











CHANGELAWYERS[®]

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

2024 - 2026



TABLE OF CONTENTS

 2024-2026 Strategic Directions Overview	3
 Theory of Change	4
 A Closer Look at the Problem	5
 Our Impact	6
 Organizational Strengths	7
 Power the Movement	8
 Amplify + Train the Next Generation	10
 Resource Mobilization	11
 Conclusion	12
 Staff and Board	13

2024-2026 STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS OVERVIEW

The next two years will be pivotal in augmenting our impact for our California communities. To guide our path, the following Strategic Directions document outlines key goals that will shape our work regardless of the direction the national or state winds may blow.

GOALS BY 2026:

HARNESS THE POWER OF LAWYERS FOR GOOD



Through grants to nonprofit partners, build more pathways into positions of influence in the legal field; increase the likelihood that smaller organizations with budgets under \$1M will thrive; and strengthen the model of social change that integrates law with community organizing.

EMPOWER THE NEXT GENERATION



Through scholarships and fellowships, empower the next generation of legal changemakers to live into their limitless potential and become future leaders.

GROW COMMUNITY + VISIBILITY



Create new scholar learning spaces that help launch the careers of tomorrow's leaders, and promote lawyers fighting for our shared humanity through online social channels and events.

REACH NEW HEIGHTS



Maximize our resource mobilization efforts by integrating community-centered principles with donors, alumni, and supporters.

THEORY OF CHANGE

As a precursor to this Strategic Directions process, in 2024, ChangeLawyers created our first-ever Theory of Change (TOC). The result of several months of joint work by the board and staff, the TOC represents an updated analysis of the relevance of our organization in terms of what we do, and why and how we do it. The TOC heavily informs our strategic direction over the next 24 months.

Racism, classism, and other social inequities were built into our laws and institutions. For those facing a persistent lack of opportunity, this has resulted in a crisis of confidence in the legal system itself.

the problem

our values

EMPATHY We lead with understanding and compassion towards ourselves and others.

VIGILANCE We believe none of us are free until we are all free, and take action when injustice is committed.





CURIOSITY We listen to and learn from those closest to the problems we seek to address.

SERVICE We exist to be in service to people directly impacted by societal inequities.

ACCOUNTABILITY We accept responsibility for our shortcomings and seek to constantly do better.

our vision

We envision a fully-inclusive democracy led by vigilant changemakers who safeguard the humanity of all.

what we do	why we do it	how we do it
 <p>We raise money for those fighting to transform unfair laws and institutions, and distribute these funds to organizations and individuals.</p>	<p>→ So that more resources can flow towards the movement for justice for all.</p>	<p>→ Grants to non-profit organizations; scholarships and fellowships to first-generation law students and lawyers.</p>
 <p>We create opportunities for young and/or future lawyers.</p>	<p>→ So that the next generation of legal changemakers can rise to positions of power and effect an inclusive and fair legal system.</p>	<p>→ Leaders Forum, mentorship, Next Gen Events</p>
 <p>We advocate to change California laws and policies.</p>	<p>→ So that our state can live up to the promise of equal justice under the law.</p>	<p>→ Legislative and administrative advocacy, amicus briefs</p>
 <p>We shine the spotlight on legal changemakers fighting for our shared humanity.</p>	<p>→ To amplify the efforts of those on the frontlines of change and inspire new generations.</p>	<p>→ News Brief, ChangeMaker, Community Conversations, Next Gen Events</p>

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE PROBLEM

For those facing a persistent lack of opportunity, there is currently a crisis of confidence in the legal system itself. For example, in a 2023 survey conducted by the National Center for State Courts, **only 39% of Black respondents felt that state courts are unbiased in their decisions.**¹ Moreover, the survey revealed a belief among respondents across the ideological spectrum that state courts are becoming increasingly politicized.² This crisis of confidence threatens to lead to a breakdown of one of the most basic democratic tenets, the rule of law.

On a federal level, the 2023 Supreme Court affirmative action cases striking down race conscious admissions programs at elite colleges and universities have reverberated outside of the higher education context. Copycat lawsuits seek to extend the reasoning of the Court's decision into other areas such as employment, government services, scholarships, fellowships, and even philanthropy. What's obvious now is that the case was just the tip of the spear in a larger effort to defang DEI and other racial justice initiatives. The time for bolder action is clearer than ever.

In California, there remains a profound underrepresentation of the state's majority communities in leadership roles in law. Even though the state's population is 62% Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC),³ executives at the highest levels of all types of legal organizations remain deeply unrepresentative of the general population.

In 2020, BIPOC attorneys were only 23% of all law firm partners; 30% of corporate in-house executives; 34% of government executives; and 35% of nonprofit executives.⁴ These paltry numbers across the board reveal the deep barriers to ascending and remaining in leadership positions.

IN 2020, BIPOC ATTORNEYS WERE ONLY:

23%
of Law Firm
Partners

30%
of Corporate In-
House Executives

34%
of Government
Executives

35%
of Nonprofit
Executives

1 2023 State of the State Courts. https://www.ncsc.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0039/96879/2023-SoSC-Analysis-2023.pdf. Last visited 8/5/24.

2 2023 State of the State Courts. https://www.ncsc.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0039/96879/2023-SoSC-Analysis-2023.pdf. Last visited 8/5/24.

3 2023 Report Card on the Diversity of California's Legal Profession. <https://publications.calbar.ca.gov/2023-diversity-report-card/diversity-2023>. Last visited 8/5/24.

4 2020 Report Card on the Diversity of California's Legal Profession. <https://www.calbar.ca.gov/Portals/0/documents/reports/State-Bar-Annual-Diversity-Report.pdf>. Last visited 8/5/24.

OUR IMPACT

2020

■ REDUCED BARRIERS TO ADMISSION

ChangeLawyers, in partnership with the Impact Fund and the ACLU of California, spearheaded an effort to rally nearly 50 nonprofit organizations and bar associations to persuade the California Supreme Court to lower the Bar Exam passing score from 1440 to 1390. This change helped reduce a significant institutional barrier to admission for future BIPOC attorneys.

2022

■ ALUMNI ASCENDED TO POWERFUL POSITIONS

A queer, Latina, first-generation public interest lawyer became the first ChangeLawyers alum to be appointed as a federal magistrate judge. Additionally, four other ChangeLawyers alumni were recently elevated to the bench, a fifth served as the District Attorney of San Francisco, and a sixth was elected as a County Supervisor.

2023

■ RAISED OUR VOICE TO SCOTUS

In collaboration with the Equal Justice Society and Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati, P.C., ChangeLawyers co-filed an [amicus brief](#) with the U.S. Supreme Court, where we argued that California's experience in eliminating affirmative action should serve as a warning to the rest of the country, not a model to replicate. The brief was cited in Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor's dissenting opinion.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTHS



Our five team members represent California and reflect the demographics of alumni, scholars, fellows, and other program beneficiaries. The staff is 100% BIPOC including Native Hawaiian & East Asian; Black & Multiracial; Filipino; Punjabi Sikh; and Latinx. Two of our staff identify as LGBTQ+. One of our staff is a single mother and another is a parent of two children adopted from the foster system. Moreover, two of our staff are direct beneficiaries of ChangeLawyers' work, specifically through scholarships and policy advocacy.

The ChangeLawyers staff holds deep connections to the California legal community, from judges to law schools to bar associations to legal nonprofits to thousands of individual attorneys who financially support our mission. Our unique position allows us a bird's eye view to understanding the opportunities and challenges facing first-generation, undocumented, LGBT, and attorneys of many other types of backgrounds. We have also earned the trust of many in the legal community because of our 35 year history of advancing justice for all Californians.

The ChangeLawyers board is 2/3 majority women and BIPOC, and hail from leadership roles throughout California's legal community including firms, government, corporate in-house, and nonprofits. Many are first-generation lawyers themselves, and all are committed to swinging open the doors of opportunity so that others may also rise to positions of influence. They epitomize the proposition that social change can emerge from within institutions of power when the right people are in the right place.

Over the past five years, ChangeLawyers has shifted our philanthropic model from charity to justice. We intentionally dropped the word "foundation" from our name (we were formerly known as the California Bar Foundation). We made this shift because we view ourselves as direct partners to those working on the frontlines. Finally, the racial reckoning catalyzed four years ago by the murder of George Floyd continues to infuse our sense of purpose even though his memory is already fading from public awareness.

POWER THE MOVEMENT



IMPACTFUL GRANTMAKING: LEGAL EMPOWERMENT FUND AND LEGAL AID FUND

In the last 5 years, ChangeLawyers completely refreshed our grantmaking strategies through two funds: the Legal Empowerment Fund (LEF) and the Legal Aid Fund. The LEF is a broad-based approach to harnessing the power of lawyers for good. Additionally, since 2020, the ChangeLawyers Legal Aid Fund has invested more than \$2M in organizations increasing access to justice for indigent Californians. These grants are mandated by state statute and represent the single, most focused grantmaking goal outside of the Legal Empowerment Fund priorities. The need for funding access to justice is great as there is only 1 attorney for every 7,000 Californians in need of legal assistance.

With numerous years under our belt, these grantmaking approaches have been validated through direct feedback from our grantee partners in annual convenings and through a recent anonymous grantee partner survey. The next two years will focus on more precisely identifying the collective impact of the LEF grantmaking strategy.

2024-2026 GOAL

Through grants to nonprofit partners, build more pathways into positions of influence in the legal field; increase the likelihood that smaller organizations with budgets under \$1M will thrive; and strengthen the model of social change that integrates law with community organizing.



NEXT GEN FUND: SCHOLARSHIPS & FELLOWSHIPS

Each year, ChangeLawyers empowers the next generation of legal changemakers through 40-50 scholarships for first- and third-year California law students. These scholarships alleviate the financial burden of students who: have great economic need, show grit in the face of adversity, and are committed to being a changemaker. Beyond the check to the students, we offer an annual cohort experience in the form of trainings, access to influential legal networks, mentorships, and more. Additionally, for the 3L scholars who receive support and resources related to sitting for the August bar exam, we will offer ongoing assistance should the scholar not pass the exam on their first try.

Similarly, in our various fellowship programs, we seek to enhance our fellows' experience through convenings, trainings, and access to powerful legal networks. We will do this across all three types of fellowships we administer: 1.) year-long fellows through the Legal Empowerment Fund, 2.) summer fellows for California legal aid organizations, and 3.) the 2023-2026 Immigration Legal Fellowship Project, which currently hosts 7 first-generation deportation defense fellows.

Since 2019, we have surveyed and held focus groups with various segments of our 1400 scholars and fellows alumni. From this feedback, we know that law students and early career attorneys experience imposter syndrome, feelings of isolation and stagnation in the workplace, and systemic exclusion based on race, gender, gender identity, class, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, and other factors. Moving forward, our support initiatives for scholars, fellows, and alumni will be guided by the skills and experiences they have identified as crucial to their success, including wellness management, financial literacy, and long-term career sustainability.

2024-2026 GOAL

Through scholarships and fellowships, empower the next generation of legal changemakers to live into their limitless potential and become future leaders.

AMPLIFY + TRAIN THE NEXT GENERATION



We want to amplify the work of lawyers and activists fighting for our shared humanity. That is why for nearly a decade, the newsletter and blog News Brief by ChangeLawyers has offered weekly highlights of the social justice movement from a legal perspective. Steadily growing in subscribers since its inception, News Brief currently reaches 11,000 lawyers, law students, and other activists primarily but not exclusively in California. Our aim is to create powerful narratives that both educate and inspire readers.

We also want to see our scholars rise into positions of power, and become protectors of our democracy. That is why starting in 2020, ChangeLawyers has created spaces to train, educate, and convene the next generation of leaders. Through a combination of Community Conversations (issue forums and thought leadership discussions); Leaders Forum (skill-building webinars); and Next Gen Receptions (scholar celebrations), we regularly reach thousands of online and in-person participants each year.

The next iteration of our events will be Next Gen Leaders, launching Fall 2024. This academy will be offered exclusively to 1L Next Gen Scholars, in addition to their scholarship cash award. Next Gen Leaders will consist of two components: mentorship and skill-based trainings. This pilot will be evaluated in Spring 2025 and we will explore what future iterations may look like.

2024-2026 GOAL

Create new scholar learning spaces that help launch the careers of tomorrow's leaders, and promote lawyers fighting for our shared humanity through online social channels and events.

RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

From individual and corporate donations, grants and subgrants, earned revenue and more, ChangeLawyers maintains a well-diversified portfolio. The relationships we've formed with our supporters have shifted as we've incorporated Community-Centric Fundraising (CCF) and employed different resource mobilization strategies into our fund development work. Through focused efforts, we are able to engage with individual supporters, corporate sponsors and grantors to solicit and raise around \$1M a year. Additionally, each year, our for-profit subsidiary, CalBar Affinity, generates nearly \$1M in earned revenue. With this said, our most underdeveloped source of funding is unrestricted giving, which is the most valuable way for nonprofits to deepen and evolve their work. In order to level up our philanthropic and programmatic efforts while integrating CCF-principles, we are employing two new strategies into our resource mobilization: 1. Major gifts and 2. Monthly donors.

Our major gift strategy focuses on strengthening past relationships with lapsed or former donors and board members, who have great potential to support and likely, need to become reacquainted with ChangeLawyers. Increasing our organizational visibility and telling the story of our impact will lend greater credibility to our major gift efforts.



NEW MONTHLY GIVING PROGRAM

In 2023, we launched a monthly donor strategy focused on converting one-time, annual fund donors into ChangeCatalyst, our new designation for supporters who contribute on a recurring, monthly basis. Monthly giving provides our deepest supporters a way to provide consistent and reliable revenue for the organization. This new focus directly aligns with CCF values.

2025 marks a landmark year for ChangeLawyers as we celebrate our 35th anniversary. This will create a unique opportunity to amplify fundraising initiatives, deepen engagement, and build community with our supporters. Meanwhile, ChangeLawyers will also seek new foundations to support the Legal Empowerment Fund as well as new supporters for scholarships, fellowships, and other programs.

2024-2026 GOAL

Maximize our resource mobilization efforts by integrating community-centered principles with donors, alumni, and supporters.

CONCLUSION

HOLDING OURSELVES ACCOUNTABLE

In order to maximize the effectiveness of this plan, staff will develop 12 month implementation plans to create even more specificity as to how the work will unfold. Progress against the identified goals will be reviewed at least on an annual basis by the board and a quarterly basis by the staff. Successes will be celebrated, shortcomings will be analyzed, and adjustments will be made accordingly. Our overarching goal is to measure our organizational impact in more precise and tangible ways. More specifically, we will conduct regular surveys of our program participants and keep open channels of communication to solicit feedback and stories.

LIFT AS WE CLIMB

Over the next 2 years, ChangeLawyers seeks to achieve ambitious goals. We have and will continue to punch above our weight class and leverage more and more resources for the movement for justice for all. We will support those who have felt underestimated, undervalued and underrepresented in the legal field and strive to strengthen the ecosystem of lawyers in California who are fighting for social change.

Demographics do not equal destiny. The emergence of a future generation of leaders committed to justice, equity, and inclusion cannot be taken for granted. Investing in organizations like ChangeLawyers ensures greater opportunity for tomorrow's legal changemakers to live into their limitless potential and effectuate a fully-inclusive democracy for all.

"NO ONE REACHES THE HIGHEST OF HEIGHTS ON THEIR OWN."

Honorable Ketanji Brown Jackson, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States



STAFF

Carlos Aguilar, Chief Content Director
Brooke Cannella, Operations Associate
Christopher Punongbayan, Executive Director
Jasjit Singh, Director of Programs
Staci Young, Development Officer

BOARD

Rasha Gerges Shields, President
Alexis Amezcua, Co-Vice President and President-Elect
Bennie Mackey, Co-Vice President
Mark Selwyn, Secretary
Jasmine Singh, Treasurer
Cecilia Chen, Executive Committee Member at Large
Jonathan Libby, Executive Committee Member at Large
Deepak Ahluwalia
Sheila Bapat
Teresa Beck
Purdey Castle
Anjan Choudhury, In Memoriam, 1979-2022
Camille Granville
Will Haney
Anna Hohag
Corin Korenaga
Ken Langan
Christopher Stecher
Michelle Ybarra

JOIN US!

Follow us on [LinkedIn](#)
Subscribe to the [ChangeMaker](#) (quarterly)
Subscribe to [NewsBrief](#) (weekly)

CHANGELAWYERS[®]

WWW.CHANGELAWYERS.ORG