

The background features a light green map of New Jersey. Overlaid on the map is a graphic of two hands shaking, rendered in a hatched, sketch-like style. The text is centered over the map.

DARING TO CREATE A MORE PERFECT NEW JERSEY

ACLU
New Jersey

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

2022-2026

Abridged Version

THE ACLU OF NEW JERSEY STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK 2022-2026

Abridged Version

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A LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Dear Friends,

2022 marked an important milestone in our organization's evolution. For the first time in our history of more than 60 years, the ACLU of New Jersey adopted a strategic framework that doesn't just outline our priority issues but sets an overarching vision for the organization to guide us through 2026.

Through a collaborative strategic planning process involving our entire board and staff, stakeholders, partners, and more, we arrived at a shared vision for the future of this great organization. This facilitated process helped inform our vision of an ambitious and intentional future that reflects voices at all levels of the ACLU-NJ.

Together, we've identified three strategic priorities that will guide our work over the coming years: racial justice, partnered leadership, and organizational development:

- We commit to advancing racial justice both internally as an organization and in our work across New Jersey. We believe that racial justice is, and has been, at the center of the fight for civil liberties, and by advancing racial justice, we help advance justice for all historically marginalized communities.
- By partnering with and centering the voices and lived experiences of people and groups who historically have been marginalized and disenfranchised, we aim to help equalize the power of all voices in the courts, the legislature, other arms of government, and in access to financial and other resources.
- Finally, we commit to paying continuous attention to our governance and board development, our operational systems, and supporting our staff. We will prioritize caring relationships, equity across identities, and addressing power dynamics within our organizational hierarchy.

Woven into these priorities are our values: empathy, kindness, humility, and generosity will guide us as we engage in our quest for a just and fair New Jersey.

Using this framework as our guide, our organization is poised to reach its unmet potential and be even more effective and impactful in striving for a more just and more fair New Jersey. Thank you for supporting us in this exciting vision for our future.

Onward,



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Sinha'.

Amol Sinha
Executive Director



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Beebe'.

Marc Beebe
President of the Board of Trustees



OUR WHO, WHAT, AND WHY

VISION: OUR NORTH STAR

We envision a just and fair New Jersey where laws exist to protect the civil rights and civil liberties of all, and are consistently and equitably enforced.

We envision a just and fair New Jersey where laws exist to protect the civil rights and civil liberties of all, and are consistently and equitably enforced.

MISSION: THE SPECIFIC CONTRIBUTION OF THE ACLU OF NEW JERSEY

The ACLU of New Jersey's mission is to preserve, advance, and expand the individual rights and liberties guaranteed by the state and federal constitutions in courts, in the legislature, and in our communities.

GROUNDING PRINCIPLES: THE VALUES THAT GUIDE OUR WORK

We strive to be anti-racist and are actively committed to advancing racial equity and racial justice in the institutions

The ACLU-NJ brings humility, empathy, kindness, and generosity to our work, internally within the organization and externally with our partners and those whom we are serving.

of New Jersey, for the people of New Jersey, and within ACLU-NJ itself. Being anti-racist requires intentional, decisive actions rooted in a historical understanding of how local, state, and federal laws and policies create and sustain a culture of white supremacy. It requires an understanding of the enduring legacy of the institutions and the cultures that surround us and make necessary our continued learning and growth about racism, sexism, classism, and all the other systems of inequity and repression in which we live and function.

We aim to center the voices of people and groups whom we serve and who historically have not been fully protected by systems of law, justice, and society. Only in this way can we hope to help equalize the power of all voices in the courts, the legislature, other arms of government, and equalize access to financial and other resources.

We believe that people should have input into decisions that affect them. It is our obligation as ACLU-NJ staff and board members to grow our awareness of the relations and dynamics of power inside the ACLU-NJ as well as in our work in the world. We aim to perceive them, name them, and with compassion and commitment, to do all in our power to shift them toward justice.

We work to earn the trust of our partners. We strive to be regarded with respect by the public.

We bring humility, empathy, kindness, and generosity to our work, internally within the organization and externally with our partners and those whom we are serving. We approach everyone with whom we interact with a sense of deep collegiality, and a willingness to be generous with our expertise and resources.

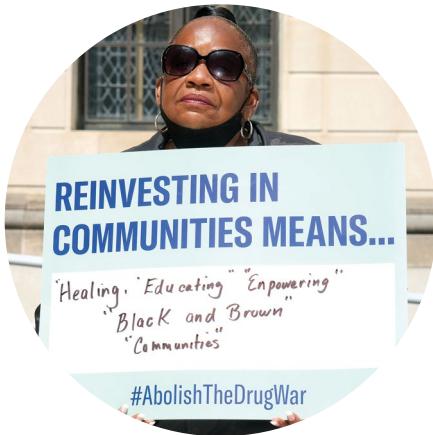
While we are a non-partisan organization, we participate in political activity to effectuate change and with the aim of shaping a more equitable society.

We protect the future of the ACLU-NJ and the well-being of our staff.

OUR STORY OF PROTECTING RIGHTS

To achieve a just and fair New Jersey that expands and protects the civil rights and liberties of all, we must:

- Fight to protect and expand the rights guaranteed by the U.S. and New Jersey constitutions, as well as related civil rights and non-discrimination statutes.
- Acknowledge the pain of those harmed by laws or whom the law does not protect, and seek to expand rights, achieve redress, and change policies and practices; and where the law fails to guarantee rights, work to transform it.
- Seek out partnerships and coalitions in a way that centers marginalized voices and shifts power, furthering our mission in accordance with our values.
- Learn when to lead and when to support. Play a more supportive role when other organizations or people are already skillfully taking initiative and take the lead in situations where we perceive that the fight for civil rights and civil liberties requires it.
- Utilize our model of integrated advocacy by working flexibly, creatively, and strategically with the tools of policy advocacy, litigation, public education, strategic communications, and capacity-building with directly impacted partners.



Taken together, these activities build power. Even our losses in advocacy build our power for the next fight. When we win advocacy fights, block bad legislation, or win cases, we protect the rights of the people of New Jersey and ensure that legal protections are extended to all and equitably enforced.



A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR A HISTORIC MOMENT

The ACLU-NJ has been successful in achieving the advocacy goals we have set as well as in securing funding to sustain our work. The moment when we are operating from a position of programmatic and financial strength is the moment to take a leap forward. Our collective experience, knowledge, and wisdom at this moment provide three orientations for how to move forward – three strategic priorities that will orient us through the next five years.

ACLU-NJ STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2022-2026

Racial justice is a lens through which we strive to examine every aspect of our organizational development, as well as in our outward-facing programmatic work, our fundraising, and our resource development.

- **Racial Justice:** As advocates dedicated to issues of equity and justice, we must each commit to individual, organizational, and community-focused learning and growth around racial justice. Racial justice is a lens through which we strive to examine every aspect of our organizational development, as well as in our outward-facing programmatic work, our fundraising, and our resource development. In our construction of internal systems, in our conversations, and in our culture, we will strengthen our racial equity muscle, and this will contribute to making our staff stronger, our community partnerships more effective and genuine, and our advocacy more equitable and just.
- **Partnered Leadership:** There is an overarching theme that ties our vision, mission, and guiding principles together in our story of change: our relationship with the communities that are systematically denied their rights. Our work is grounded in partnership with our clients, impacted community members, and partners in advocacy on behalf of these groups.
- **Organizational Development:** The ACLU-NJ is committed to paying continuous attention to our governance and board development, our systems of hiring and retaining staff, and our ability to support staff in professional development and career growth. We are committed to growing our capacity in operations and information technology infrastructure, internal communications, and all aspects of management.

We are committed to prioritizing caring relationships, equity across race, class, gender, religion, physical and mental abilities and other identities, and power dynamics within our organizational hierarchy. We are at the point in the history of the organization where we ensure internal culture and systems are at the center, rather than at the periphery, of organizational attention and growth. We must support the internal organization in time to hold our successes.

These three strategic priorities for the coming five years serve as grounding points for our growth, how we choose and prioritize our work, and the way we carry out our relationships with each other and the people and communities of New Jersey.

RACIAL JUSTICE

As our stated principles assert, the ACLU-NJ strives to be anti-racist and actively center the needs of people and groups who have historically and systematically been denied justice. Racial identity is the primary indicator of social and economic outcomes in our society, and these outcomes have their roots in the origins of our country. The 21st century civil rights movement for Black lives presents our opportunity, and our duty, to uplift the civil rights and civil liberties of Black people and others denied rights and liberties by virtue of their perceived race or racial identities.

Attention to racial equity and justice will be integrated into the work we do, who we work with, how we work with each other, and how we present ourselves in the larger community of advocacy partners and to the public beyond. As fundamental priorities for the organization, racial equity and justice go beyond recruitment and training for all staff and board members and require that we fully interrogate all policies and processes to ensure alignment with core values. This section describes how we will embed racial equity and justice practices internally, in our programmatic work, and in our external communication.

Through ongoing training and professional development, we will strengthen understanding at all organizational levels of how oppressive power dynamics manifest in our organization and in our relationship with partners. We will intentionally be more inclusive of people who are at the center of much of our work – people whose rights are systematically marginalized. We will develop baseline measures to track and be transparent on progress and areas in which focused work is needed.

Responsibility and accountability for racial justice and equity infuses all ACLU-NJ roles, and specific leadership roles (including, but not limited to, Executive Director, Board President, Affiliate Equity Officer, Deputy Director, and the People, Benefits, and Culture Director) will be tasked with promoting this throughout all levels of staff and board. Leadership and supervisors will be provided resources to develop skills and competencies needed to support the ACLU-NJ in its work to grow as an actively anti-racist organization. Board members and staff at all levels will learn and practice sharing feedback to support each other's growth, whether as members



of marginalized groups or as allies to members of marginalized groups. For staff, performance management tools will provide support, recognition, and accountability for all of this work.

In our legal and policy work, racial justice and equity inform our civil rights and civil liberties framework. The racial diversity of ACLU-NJ's staff and board will strengthen the work of the organization, but simply accounting for demographic representation is not enough. The work of inclusion, equity, and belonging goes beyond numbers. Over time, we will work to further racial justice and equity in the broadest sense.

We will continue to seek out partnerships with affected groups, working across differences in access, resources, and values, while holding the ACLU-NJ's work and our organizational power and role with humility.

PARTNERED LEADERSHIP

We will continue to seek out partnerships with affected groups, working across differences in access, resources, and values, while holding the ACLU-NJ's work and our organizational power and role with humility. In this section, we outline a set of practices that will guide our partnering practices in the years ahead.

We are committed to following the initiative, taking in the knowledge, and benefiting from the lived experiences brought by those – including many of us ACLU-NJ board and staff members – who are Black and Brown, working class and poor, immigrants, people involved in the criminal legal system, women, people with disabilities, LGBTQI+ people, and part of marginalized communities, as we offer the support of our technical skills and resources. We will not assume that we know what community partners want or need in a particular issue, case, or campaign.

When a violation or denial of rights in New Jersey would remain unaddressed unless we address it, we may be alone in our work. This can happen when there are no partners working on a given issue, we alone have the resources to take on a particular issue, or there are significant gaps or conflicts between our approach and that of would-be partner groups. In these instances, we will – consistent with our guiding principles – strive to respond to the needs of individuals, groups, or communities most susceptible to the violation of rights even in the absence of organized or acknowledged partnerships. Even in instances where we don't have partners, we will strive to engage in

conversations with organizations or individuals closely affected by the situation.

Moving forward, we will make more intentional choices about when we work alone, when we work in coalition with groups of people directly impacted by the issue, and when we partner with organizations that advocate on behalf of those directly impacted. Whether we are working in coalition with partners or not, the principle of partnered leadership will inform our choices of what issues to focus on, what cases to take, and what relationships to cultivate.

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Our organization has been on a fast-paced, steep trajectory for growth. As a result, the role of governance, structure, and internal processes needs to be clearer. In this section, we provide detail on the ways in which values and strategic priorities are embedded in governance, structure, and internal processes. At the top of our list of organizational development commitments are board development, sustainable staffing, internal systems and processes, and clarity around decision-making.

All members of the board will be expected to develop their individual and collective anti-racist understanding and practice

Governance

The Board of Trustees must provide the quality and degree of guidance and support needed to ensure that the vision, mission, and grounding principles of the ACLU-NJ are advanced across and throughout the organization. As we grow, the board will work to be inclusive, collaborative, and reflective of a range of stakeholders. A central responsibility will be to support the ACLU-NJ's strategic priorities and shepherd fidelity to this strategic plan.

All members of the board will be expected to develop their individual and collective anti-racist understanding and practice, as well as develop and implement meeting facilitation and participation norms and practices that reflect the ACLU-NJ's racial justice principles. There will also be an intentional effort to cultivate the next generation of leadership among board members who identify as people of color.

Sustainable Staffing

The work of fighting civil rights violations requires vigilance, responsiveness, and commitment from all staff. The ACLU-NJ understands that staff are affected by the intensity and pace of work and acknowledges the toll it may take. As a result, the aim is to create an environment that prioritizes working in ways that are healthy, sustainable, and respectful of personal and professional priorities. We will develop practices, norms, and policies that center supporting employees at all levels and tenures to thrive.

A comprehensive and responsive human resources function will be developed and implemented beginning in 2022 and continuing through 2023.

A comprehensive and responsive human resources function will be developed and implemented beginning in 2022 and continuing through 2023. The task of the human resources function includes working with managers and others to put systems and processes in place that:

- Strengthen the organizational culture, specifically focusing on equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging.
- Ensure that recruitment, hiring, and onboarding advance strategic values and operational goals.
- Make certain all staff have access to professional development and performance management required to help them thrive.
- Addresses the human resources issues accompanying growth and pandemic work challenges.

This includes, but is not limited to, practices supporting anti-racism, inclusion, sustainable work policies and practices, career progression and retention, and professional development for all levels of staff.

These efforts will contribute to a work culture that is respectful of employee needs, advances the strategic priorities, and specifically supports a range of options for mutual affirmation and support among members of marginalized groups.

Internal Systems Goals

ACLU-NJ staff have faced the challenges of the pandemic, including the transition to working in a remote environment with its limitations, discomforts, and ambiguities. Beyond the pandemic, there is an expressed need by our staff for role definition. As we grow, we will aim to build trust throughout the organization through clearer understanding and concrete practices of clarity, transparency, and accountability about roles, decisions, and organizational processes generally.

The uncertainties and complexities wrought by working through the pandemic have revealed pressure points within the organization and opportunities for change. There is strong data that suggests continued volatility and complexity in government, civic life, and business in the near to medium term. These universal challenges, along with concerns of clarity, transparency, and accountability expressed by ACLU-NJ staff, underlie our commitment to reviewing and improving existing ACLU-NJ policies, practices, and procedures. In preparing to implement this Strategic Framework, we will audit our internal systems to determine the degree of their alignment with the Strategic Framework. This will highlight areas that need to be sustained and strengthened and flag gaps and impediments to the change we seek.

Knowledge of gaps to be addressed, clarity and accountability about this internal systems audit, and ongoing work generally, can act as a significant source of hope. To further meet these interests, we will ensure that supervisors get support to continuously upgrade their management, mentoring, and coaching skills. Staff will, in turn, get better clarity in their own individual growth and advancement in their professional development and in the forward motion of their careers.



Decision-Making Clarity

In all decisions made by and for staff, we will aim to center practices of inclusion, participation, collaboration, clarity, and transparency in ACLU-NJ decision-making, to the extent possible in achieving our mission. These hallmarks of our decision-making practice reflect our values of equity and justice inside our workplace.

In ongoing decisions, whether programmatic or operational, our size requires clarity around decision-making roles and processes. To ensure that we adopt and implement the substantive actions and decisions identified in this Strategic Framework across the organization, we will clarify decision-making roles at the staff level. We will clarify roles and processes for implementing guidelines for emerging strategic opportunities, including issues, cases, and campaigns.





GUIDELINES FOR EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES

Historically the issue-areas around which ACLU-NJ chooses to focus have shifted in response to a combination of: the perceived priorities of communities most in need, opportunities for legislative or judicial wins, opportunities to strengthen strategic relationships and grow partnerships, and opportunities to build the ACLU-NJ's power to strengthen its brand and continue its work.

Our strategic clarity can be jarred when we are faced with unpredictable but inevitable events and phenomena such as the pandemic, extreme weather and other climate-related events, the uprising for Black lives, economic downturns, and continued erosion of democratic norms and principles.

GUIDELINES FOR CHOOSING ISSUES, CASES, AND CAMPAIGNS

In choosing whether to initiate or respond to any opportunity to lead and/or partner on an issue, case, or campaign, we will evaluate it based on these strategic considerations:

- 1. Alignment with our values:** Does this issue, case, or campaign promote our values?
- 2. Alignment with our three strategic priorities:** Racial justice, partnered leadership, and organizational development.
- 3. Alignment with our issue priorities:** The list of issues we may work on is long and diverse, including, but not limited to, the criminal legal system; democracy and civic engagement; discrimination; gender, sexuality, and reproductive freedom; immigrants' rights; racial and economic justice; speech, privacy, and technology; and students' and youth rights.



DECISION RULES

Choices like those above will be made through a well-defined and consultative decision-making process. This process, including decision rules, will be the basis for the ACLU-NJ's project of clarifying decision-making roles and processes overall.



ACCOUNTABILITY

We will hold ourselves accountable to manifesting our priorities over the next five years:

INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Individuals, both staff and board members, will hold themselves accountable. Staff will be held accountable by their supervisors through processes managed by the People & Culture team and described in this Framework. Board members will be held accountable by the Executive Committee and through the renomination process.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

We will hold ourselves accountable for living out this strategic plan by monitoring progress toward manifestations, measuring progress at their specified timeline, analyzing barriers to success, shifting our course of action as needed, and so forth, in a cycle. At appointed intervals we will evaluate our work in all strategic priority areas described in this framework by looking at progress toward each manifestation, alignment with principles in each case, and our ability to adapt and adjust course to manifest our priorities.



APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY

FROM PROCESS TO FRAMEWORK: DECEMBER 2020 TO DECEMBER 2021

The language in this strategic framework was crowdsourced from ACLU-NJ board and staff members. In its edited form, it represents an amalgamation of inputs from every person who responded to a survey or participated in a one-on-one conversation with Dragonfly Partners, a focus group, Strategic Planning Team or Steering Committee meeting, Deep Dive Discussion, or Board meeting over the course of 2021. This appendix details that process.

STRATEGIC PLANNING LEADERSHIP

In late 2020, ACLU-NJ leadership selected Dragonfly Partners to facilitate its strategic planning process. Starting in early January 2021, Board President Marc Beebe and Strategic Planning Committee Chair Afsheen Shamsi, with Executive Director Amol Sinha, met several times with the Dragonfly team of Rebecca Subar, Jacqueline McLemore, and Naseem Khuri. They invited Legal Director Jeanne LoCicero to join them to form the strategic planning process Steering Committee, which would meet monthly through the course of the year to plan and debrief meetings of the Strategic Planning Team.

The first task of the Steering Committee was to define roles for each leadership body and its individual leaders. They then selected three members of the board – Amardeep Singh, Frank Corrado, and Marnita Robinson – and three staff members – Alejandra Sorto, Diane Du Brule, and Tess Borden – to join them to form the 10-person Strategic Planning Team. This team met monthly as well, competently addressing some of the more challenging process and content questions of the strategic planning process, as was their duty.



DISCOVERY AND DEEP LEARNING

In the next phase of its work, Dragonfly sought to learn about the ACLU-NJ, including recent history, what the people associated with the ACLU-NJ envision, desire, and believe about how change is made and how the ACLU-NJ functions. They conducted a survey of board and staff to collect a range of perspectives on organizational direction and function, with 30 respondents representing 60% of the board and staff members. Dragonfly conducted thirty one-on-one interviews with 15 staff, 15 Board members, and 5 external stakeholders. They conducted three staff focus groups: one for staff of color, one for managers, and a third for any interested non-management staff.

Dragonfly presented their top-line findings from this learning to the board and staff in two separate presentations. Based on their learning from these sources, Dragonfly developed the scaffold of the strategic framework. Critical questions and particular areas

of tension were identified for further investigation, bucketed into seven topics that would be explored in deep-dive deliberation among board and staff.



DEEP DIVE DELIBERATIONS WITH BOARD AND STAFF

Five of the topics were designated for board-staff deep dive deliberations:

- 1. How can the ACLU-NJ become a consciously multi-racial, cross-class community, now and into the future?*
- 2. What partnerships will we build, and what practices will guide us in building them?*
- 3. What will be our big strategy?*
- 4. What issue areas will we focus on?*
- 5. What criteria will guide our strategic decisions about which issues, cases, and partnerships to take on as opportunities arise over the coming years?*

The board would discuss as its sixth topic the role of the board. The staff would deliberate on how to develop a culture of healthy work/life balance to support the work ahead.

The Deep Dive Deliberations were facilitated by Dragonfly during seven three-hour online sessions scheduled between June and December of 2021. Each session drew between one and several dozen participants from among staff and board. Sessions included full-group discussions as well as breakouts, leading to the sharing of a diversity of perspectives and opinions about the topic of the session. Each conversation explored the question at hand to identify additional questions or points of tension.

Dragonfly incorporated the rich output of the Deep Dive Deliberations into the scaffold for the strategic framework, incorporating key thinking and attempting to reflect subtleties from the diversity of perspectives expressed.

ITERATIVE DRAFTING

Drawing on all the learning that emerged throughout this process, Dragonfly developed an initial draft of the Strategic Framework. Dragonfly submitted a draft of the strategic framework to the Strategic Planning Team for review and response, and after incorporating their feedback, shared the revised draft with the entire board and staff for comment. Dragonfly further built out the Strategic Framework based on comments and suggested edits. The next draft was shared only with the Strategic Planning Team for their deep engagement. After a third round of feedback and drafts, Dragonfly shared the Strategic Framework with the Strategic Planning Team, with an invitation for the Steering Committee to share it with the entire board and staff. This framework was approved by the Board of Trustees in January 2022. ■

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