

Legal Aid Justice Center

STRATEGIC PLAN 2026-2029

April 2026



Rooted and Ready

Prepared by:
coLAB Impact
533 Janet Avenue, Suite D
Lancaster, PA 17601

Background

The Legal Aid Justice Center (LAJC) is a statewide advocacy organization dedicated to advancing racial, social, and economic justice by partnering with communities to dismantle systems that create and perpetuate poverty. Through a combination of legal advocacy, community organizing, policy change, and impact litigation, LAJC works to address both the immediate needs of clients and the root causes of injustice across Virginia. Over time, LAJC has grown into a trusted and influential leader within the legal and advocacy ecosystem, known for its community-centered approach, bold positions on complex issues, and ability to drive meaningful systems-level change.

In early 2026, LAJC partnered with coLAB to launch a comprehensive strategic planning process designed to clarify priorities, strengthen alignment, and position the organization for its next phase of impact. The process engaged Board members, staff, partners, and community stakeholders through interviews, focus groups, surveys, and facilitated discussions that explored LAJC's role within the broader legal aid and advocacy ecosystem. This work culminated in a Board Strategic Planning Retreat in April 2026, where key themes, opportunities, and areas of focus were further refined and shaped through collaborative discussion. This Strategic Plan reflects the insights, perspectives, and momentum generated throughout that process. It provides a framework to guide LAJC's work over the next three years by sharpening advocacy priorities, strengthening organizational sustainability, expanding equitable access across Virginia, and deepening the organization's ability to demonstrate and increase its impact. Together, these priorities position LAJC to build power with communities, respond to evolving challenges, and advance lasting systems change.

Our Foundation

Mission

The Legal Aid Justice Center works alongside communities and clients to fight for racial, social, and economic justice by dismantling systems that create and perpetuate poverty.

Core Values

Community-centeredness – Support building community power and centering community perspectives in carrying out LAJC’s mission.

Commitment to Racial Equity – Align with race equity and justice values, including ensuring that race equity is reflected in learning and professional development, work plans and priority-setting, storytelling, and community partnerships and accountability, particularly with low-income communities of color.

Courageous Advocacy – Pursue bold, systems-level change through integrated legal, organizing, and policy strategies.

Building Trust – Seek out and develop ongoing and authentic relationships of trust with community members and encourages and supports colleagues in doing the same.

Systems Thinking – Views one’s work in the context of larger social and political systems; sets priorities and utilizes resources for the greatest positive impact.

Clear, Open Communication – Maintains open communication with colleagues, clients, and community partners and listens for understanding, curiosity, and connection, not judgment.

Strategic Pillar 1

Build and Win Power for Justice

Advance community-rooted advocacy to challenge harmful systems, win positive reforms, and drive lasting change for and with Virginians most impacted by poverty and racism.

Goal 1: Set and sustain focused advocacy priorities that define where LAJC will lead to drive the greatest impact.

Goal 2: Deepen and sustain community-led advocacy and decision-making to ensure people most impacted by injustice shape advocacy leadership, priorities, and strategies.

Goal 3: Elevate the impact of LAJC's advocacy to shape public understanding, influence decision-makers, and build support for systemic change.

Goal 4: Position LAJC as a leader in addressing emerging systems of harm, including AI and automation, by advancing advocacy strategies that protect communities and shape more equitable systems.

Strategic Pillar 2

Financial Strength & Resource Alignment

Strengthen LAJC's diversified financial model to sustain its impact across Virginia, reduce vulnerability to political and funding shifts, and strengthen fiscal discipline.

Goal 1: Strengthen LAJC's diversified funding model to make it sustainable and reduce reliance on concentrated sources and close the funding gap without destabilizing core work.

Goal 2: Make disciplined funding and resource decisions that protect mission, align with strategic priorities, preserve independence, and ensure responsible stewardship of resources.

Goal 3: Build shared ownership and understanding of financial strategy, tradeoffs, and constraints across the organization to support aligned decision-making and long-term sustainability.

Strategic Pillar 3

■ People, Culture & Organizational Alignment

Build an equitable, accountable, and well-aligned organization where people are supported to grow, lead, and sustain high-impact work over time.

Goal 1: Strengthen a culture of accountability, clarity, and effective management by establishing consistent, equity-centered expectations for roles, supervision, communication, and performance.

Goal 2: Support staff growth, development, and sustainability of the work by creating clear pathways for professional growth and leadership development while supporting workload balance and retention.

Goal 3: Strengthen organizational alignment through clear and consistent processes for setting priorities, making decisions, and sharing information.

Goal 4: Establish and sustain a strong collective bargaining relationship by building a collaborative and effective partnership with the union.

Strategic Pillar 4

Community Reach, Access & Ecosystem Alignment

Deepen LAJC's accessibility, visibility, and trust in communities across Virginia, with a focus on under-served regions, while strengthening its role within the broader advocacy ecosystem so people most impacted by injustice can access, engage with, and partner with LAJC effectively.

Goal 1: Strengthen coordination between regional work and organizational priorities and capacity.

Goal 2: Continue developing presence in underserved regions where LAJC is already working.

Goal 3: Define LAJC's role within the legal aid and advocacy ecosystem by clarifying when to lead, support, or operate independently and strengthening coordination with partners.

Goal 4: Strengthen decision-making around demand and capacity by establishing clear approaches to prioritizing work, managing intake, and aligning community needs with organizational capacity.

Strategic Pillar 5

Impact, Learning & Informed Decision-Making

Strengthen LAJC's ability to understand, demonstrate, and increase its impact through intentional use of learning, outcomes, and technology to inform decision-making.

Goal 1: Define clear outcomes and measures across LAJC's work, build systems to evaluate progress and impact, and use what we discover to continuously sharpen strategy and practice.

Goal 2: Strengthen the data, metrics, and shared visibility into organizational health — across fundraising, finance, operations, and coordination — that enable leadership, staff, and the Board to make informed decisions and act with shared understanding.

Goal 3: Build a culture of learning and responsible discovery experimentation, including the use of AI and emerging tools, to enhance impact and improve how work is done.