of life for present and future youth, how can we establish, engage, and expand youth power across California to foster sustainable systems for youth leadership in societal decision-making?



Inaugural Commissioners

Strategic Planning Process



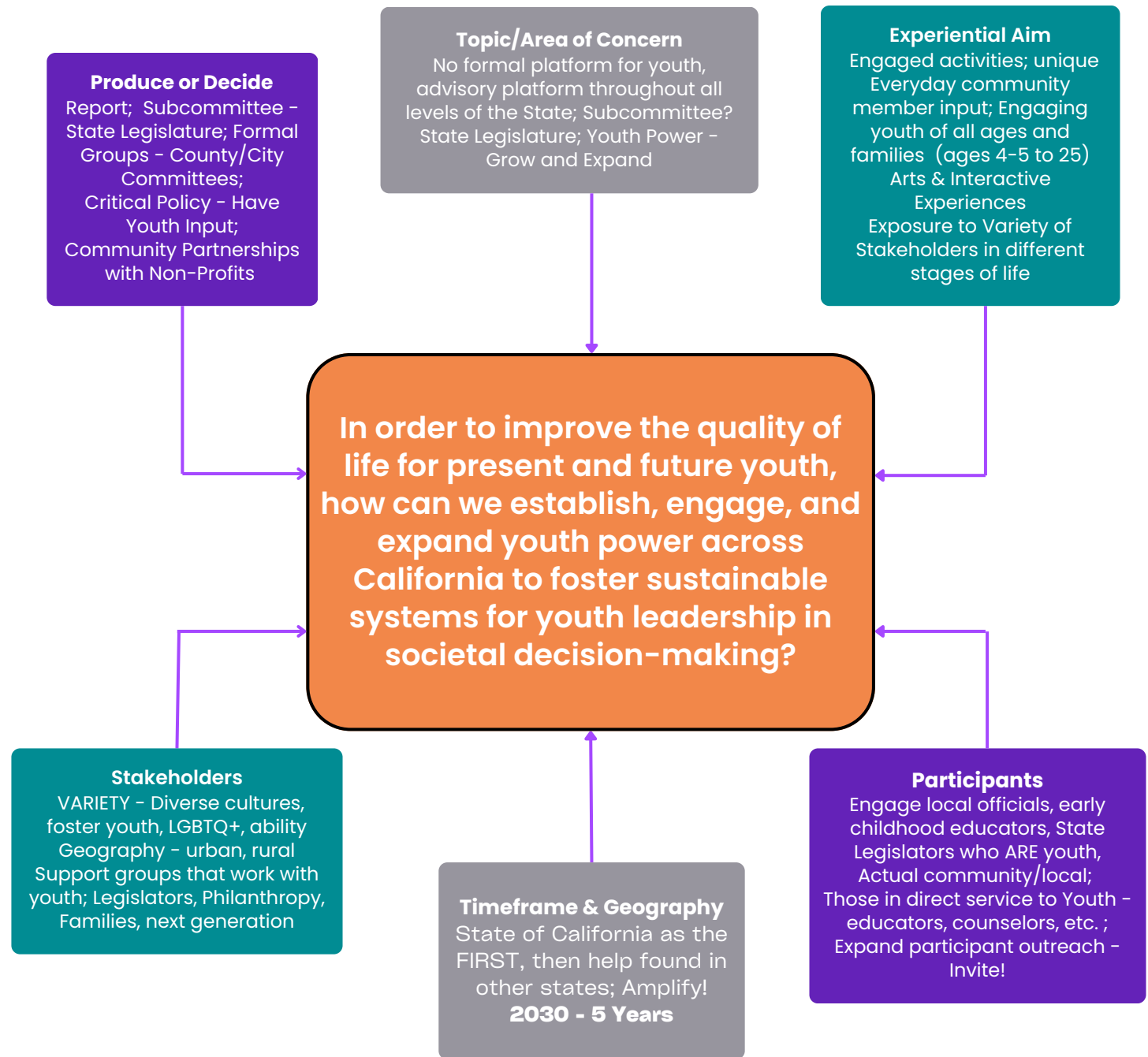
In 2025, the California Youth Empowerment Commission engaged in four strategic planning workshops with Raven Tahara of Strategy by Association. The process began with discussions with Executive Director, Thomisha Wallace and consultant Joyce Chiao to determine what specific engagement activities would enhance the Commission's direct involvement in shaping the strategic plan.

In addition to prior and ongoing research that shaped the Current State Assessment, this series of workshops was designed to engage both the Commission and the public in sharing their lived experiences and shaping priorities for action in the months and years ahead.

Strategic Planning Focus Question

A Focus Question takes into account multiple factors that call for strategic planning at this time.

On January 25, 2025, the California Youth Empowerment Commission convened in Madera, California, and began the strategic planning process. The first session guided the Commission in crafting a Focus Question for the entire Strategic Planning Process.



Environmental Scans

The purpose of environmental scan exercises (in the context of strategic planning) is to ground the work of the group firmly in **current reality**. Before we can envision and plan for a desired future, we must understand clearly our current circumstances. The Commission approached this work through multiple lenses.



The WAVE - Trends Analysis

The WAVE Current Trends Analysis

Youth Empowerment Commission
January 25, 2025

What are the trends, technologies, policies, and social dynamics that impact the youth experience?

In Madera, California, the Commission considered major trends that impact youth and the work of the Commission

Horizon	Emerging	Established	Disappearing
Polarizing changes to education, DEI, and advocacy	Accepting climate change is a <i>real</i> threat	UC and CSU system + Cal Grants \$	Foster youth receiving homes
Mobilizing youth power in decision-making	Social openness to identity politics in open spaces	Free and reduced school lunches, CalFresh + food programs	Juvenile detention centers
Questioning power structures, not surfacely accepting information	Tokenizing youth involvement	Normalizing mental health	Extroverted social culture - openness to staying in
AI: misinformation, rapid changes and opportunity	Rent Control	Equity & Inclusion Initiatives	High school exit exam - SAT testing
Guaranteed income programs	Increasing criminalization of homelessness	AB 12 - Extended foster care system	Protection from ICE in mass community spaces: schools, churches, hospitals
Restorative justice practices in our education system implemented	More wellness centers on campus	Lack of higher education resources with increased career technical pathways	Mental health stigma
	Universal access to community college	Increasing Cost of Living + decreased home ownership	DEI initiatives
			Racial equity programs and practices
			Student press freedom
			Disappearing sex education + abortion resources

The WAVE - Trends Analysis

The WAVE Current Trends Analysis

*Youth Empowerment Commission
January 25, 2025*

Discussion

What trends are powerful or significant?

DEI - Both Established and Disappearing

Youth Power on the Horizon

Social movements historically led by youth

Protections of at-risk youth disappearing

Education Trends:

Cost and access to higher education

Changing in ALL categories

Student Loans - expense creates economic hardship from debt

Housing - Rent control

Social Media - It's the primary method of engagement for youth; one benefit is advocacy; one detriment is disinformation

What are the implications of these trends for our strategic planning process?

Social Media - Use as a tool

Declining Youth Voting

DEI - Amplify **diverse voices** in strategic planning including homeless, LGBTQ+, younger youth (ages 5-15+), etc. and determine how to engage

Create **Safety** to Engage / Freedom from violence

Education - Resources and Gaps

The trends illustrate **quick change**; something that was Established for decades may be Disappearing today

Costs rising for everything: housing, food, education, etc.
"Can't afford to live."

Our views on **punitive action and justice**

Whole person **wellness**

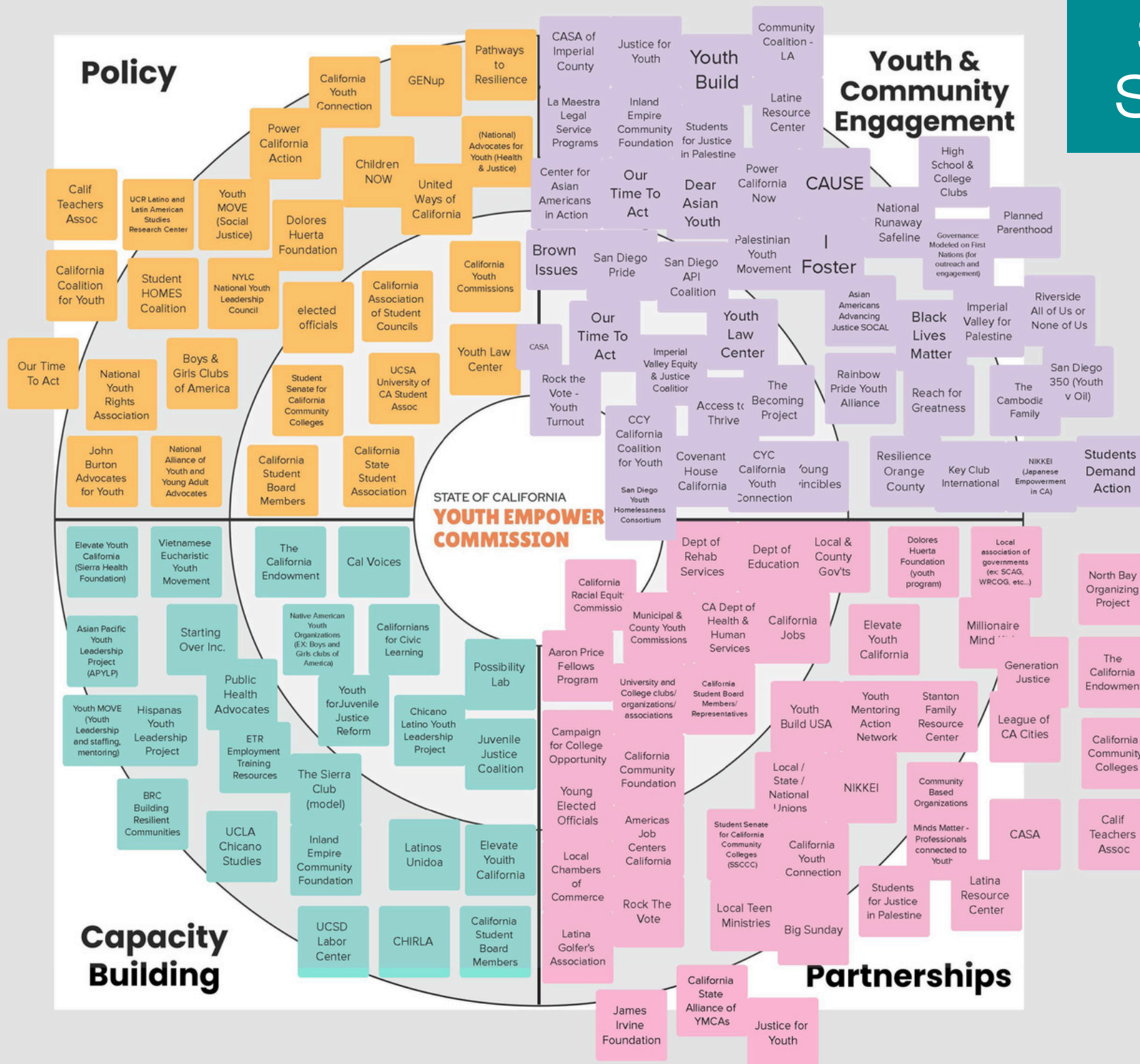
A focused conversation followed the exercise to lift out insights and implications for the work of the Commission

Seeing Systems

Determined to not duplicate the efforts of other groups, on March 22nd, the Commission created an inventory of known non-profits, State agencies, and community-based organizations that may already be working to serve the needs of California's youth.

We looked at them by four categories: Policy, Youth & Engagement, Capacity Building, and Partnerships.

We then arranged them in proximity by how closely aligned they may be.



Seeing Systems

After completing the exercise, the Commission discussed their insights and implications for their work moving forward:

What patterns are emerging?

- Organizations are in multiple quadrants
- Some orgs are localized while others are broad
- Commissioners have direct experience with some of the orgs
- What are we missing? Lack of National orgs
- Indigenous and Black communities are less represented
- Expand this circle to include marginalized groups
- Represent ALL

Where do others have a strong offering to youth?

- Economic & Social Mobility
- Civic Engagement
- Advocacy
- Service provision for homelessness
- Developing Leadership in orgs & communities
- Space of affinity for marginalized groups
- Space to uplift marginalized voices - 3rd space

What's being done well? What do we not need to reinvent?

- Youth Leadership
- Intensive research done by these groups
- Job creation, pipeline programs

Who might we partner with?

- State departments
- CSAC CA Student Aid
- Orgs addressing issues that youth prioritize
- Elected officials - senators, mayors, etc.
- Orgs that have strong offerings to youth
- Mental health
- Environment
- Student Associations in Higher Ed
- Higher Ed; Community, State
- Social Justice Orgs
- Grass Roots Orgs
- National Organizations

What is uniquely ours to do?

- Meet youth where they are with equity
- Reach out to other youth orgs
- Hear perspectives of other youth orgs
- Be a Bridge to these Orgs and the CA State Gov't
- Impact Policy
- Build Youth Power on a Statewide level
- Amplifying Youth Voice and Experience
- Empowering Youth Centered Orgs - Grants, Prizes, etc.
- Establish youth coalition among local groups
- Testimony at Legislative meetings
- Amplifying current policy issues
- Money/Funding to meet needs
- Leverage State and private investment

Strategic Juncture Analysis | Part 1

Positioned between the Underlying Contradictions workshop and the Strategic Directions workshop, this exercise provided an opportunity to consider the Commission's options moving forward before articulating strategy.

What is our window of Opportunity?	What are the negative consequences of in-action?	What could be affected in a positive direction in 5-10 years if we took action now?	What future desired result will require perseverance? (Not a quick fix?)
<p>The Commission has until our sunset date in 2030 to achieve sustainable systems integrating youth power in government</p> <p>We have until the next legislative season to identify specific recommendations for the Legislature</p> <p>We have 3 weeks to consider and contemplate proposed solutions to the barriers we identified today before we discuss at our next meeting</p> <p>We have the rest of each of our individual terms to work on networking with the Commission to build a foundation of community collaborators</p> <p>We have a few months to discuss educational recommendations to pitch to the Dept of Ed</p> <p>We have two months between meetings to connect with local governments and community supports to invite them to meetings</p>	<p>No accountability measures for elected officials</p> <p>Deepened lack of trust in government from underserved youth communities</p> <p>Policies (that youth do not agree with/that hurt youth) are passed.</p> <p>No progress on issues affecting youth (environmental, min. wage)</p> <p>Budget allocations/funding priorities decided without youth input</p> <p>Youth suffer the consequences of not being able to take action</p> <p>Greater alienation and suffering in youth may grow disillusionment into extremism</p> <p>Creative arts programs cut out of school budgets</p> <p>Widening inequities/gap in education and civic engagement</p>	<p>The sustainability and growth of YEC's throughout the state</p> <p>Public comment during meetings, higher community attendance turnout</p>	<p>Achieving sustainable, youth-driven policy reform</p> <p>Closing the opportunity gap and amplifying youth voices in policy making through accessible platforms</p> <p>Requires community engagement, shown through strong partnerships</p> <p>Reforming our current public education structures into a system that is more modern, flexible, and accessible according to the diverse needs of each student.</p>

Strategic Juncture Analysis | Part 2

What bold new risks could we explore or take?	What is working that needs to be carefully watched, preserved, or encouraged?	Where do you see signs of the future happening now?	What is placing new limits on our future?
<p>Applying direct pressure to public officials and partisan organizations to establish standards of minimum youth engagement.</p> <p>Recommendations to school districts on their budget allocations</p> <p>Work with the legislature to identify funding streams for underresourced communities</p>	<p>Community Stakeholder support and engagement with the Commission</p>	<p>Defunding of government agencies (esp. DoE) is likely to worsen inequities and require more state and local interventions</p> <p>Curriculum censorship(ex. defunding of certain research), cuts to education</p> <p>Criminalization of student activism</p>	<p>The constraints of climate change remaining unaddressed</p>

Practical Vision Workshop

What do we want to see in place in the next 3-5 years as a result of our actions?

Strong Civic Respon-sibilities	Youth Led Policies	Universal Basic Needs	Powerful Young Government	Intentional Impactful Partnerships	Youth Creative Development	Dynamic Accessible Education
Automatic voter registration in high school	Majority (>50%) of the 482 cities in CA have a Youth Commission	Social Housing	Innovate young leaders in positions of power/ decision-making	Strategic partnerships with local stakeholders	Creative economy	Tuition-free public college
Automatic voter registration at 18	Youth empowerment caucus with our State Legislature	Cost of living adjustment for all jobs	Youth know their Commissioner and actively engage	Youth civic engagement network (partnerships)	Modern free public access recreational centers for youth	K-16 education pipeline
70-90% voter turn-out for youth	All major legislation affecting youth actively seeks Commission input	Passed legislation	>500 applications to serve on the Commission	Grants that serve underserved communities (CC, BIPOC, etc.)	Biannual commissioner affinity events with arts	Increased financial aid and student housing
Youth voter turnout is >50% in 2026/2028	National advocacy platform for youth organizations across U.S. to advocate on Federal issues	Better Healthcare systems both medical and mental health	More engagement of highschoolers in YEC	Exposure to diverse workforce programs / careers	Grants that promote access to the arts	Decrease in cost for higher education
Voter hotline for over-arching resources	Preventive services vs. punitive punishment	Universal designs	Double the number of youth running for elected office	Funding opportunities for other agencies through YEC	Apprenticeship pipeline programs (arts, music, poetry, journalism)	
	Establishing the CYC department	Independent Economic Districts (in Imperial Valley they do not receive a lot of funding due to their population)	State decision meetings take place with students in cafeterias & classrooms			
		Universal, free, multilingual teletherapy	Empowering youth to run for office			
		Away from minimum wage slogan to a livable wage momentum	More students & teachers represented on school boards			
		Equitable rehabilitation programs	Network of youth commissions in California	Staff member / liasion that secures partnerships		
		25% reduction in youth homelessness by 2030	Youth empowerment commission in every county	Collaboration with influential youth advocates to present advocacy & organizaing workshops		
		Transitional housing programs expansion	Youth power in local government / connection to State			
			Diversity and inclusion in government			

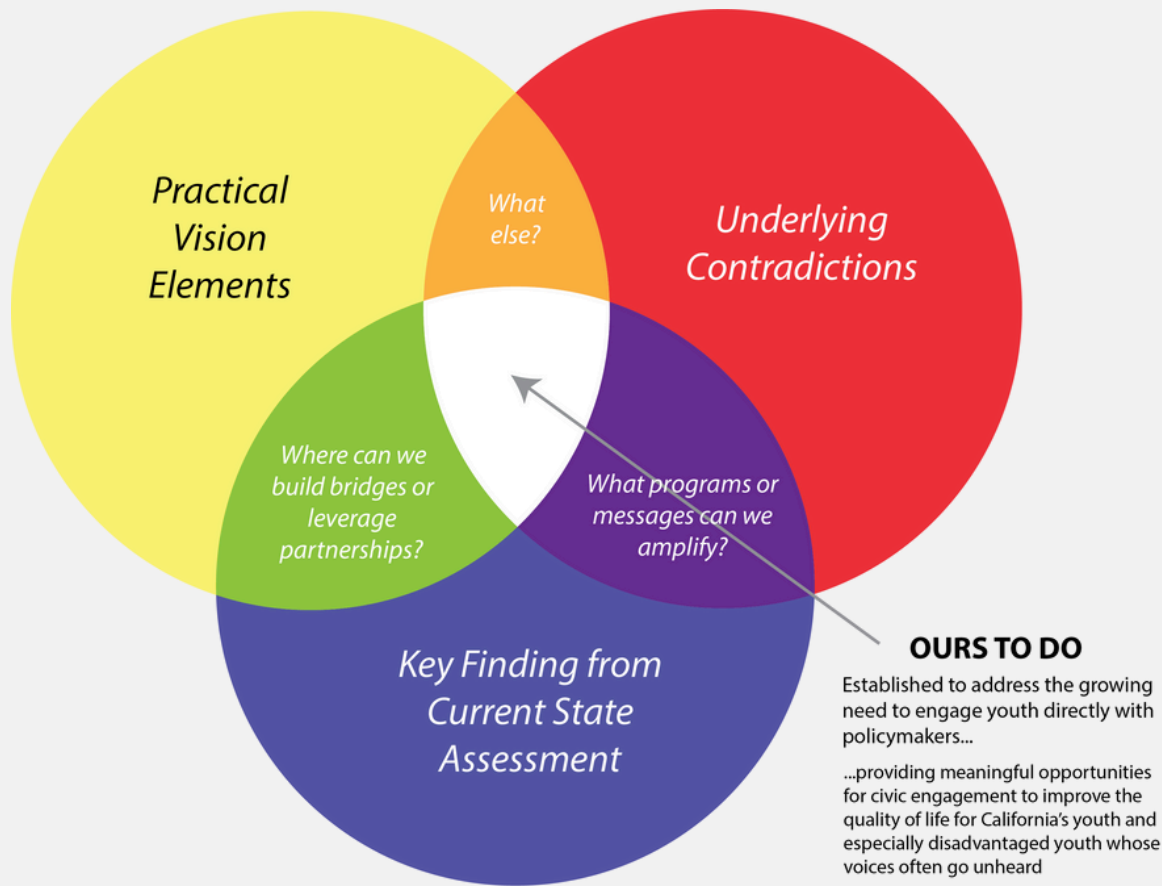
Underlying Contradictions Workshop

What is blocking us from achieving our vision?

<p>Historic precedents and unchecked assumptions hinder a systemic redesign that encourages and values youth participation</p>	<p>Competition for resources and disconnected collaborations creates disillusionment and discouragement for youth</p>	<p>Unclear accountability measures within the legislature that champions policies for youth power and well-being creates an imbalance of political input and power.</p>	<p>Restricted funding streams or misallocation of funds prevents youth from academic and extracurricular success</p>	<p>Profit-driven systems enforce materialistic policies that overshadow youth civil liberties and decent standards of living</p>	<p>Current standardized education practices prevent the creation of equitable and inclusive education for youth from marginalized and disenfranchised communities</p>
<p>Low political efficacy, leading to depleted interest in government/policymaking</p> <p>Age restrictions (e.g voting, holding political office, internship positions)</p> <p>Students' responsibilities are prioritized elsewhere</p> <p>Adults don't value youth perspectives</p> <p>Hostile attitudes towards youth participation in government & politics</p> <p>We don't hear about young role models in government; Competition for resources; unclear path</p> <p>Historically youth candidates face huge barriers</p>	<p>Fragmented understanding of all organizations engaged in youth engagement</p> <p>Disorganized/ disjointed/ disconnected community between youth orgs across the state</p> <p>Limited adult supporters enabling youth-led spaces</p> <p>Unclear commission partnership strategy: who, what, outcome</p> <p>Teacher/youth support system burnout, violence in schools</p> <p>Youth avoid leadership for fear of discrimination</p>	<p>Thinking about youth as an isolated group - youth policies are about family, holistic, community</p> <p>Policymakers are not incentivized to be accountable for youth wellbeing</p> <p>Unclear coordination between legislators</p> <p>Adult-dominated systems with an often limited prioritization towards youth</p> <p>Disillusionment, bad accountability in current government systems</p>	<p>Unclear centralized location for youth to find civic engagement resources</p> <p>Financial/time barriers cause difficulty of entry to civic spaces for marginalized students</p> <p>Disorganized allocation of current funds on ineffective/ inefficient programs</p> <p>Budget cuts, art not prioritized nor integrated with STEM</p> <p>Budget cuts across school districts --> identify funding streams/district or region</p>	<p>Labor market-based social economy stigmatizing creativity</p> <p>Pervasive political influence of private interest groups</p> <p>Drug crisis</p> <p>Stigmas surrounding profitable skills vs not profitable skills</p> <p>Broken systems in terms of healthcare and education</p>	<p>Standardized Education Practices preventing equity</p> <p>Education system made for traditional students</p> <p>Practice of civic engagement is not implemented into curriculum</p> <p>Current programs unavailable to the most disenfranchised communities</p>

Strategic Directions Workshop

What innovative, substantial actions will deal with the underlying contradictions and move us toward our vision?



To assist the Commission in focusing on strategies that were uniquely theirs to do, a series of Venn diagrams was created that illustrated the intersection of Key Findings from the Current State Assessment and relevant Practical Vision Elements and Underlying Contradictions. After reviewing each focus area, the Commissioners were invited to brainstorm potential actions.

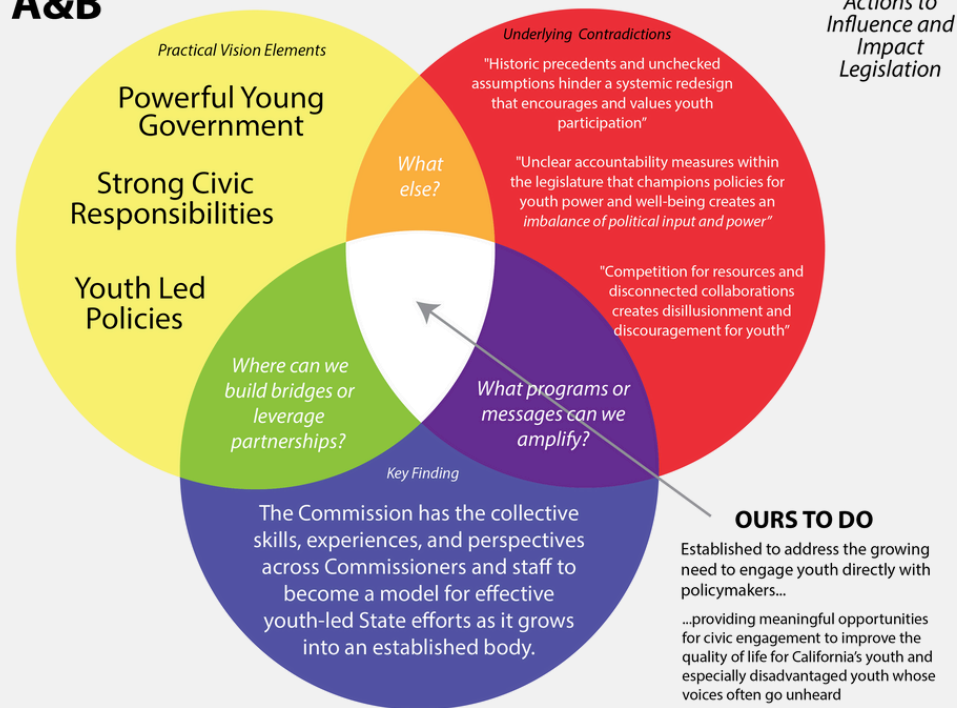
There were 9 areas considered. Once the brainstorming for all areas was complete, we rearranged the segments by similar intents to determine four Strategic Directions.

The purpose of Strategic Directions is to provide an adaptable framework that is designed to keep the Commission moving forward in these four vital directions over the next 3-5 years. The ideas that created the Strategic Directions may serve as inspiration for a detailed Implementation Plan, starting with one-year goals and objectives, then a 90-Day action plan.

Strategic Directions Workshop

Actions to influence and impact legislation

A&B



A. Identify and Prioritize Current Legislation

- Student-friendly legislative database
- Newsletter : Top 10 policies/bills in a student friendly version
- Create a Youth policy scorecard
- Partnership with youth journalism programs
- Share scorecard with Legislators
- Digital Democracy style engagement for youth
- Partner with youth electeds--state assembly, state student board members
- Form partnerships with policy and legal groups working on youth advocacy
- Define criteria for a scorecard
- Examine current policy that impacts youth
- Defend existing programs

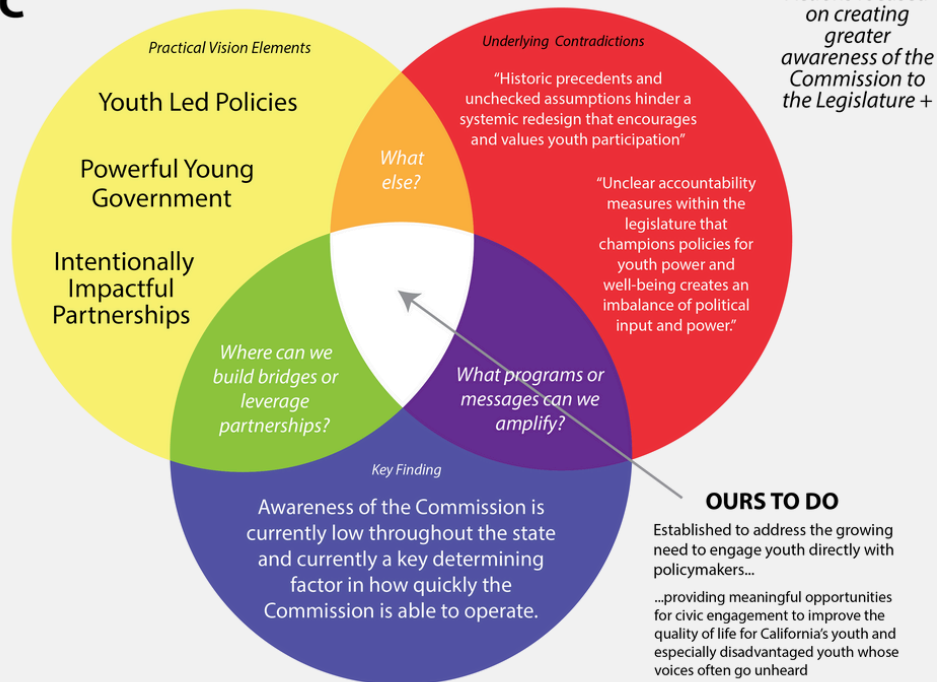
B. Draft Model Legislation Addressing Youth Issues

- Support marginalized students - gain access to existing spaces that teach students
- Set a goal for a collective proposal for a bill as commission
- Publish a quarterly / annual report - serve as an aggregator
- Map bills to our priority areas and identify GAPS
- Leverage subcommittees to focus on key policies
- Partner with student orgs to propose legislation
- Create a legislative principles guide
- Current events - ad hoc draft letters re: current issues
- Establish a subcommittee on strategic communication or relationship building

Strategic Directions Workshop

Actions focused on creating greater awareness of the Commission to the Legislature +

C



C. Connect with Electeds, Commissions, Government Agencies

Reaching out to legislators and finding out their youth policy priorities

Determine how you want to present yourself to the Legislature

Look at which legislators are routinely proposing youth-oriented bills

Utilize existing resources – 2-way street with County Commissions; amplify their voice

Establish a support committee in the legislature

Prioritize Legislators that serve on Committees that impact youth

External affairs with GoServ

Go to their hearings

Leveraging CA School Board – Student Board Member Assoc.

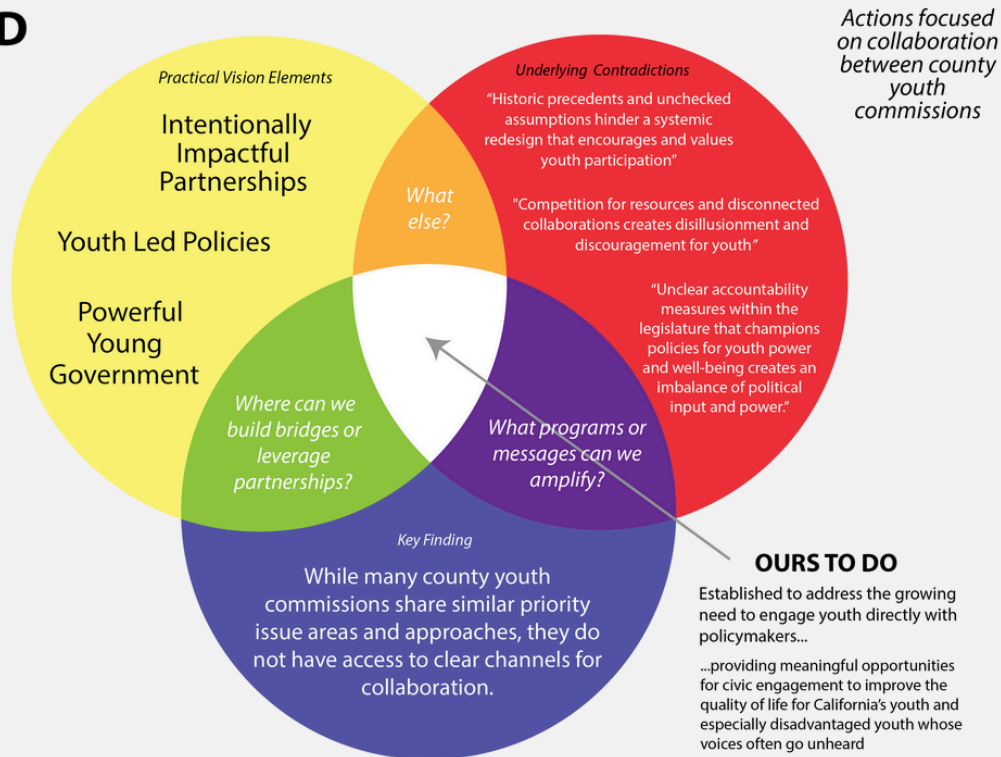
Government Agencies – CDSS, Arts Council, HHS, listening sessions, etc.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction – establish a direct line of Communication

Strategic Directions Workshop

Actions focused on connecting county youth commissions

D



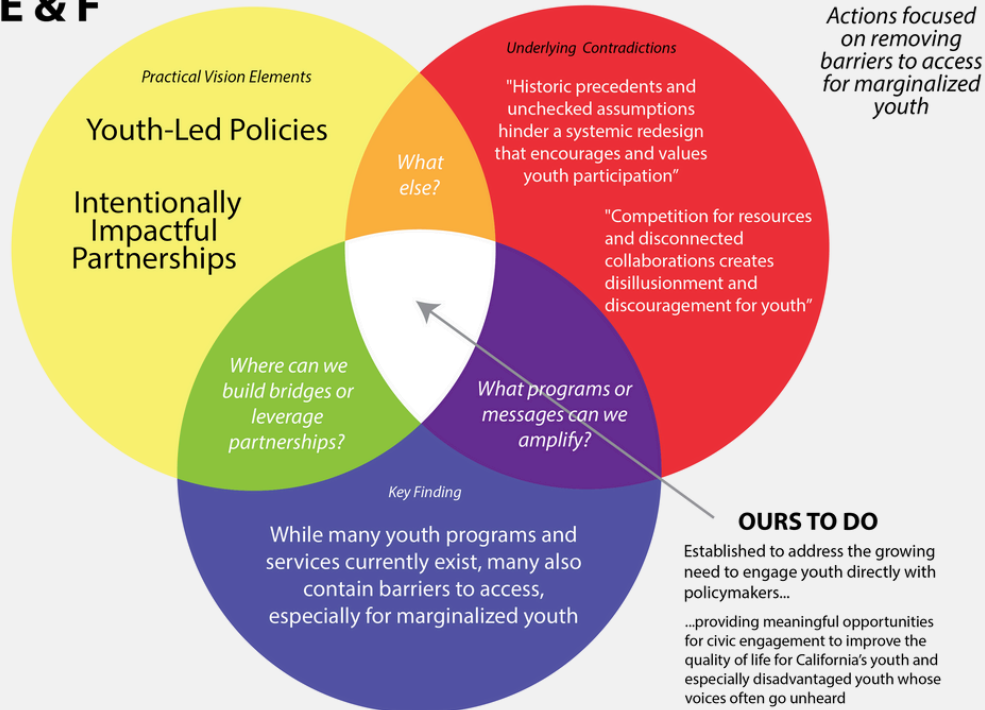
D. Connect County Youth Commissions

- Public Awareness campaign - spotlight
- Create toolkit for partners
- Serve as a bridge for existing youth commissions; connect them to each other
- Create a subcommittee focused in these connections with other commissions
- Offer to amplify local voices at a State level
- Reach out to local Commissions invite to our events
- Civic learning toolkits
- Connect with leadership of the Association
- Centralized website/Central location for youth commission meeting minutes
- We can go to local county commission meetings
- Co-create a shared space to hear youth voices
- Create a conference / summit inviting youth commission leaders
- Introduction to local meetings and maintenance of those connections
- Learn from local commissions - what has worked/not
- Resource gap - acknowledge
- Co-creating principles of engagement with county commissions
- Create an award or grant for Commissions to apply for
- Newsletter to share with one another

Strategic Directions Workshop

Actions focused on elevating voices of marginalized youth

E & F



E. Elevate Voices of Marginalized Youth

Create student award for projects proposed to uplift marginalized youth

Hold a summit for marginalized students x legislation

Create a "feature" or "highlight" section in our newsletter

if we ever had a social media, we could do youth takeovers for commissioners state wide/award winners

Echo the stories & needs of marginalized youth (not us telling the stories, preserves first-hand factor)

Survey anonymous stories and amplify; anecdotes of difficulties and youth experiences — read them and build on them at meetings (if granted permission to do so)

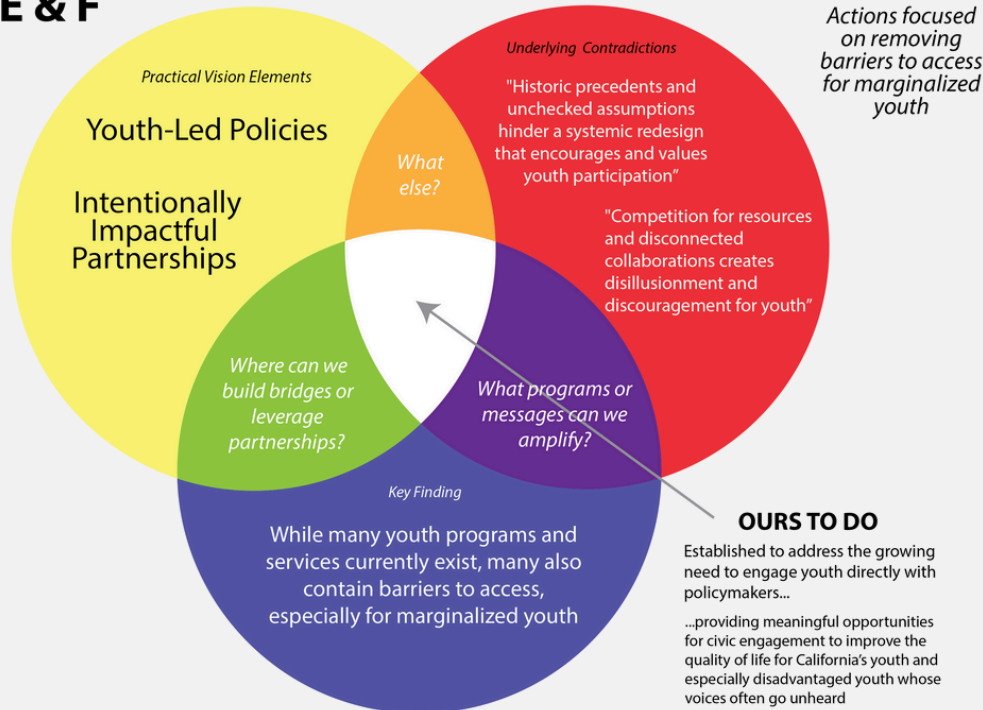
Video storytelling project to share youth priorities with legislators and the public

Legislators or commission members making time to listen to youth and answer their questions via social media, ie Instagram Live

Strategic Directions Workshop

Actions focused on overcoming access barriers for youth

E & F



F. Overcome Barriers to Access – Youth Programs/Svcs

School gov classes bring in local gov offices to share info about finding/applying for internships

Partner with legislators to propose student support systems

Examine barriers in current support programs and assess access needs

YEC standing as liaison between youth and often unreachable elected officials

Ensure funding is not cut for these programs

Reach out to community orgs to create new program focusing on breaking down barriers

Create avenues for youth input in program development

Connect with highschool and college civics teachers to dedicate class time to engage with the CYEC

Encourage compensation for participation

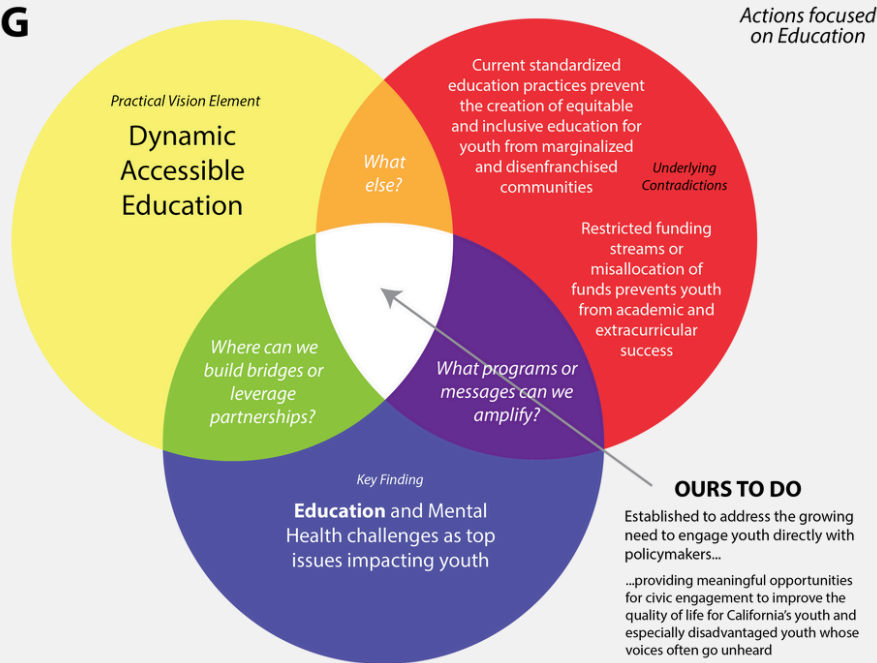
Create spaces where youth can share their voices without risk or danger

A CA YEC empowerment day in SAC funded by us

Strategic Directions Workshop

Actions focused on dynamic, inclusive education

G



G. Promote Dynamic Inclusive Education

Work with legislators to reform civic education standards to weave direct practice

Identify possible improvements to state policy/funding regarding accessibility (IEP, 504, etc.)

Connect with school boards to review and advise policy (eg. Student Advisory Board)

Partnership with youth journalism programs

aligning community college courses with UC courses so transfer students get credits

Recommend additions to the CA State educational curriculum (e.g. mandatory financial literacy class or unit)HS + UC/CSU System + CCs

Education strategy must be informed by evolving technology landscape - challenges with AI, the education of the next generation

Prioritizing accessibility across all aspects of the term

Assessing workforce needs and skill gaps for the next generation

Work with state board of education as partner in youth centered programs

Make education affordable and accesible

Supporting rural communities or communities that are lacking resources

establish/reinforce pipeline civic engagement programs with legislators (ie. Sac State has a summer at the Capitol internship, something similar for hs students, connecting college Capitol interns with hs students, mentorship network)

internet access and digital inclusion

Bring more resources to school sites (medical care, child care, social work)

better accountability process for abuse and mistreatment in schools, proposing a student bill of rights

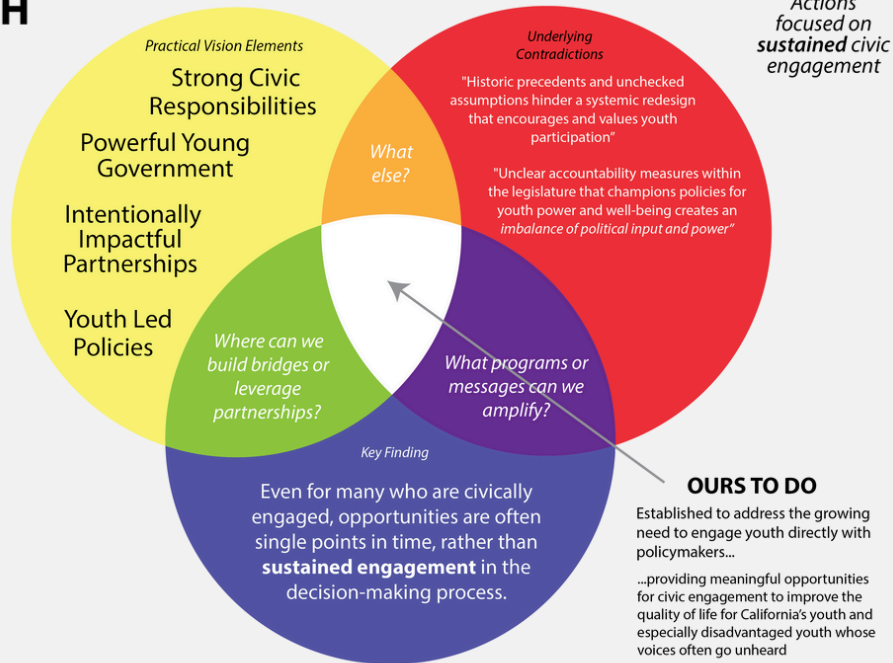
Redefining what "protection" of students is--decreasing police presence on campus, etc

Proposing added curriculum on environmental justice and tangible application of this education

Strategic Directions Workshop

Actions focused on sustained civic engagement

H



H. Encourage Sustained Youth Civic Engagement

Create Principles of engagement to share
(with an emphasis on sustained engagement)

Voter registration campaign organized by CYEC + partners.
(Democracy Day is a good day to start)

Partnering with orgs like headcount (voter reg at concerts)
to meet youth where they are

16 year old voting age for school board elections (City of Berkeley
implemented this through Measure YI!)

gov classes- provide opportunity for students to register
to vote + voting education

Encourage partners to formalize their engagement efforts/pay
youth for their time and expertise

Accessible youth-friendly and welcoming meeting spaces

Inclusive and accessible language in government

Fight against current attacks on voter inclusion and accessibility

Paid civic engagement leave from school and/or work

Create toolkit for community partners

Creating a youth voters guide during big statewide
elections, nationwide, etc

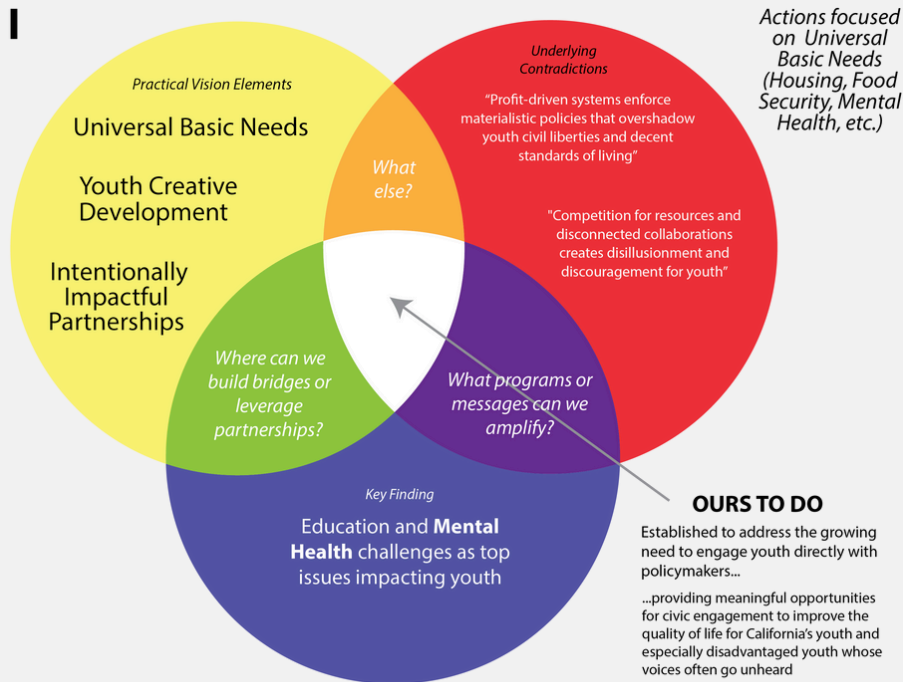
Civic Engagement Pathway for students

Incentivizing students pursuing civic careers through scholarship, etc

Social media campaigns to reach youth where they are

Strategic Directions Workshop

Actions focused on access to universal basic needs



I. Advance Access to Universal Basic Needs

Understand how county commissions define basic needs in their communities

Launching awareness campaign with specific orgs. such as AAJC (Asian Americans Advancing Justice) to bring awareness to existing programs specific to marginalized communities

explore the possibility of GBI programs (Guaranteed Basic Income)

Replace programs that contribute to welfare poverty traps with programs that are centered around ending cycles of poverty and building generational wealth in marginalized communities

ensure confidential, free access to school mental health resources

Increase enforcement of state mandates for wait times for providers receiving state contracts.

Connect with centers and orgs already serving their communities (they know their needs best)

support and propose GBI pilot programs that support marginalized communities

fight for affordable and accessible housing for youth

Analyze data from GBI pilot programs to see success rates and barriers

Defend existing programs against funding cuts (school lunch, healthcare)

Identify programs and funding for programs that have not been optimized or utilized efficiently

Establish survival needs as basic human rights. ie: shelter, food, health, etc.

Understand and provide discreet resources for intersectionally marginalized youth--undocumented students, unhoused students, etc

Strategic Directions Workshop

What innovative, substantial actions will deal with the underlying contradictions and move us toward our vision?

Connect county youth commissions

Elevate voices of marginalized youth

Encourage sustained youth engagement

Amplifying Youth Voice and Leadership

Connect with electeds, commissions, and government agencies

Identify and prioritize current legislation

Draft model legislation addressing youth issues

Centering Youth in Policy Making

Advance access to universal basic needs

Overcome barriers to access - youth programs and services

Prioritizing Youth Quality of Life

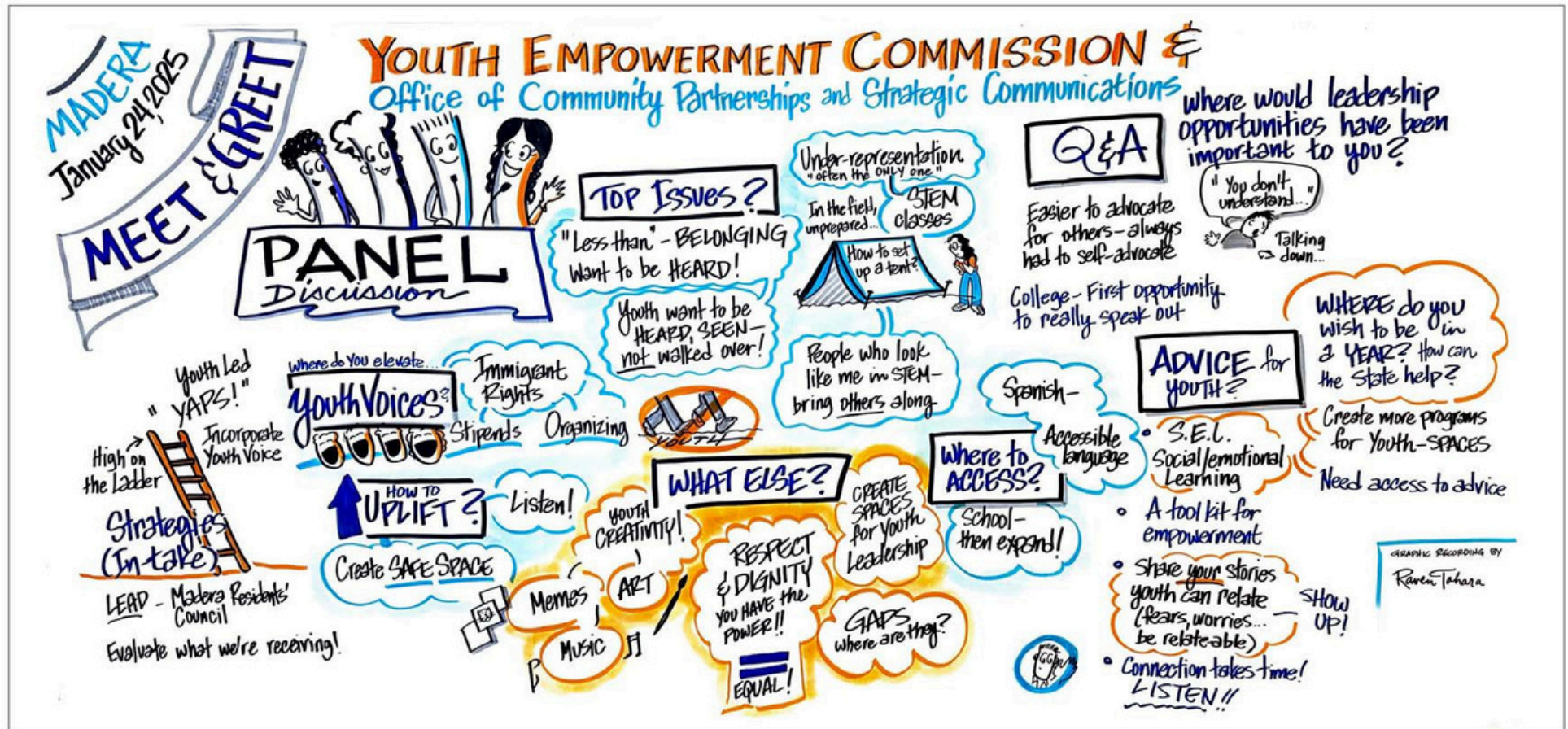
Promote dynamic, inclusive education

Building an Accessible and Resilient Education System

Detail for each block is in the prior pages for each topic

Listening to Youth Voices in California

Graphic recordings from listening sessions in Madera and Sacramento



Detail for each block is in the prior pages for each topic

Listening to Youth Voices in California

Graphic recordings from listening sessions in Madera and Sacramento



Detail for each block is in the prior pages for each topic

California Youth Empowerment Commission Strategic Plan Documentation

Workshops conducted January - May 2025

Consultation, design, and facilitation by:

Raven Tahara, CPF, CTF

Strategy by Association

raven@strategybyassociation.com

808-463-7057