



YOUTH EMPOWERMENT COMMISSION

Strategic Plan



Acknowledgements

The California Youth Empowerment Commission is deeply grateful to the many community members, collaborators, and supporters who contributed to the development of this inaugural Strategic Plan. Their insights, guidance, and expertise helped shape the Commission’s vision and priorities for the coming years.

We extend special thanks to:

- Governor’s Office of Services and Community Engagement (GO-Serve) Leadership for their guidance and support throughout the planning process
- Office of Community Partnerships and Strategic Communications(OCPSC) for their collaboration in community engagement and facilitation of community connections
- California Volunteers for their partnership and contributions

We also wish to acknowledge the Commissioners for their leadership, dedication, and commitment to amplifying youth voices, as well as the consultants who supported the strategic planning process and helped bring this plan to fruition.

Commissioners:

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A Message from the Chair and Executive Director

Helping shape the California Youth Empowerment Commission’s first Strategic Plan has been one of the most meaningful experiences of my time as inaugural Chair. As someone with lived experience growing up in communities that have often been overlooked or excluded from decision-making spaces, this plan feels deeply personal to me. It reflects the voices, experiences, and hopes of young people across California who want to be seen, heard, and meaningfully included in shaping the future of our state. Throughout this process, Commissioners, staff, community members, and youth across California came together to intentionally shape a plan grounded in the charge established through AB 46 (2021) and guided by the belief that youth leadership matters.

This Strategic Plan is more than a roadmap for the Commission, it is a commitment to building systems that value lived experience, strengthen civic engagement, and create equitable opportunities for young people to thrive. I am excited for the work ahead and grateful to move into this next chapter in partnership with youth leaders, community organizations, stakeholders, and State leaders who believe in the power of young people to lead meaningful change across California.

Respectfully,

Wednesday Pope
Chair of the Youth Empowerment Commission

As the inaugural Executive Director of the California Youth Empowerment Commission, I am proud to present this first Strategic Plan, which was built with intention, collaboration, and a deep commitment to California’s youth. Grounded in the vision and charge established through AB 46 (2021), this plan reflects not only the legislative foundation of the Commission, but also the voices, experiences, and aspirations of young people and communities across our state. Through a thoughtful planning process that included public engagement, listening sessions, strategic workshops, and statewide collaboration, we worked to ensure this plan represents both the realities youth face today and the future they deserve.

This inaugural plan is our first step toward realizing a California where youth, especially those from historically marginalized communities, are empowered to shape the systems that impact their lives. It establishes a shared vision, values, and goals that will guide the Commission’s work in advancing civic engagement, strengthening youth leadership, and building more equitable opportunities for all young people.

We are excited to move from planning into action and to implement this vision in partnership with youth, community organizations, stakeholders, advocates, and leaders across State government. Together, we have the opportunity to build systems that not only listen to youth voices, but truly value youth as partners in shaping California’s future.

In Community,

Thomisha Wallace
Executive Director
California Youth
Empowerment Commission



Introduction to the Commission

In 2021, Assemblymember Luz Rivas introduced Assembly Bill 46 (AB-46) to address the growing need for youth to engage directly with policymakers. The bill responded to evidence of rising youth voter participation between 2014 and 2018, while also recognizing that many young people who were not yet of voting age lacked formal pathways to participate in civic life and advocate for policies that affect them. AB-46 established the California Youth Empowerment Act, which created the California Youth Empowerment Commission as a platform to elevate youth voices in State government and provide guidance on issues that impact young people.

The Commission serves as a bridge between youth and decision-makers, bringing the perspectives of young Californians, including those from historically marginalized communities, into the policymaking process. Civic engagement

is a critical part of this charge, as the Commission works to create meaningful opportunities for youth to participate in shaping policies and programs that affect their lives. Through its work, the Commission advises on programs, policies, and initiatives that influence youth well-being and expands pathways for young people to exercise leadership and influence across the systems that impact them.

At the time of developing this Strategic Plan, the Commission operates with a small but dedicated team of five staff supporting sixteen Commissioners. While limited in capacity, the Commission has leveraged this structure to focus on strategic priorities, engage stakeholders, and advance long-term impact. This context helped shape the goals and objectives in this plan, reflecting both the Commission’s ambitions and the practical realities of its current operations.

Commission Capabilities

The Commission was created to provide meaningful opportunities for civic engagement to improve the quality of life for California’s disconnected and disadvantaged youth. To fulfill this charge, the Commission is responsible for five core activities:

- 01** Examine and discuss policy and fiscal issues affecting the interest, needs, and conditions of the youth of California
- 02** Formally advise and make recommendations to the Legislature, Superintendent of Public Instruction, and Governor on specific legislative and fiscal issues affecting youth
- 03** Consult with any existing local-level youth advisory commissions and community-based, grassroots youth-led organizations for input and potential solutions on issues related to youth
- 04** Publish a website to report details relevant to YEC, including, but not limited to, YEC agendas, minutes, resolutions, vote counts, initiatives, commissioner information, photos, and video
- 05** Publish an annual report to the Legislature, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Secretary of CA Health and Human Services, and Governor detailing YEC activities, issues, demographics, budget, and outcomes



Our Strategic Planning Process

The Commission’s strategic planning process was designed to create a thoughtful, inclusive roadmap for advancing youth well-being across California. The process unfolded in three key phases, each focused on gathering insights, building understanding, and defining priorities that reflect the needs and perspectives of youth, Commissioners, staff, and community members. These phases are described on the next page.

The Commission intentionally embedded the strategic planning process into a series of public meetings and community events, including the Voices for Change Forum, held across California to engage a broad range of stakeholders. By hosting these sessions in multiple regions, youth, families, local organizations, and other community members had opportunities to share their perspectives and contribute directly to the planning process. The map alongside highlights the locations of both public meetings and Voices for Change Forum events, illustrating the statewide reach and inclusive approach that informed the Strategic Plan’s goals and priorities.

The California Youth Empowerment Commission’s inaugural Strategic Plan was developed based on the original expectation of funding through 2030, which informed its phased goals and implementation strategy. While current state budget allocations provide funding through June 2027, the Commission remains committed to advancing its mission, strengthening statewide youth engagement, and building sustainable partnerships. This Strategic Plan serves as a long-term roadmap to guide the Commission’s work and future growth as resources allow.



Phase	Description	Key Activities
Phase 1 Current State Assessment <i>Our Story of Today</i>	Explored current needs, outcomes, and supports for California youth to develop Commission understanding of key context that informs future priorities.	• Discovery Interviews • Benchmarking Research • Community Survey
Phase 2 Visioning <i>The Story of Tomorrow</i>	Developed a vision of what is possible through the work of the Commission and outline its future direction.	7 Workshops: • Strategic Planning Focus Question • The WAVE Current Trends Analysis • Seeing Systems • Practical Vision • Underlying Contradictions • Strategic Directions
Phase 3 Strategic Plan Development <i>The Story of Our Journey to Tomorrow</i>	Charts a path to actualize the vision by gathering community feedback to refine, add detail to, and ultimately finalize the Strategic Plan.	

Key Considerations

ADDRESS THE GAPS

MINIMIZE
REDUNDANCIES

Many organizations are already providing youth programs and services. The Commission strives to avoid redundancies and create its greatest impact by focusing on the work that it is uniquely positioned to do.

CENTER MARGINALIZED YOUTH

CHALLENGE
INEQUITY

Marginalized youth are most impacted when systems fail to support young people, yet their voices are often missing in the spaces shaping those systems, including within this Commission. Centering their needs and experiences is vital for addressing critical gaps and strengthening opportunities for all youth.

BUILD TOWARDS LONGEVITY

REJECT
PERFORMATIVITY

The Commission wants to not only achieve its greatest impact but also sustain it. To do so, Commissioners expressed the need to partner with youth and communities in meaningful ways, rather than tokenizing young people or serving as a performative body.

BE RESPONSIVE

AVOID INACTION

Responding to the needs of young people while staying nimble throughout the ebbs and flows of limited staffing, fiscal shifts, and evolving policies and priorities is crucial. The Commission recognizes the necessity of taking action amid these realities and finds strategic opportunities to do so.



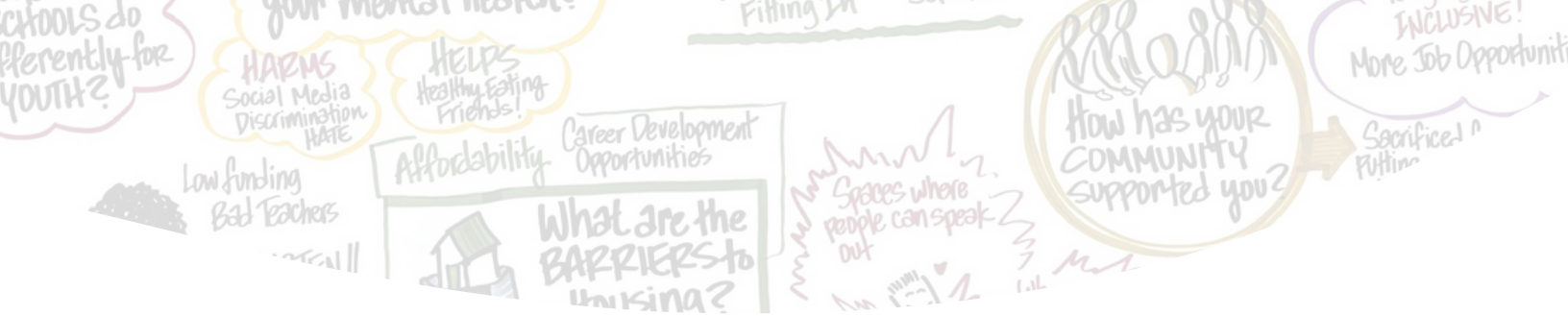
Mission

We uplift the voices and leadership of California's youth – especially those from marginalized communities – by shaping policy, strengthening civic engagement, and creating equitable access to opportunities that build youth power and well-being.

We do this by upholding our charge within AB-46 (2021).

Vision

A California where all youth thrive in just, inclusive systems that reflect their lived experiences and support their futures.



Core Values

Youth Power & Leadership

We center youth as leaders and decision-makers today, not just in the future. Youth shape the policies and systems that affect their lives.

Equity & Inclusion

We prioritize the voices of historically-marginalized youth and work to remove systemic barriers. We expand access to opportunities that lead to meaningful outcomes and improve the quality of life for all young people.

Authentic Engagement

Youth participation should be ongoing, supported, and respected for its labor. Their voices must create real change, not token or one-time input. We engage youth in both physical and digital spaces.

Collaboration & Partnership

We build intentional partnerships that use local knowledge, uplift youth-serving organizations, and avoid duplicating efforts.

Transparency & Accountability

We are accountable to young people through clear communication, follow-through, and honest measurement of impact. We use data and technology to share information openly, accurately, and promptly.

Proactive & Systemic Solutions

We focus on root causes and advocate for policies that prevent crises before they occur.



Five Strategic Goals

1. Policy & Legislation

Strengthen youth-related policy and legislation to expand equitable access to youth programs and services.

2. State Budgeting

Examine and inform the State budgets that respond to youth needs.

3. Civic Engagement

Advance youth participation and leadership in sustained, meaningful civic engagement, with a focus on marginalized and underrepresented youth.

4. Connected Youth Networks

Grow the capacity and collaboration of youth-serving organizations to meet youth needs and maximize impact.

5. Strong Operations

Build the operations of the Commission to stay effective and sustain impact over time.

Five Strategic Goals

- GOAL 1 | Policy & Legislation
- GOAL 2 | State Budgeting
- GOAL 3 | Civic Engagement
- GOAL 4 | Connected Youth Leadership
- GOAL 5 | Strong Operations



Five Strategic Goals

- Policy & Legislation | GOAL 1
- State Budgeting | GOAL 2
- Civic Engagement | GOAL 3
- Connected Youth Leadership | GOAL 4
- Strong Operations | GOAL 5

GOAL 1

Policy & Legislation

Strengthen youth-related policy and legislation to expand equitable access to youth programs and services.

- 1.1 Increase Commission and community understanding of the State policymaking process.
- 1.2 Provide State decision-makers with youth-informed insights and policy proposals to both remove systemic obstacles to existing services and create or expand programs that reflect emerging youth identified needs.
- 1.3 Bring the needs and successes of youth-serving organizations to State decision-makers.

GOAL 2

State Budgeting

Examine and inform the State budgets that respond to youth needs.

- 2.1 Increase Commission and community understanding of how State funds are allocated to support youth well-being.
- 2.2 Enhance pathways to elevate youth and community voice in Commission budget recommendations.

Five Strategic Goals

GOAL 1 | Policy & Legislation

GOAL 2 | State Budgeting

GOAL 3 | **Civic Engagement**

GOAL 4 | Connected Youth Leadership

GOAL 5 | Strong Operations

GOAL 3

Civic Engagement

Advance youth participation and leadership in sustained, meaningful civic engagement, with a focus on marginalized and underrepresented youth.

3.1

Build equitable partnerships with policy and civic groups to grow civically-engaged youth leaders.

3.2

Collaborate with State, local, and community groups on youth-centered campaigns that share meaningful youth civic engagement opportunities.

3.3

Promote youth leadership efforts to inspire more youth to participate in civic engagement.

Five Strategic Goals

Policy & Legislation | **GOAL 1**

State Budgeting | **GOAL 2**

Civic Engagement | **GOAL 3**

Connected Youth Leadership | GOAL 4

Strong Operations | **GOAL 5**

GOAL 4

Connected Youth Leadership

Grow the capacity and collaboration of youth-serving organizations to meet youth needs and maximize impact.

4.1

Support resource- and knowledge-sharing across youth-serving groups so they can learn from each other.

4.2

Share funding opportunities to grow and sustain local youth commissions.

4.3

Create a fund to provide grants to organizations and programs that serve marginalized youth.



Five Strategic Goals

- GOAL 1 | Policy & Legislation
- GOAL 2 | State Budgeting
- GOAL 3 | Civic Engagement
- GOAL 4 | Connected Youth Leadership
- GOAL 5 | Strong Operations

GOAL 5

Strong Operations

Build the operations of the Commission to stay effective and sustain impact over time.

- 5.1 Build a website that keeps youth informed about updates, opportunities, and outcomes.
- 5.2 Secure funding to support continued Commission operations.
- 5.3 Add staff and tools to manage programs, support youth engagement, and sustain growth.
- 5.4 Partner with State and community organizations to spread awareness of programs and services.



Together, we are building more than a Commission. We are building a movement that recognizes youth as partners in governance and essential leaders in shaping the future of our state."

Thomisha Wallace
Executive Director



MISSION

We uplift the voices and leadership of California's youth – especially those from marginalized communities – by shaping policy, strengthening civic engagement, and creating equitable access to opportunities that build youth power and well-being. We do this by upholding our charge outlined within AB-46 (2021).

VISION

A California where all youth thrive in just, inclusive systems that reflect their lived experiences and support their futures.

CORE VALUES



Youth Power & Leadership



Equity & Inclusion



Authentic Engagement



Collaboration & Partnership



Transparency & Accountability



Proactive & Systemic Solutions

GOALS

GOAL 1	GOAL 2	GOAL 3	GOAL 4	GOAL 5
Strengthen youth-related policy and legislation to expand equitable access to youth programs and services.	Examine and inform the State budgets that respond to youth needs.	Advance youth participation and leadership in sustained, meaningful civic engagement, with a focus on marginalized and underrepresented youth.	Grow the capacity and collaboration of youth-serving organizations to meet youth needs and maximize impact.	Build the operations of the Commission to stay effective and sustain impact over time.
1.1 Increase Commission and community understanding of the State policymaking process. 1.2 Provide State decision-makers with youth-informed insights and policy proposals to both remove systemic obstacles to existing services and create or expand programs that reflect emerging youth identified needs. 1.3 Bring the needs and successes of youth-serving organizations to State decision-makers.	2.1 Increase Commission and community understanding of how State funds are allocated to support youth well-being. 2.2 Enhance pathways to elevate youth and community voice in Commission budget recommendations.	3.1 Build equitable partnerships with policy and civic groups to grow civically-engaged youth leaders. 3.2 Collaborate with State, local, and community groups on youth-centered campaigns that share meaningful youth civic engagement opportunities. 3.3 Promote youth leadership efforts to inspire more youth to participate in civic engagement.	4.1 Support resource- and knowledge-sharing across youth-serving groups so they can learn from each other. 4.2 Share funding opportunities to grow and sustain local youth commissions. 4.3 Create a fund to provide grants to organizations and programs that serve marginalized youth.	5.1 Build a website that keeps youth informed about updates, opportunities, and outcomes. 5.2 Secure funding to support continued Commission operations. 5.3 Add staff and tools to manage programs, support youth engagement, and sustain growth. 5.4 Partner with State and community organizations to spread awareness of programs and services.