

# Strategic Plan 2015-2020



CALIFORNIA **YOUTH**  
CONNECTION

## About CYC

Youth-led and advocacy-focused since its inception, California Youth Connection was founded in 1988 by a group of foster youth and supportive adults to create a vehicle for California foster youth voice at key policy and implementation decision-making tables impacting their lives. Grounded firmly in a strengths-based framework of equity, access, systemic change, and youth development, CYC builds leadership and advocacy skills and develops leaders who empower each other and their communities to transform the foster care system by impacting legislation and policy. Founded on a model of non-tokenizing youth empowerment that is now being duplicated across the country, CYC continues to maintain our dual focus on policy and authentic youth development more than twenty-seven years later. Our deep impact on transformative leadership and empowerment, coupled with our lengthy and consistent record of strong statewide legislative and policy achievements, have earned CYC wide recognition as a leading organization in California for engaging foster youth in effective policy-making processes.

Every year, CYC partners with more than 700 foster youth members, ages 14–24, through 33 county-based Chapters throughout the state. Core CYC activities include: training members on legislative and policy advocacy, educating policymakers and providers about foster youth's experiences, presenting members' recommendations for legislative and policy changes, and providing input to county and state policymakers as they work to implement policy changes and improve the foster care system.

The foster youth leaders of California Youth Connection have created a fundamental paradigm shift in child welfare policy in California; placing foster youth voice at the center of child welfare policymaking for the first time in history. As a direct result of this leadership, foster youth throughout California are becoming full partners at the policy table, their priorities are shaping reform, and the rate of reform is rapidly increasing. CYC has a 27-year track record of policy accomplishments and practice reforms, has trained advocates in over 12 states, and has set a new national standard others now widely emulated. CYC is the founding partner of the National Foster Youth Action Network. In keeping with its mission of youth empowerment, CYC has created and implemented a unique shared governance model, with both a governing board and a youth advisory board. Together they define high-level direction, support resource development, provide organizational oversight, and inform program success.

Youth lead CYC's chapters and conferences. CYC is headquartered in Oakland with satellite offices in Los Angeles, Sacramento and Fresno. CYC has a staff of 20 FTE and a budget of over \$2 million.

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# Introduction

The California Youth Connection (CYC) Strategic Plan 2015-2020 sets a bold course for the future of our treasured organization, moving CYC deeper into our mission and promising great impact for foster youth across the state. We will create this impact in big and small ways through policy, legislation and practice change at the county and state levels, and through transformative, life-changing outcomes for our youth members and for other foster youth touched by our work.

## Purpose

The purpose of this Strategic Plan is to actively guide the daily work, decisions and priorities of CYC over the next five years. It is a roadmap to our future, and as such it maps a clear direction to reach specific goals and indicators of success, leading to our enduring vision. It says what we will do and what we will not do. It expresses where we are going, what we are about, what is important to us, and where we stand. It shows how we will achieve the goals set forth, with more specifics to be developed in an annual operational implementation plan. The annual plan, fully aligned with the Strategic Plan, will have actions and tactics, clear assignments and phasing, and detailed measures to be monitored regularly. The Strategic Plan will be reviewed annually in this context, with a major review in three years, which will be subject to modifications, and course-corrections as needed. Our Strategic Communications Plan will also align and guide both internal and external communications about who we are, what we do, what we need from partners, and what makes us successful.

## Process

With an eye toward maximizing input, capturing and leveraging our strengths, and identifying areas of growth, CYC launched a multi-phase process for developing our 2015-2020 Strategic Plan:

### **1. Engaged staff and external stakeholders in a “Refresh” process**

The “Refresh” process blended elements of organizational analysis, performance assessment, and strategic planning; and was designed with a dual purpose: to provide an objective, research-based review of California Youth Connection (CYC)'s organizational function, structure and effectiveness in achieving its mission and goals; and to develop recommendations to help CYC refresh and prepare for its next phase.

With a grant provided by the Walter S. Johnson Foundation and sponsorship by the California Child Welfare Co-Investment Partnership, CYC engaged the expertise of MIG, Inc. to assist in assessing its organizational focus, functions, structure and progress toward meeting its goals. MIG, Inc. produced a summary of findings and key recommendations stemming from the five-month process involving numerous internal and external stakeholders across the state, and provided thorough documentation of this process to CYC leadership and the CYC Board of Directors for their follow-up reflection and use in their strategic plan update and on-going operational improvements.

**2. Conducted an internal scan to explore the question: *What do we need to do to move CYC to the next level?***

CYC held two full staff meetings and a staff retreat over a six month period to answer this question. Staff met as a whole, as departments, and in mixed groups to discuss how to improve organizational success and impact. We grouped the emerging recommendations by themes, and utilized the insights gained to directly inform the direction and thinking around this strategic plan. We then brought the recommendations to the strategic planning committee for review and discussion.

**3. Engaged youth from the Advisory Board and the Chapters with adult supporters, to address strategic changes to our model and activities**

Carrying forward the core recommendations from our departmental and all-staff meetings to CYC's Advisory board, we discussed and prioritized several options for adapting our model and activities to maximize organizational success and impact. Staff and youth members then reached out to their Chapters and led presentations and dialogues in most of our county-based Chapters. We gathered the input from these meetings, collated it into themes, and brought it back to the strategic planning committee for consideration. We also brought these recommendations to a group of over 50 adult supporters attending Day at the Capitol for their input and recommendations, incorporated their insights, and then shared the results and thematic findings with the strategic planning committee.

**4. Reflected on what we have accomplished in the 2012 Strategic Plan**

Over the course of the past three years we have developed annual implementation plans linked to the 2012 Strategic Plan. CYC staff engaged in quarterly assessments of these plans each year, identifying what had been accomplished, what remained to be completed, and what remained relevant to achieving our mission.

**5. Developed recommendations for changes that are responsive to the findings from both the Strategic Refresh and CYC's internal scan**

The staff leadership team reviewed and evaluated all data and developed draft core recommendations that incorporated feedback from the Refresh process, as well as input from youth members, adult supporters, full staff, and board. These core recommendations formed the foundation for this current strategic plan, which we then brought forward to the strategic planning committee for review.

**6. Worked with the Strategic Planning Committee to refine draft Strategic Plan contents**

The strategic planning committee held a series of meetings, including a full-day working retreat facilitated by Carolyn Verheyen of MIG, Inc., to provide support for refining and integrating all of the recommendations, data, and findings. The leadership team then further refined the drafted recommendations, and presented them to the committee for final review before bringing the draft to the Advisory Board and Board of Directors.

## 7. Collaborated with the Board of Directors and Youth Advisory Board to finalize the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan

Members of the strategic planning committee, including youth, staff and Board members, presented the draft strategic plan for review to the Advisory Board and Board of Directors on March 7, 2015. CYC integrated the final feedback; final approval of the plan, along with the first-year annual implementation work plan, was officially approved at the June 2015 Board meeting.

### Strategic Plan Framework & Definitions

The diagram below illustrates the components of the Strategic Plan and how each relates to the other. Each annual operational plan will outline prioritized actions, along with specific objectives and corresponding measures for that year. We provide definitions for key terms used in the Strategic Plan in the table that follows, along with examples from everyday life.



Strategic Plan Component and Definition	Question	Answer (Example)
<b>Vision</b> A desired end state or preferred future; a destination	<i>Where are we going?</i>	I am healthy and happy, appreciating my life and health
<b>Mission</b> The purpose and associated responsibilities of a group or organization	<i>What business are we in? What is our reason for being?</i>	My life is precious and I live with fullness and intentionality
<b>Values</b> Shared beliefs that reflect what the group considers significant or important	<i>What is most important to us?</i>	Being healthy is fundamental to happiness and quality of life
<b>Positioning Statement</b> A statement that communicates a big picture stance in relation to a choice or optional direction	<i>Where do we stand in relation to key choices before us?</i>	I make choices in life that support a healthy lifestyle
<b>Goal</b> A statement of general direction leading toward a desired end state; a "path of travel"	<i>What do we want to achieve?</i>	Live an active lifestyle, building in fitness activities each week
<b>Indicator of Success</b> A measurement of progress or performance toward goals and objectives	<i>Are we achieving what we set out to accomplish?</i>	Number of steps per month as monitored by FitBit every three months
<b>Strategy</b> A means for accomplishing goals and objectives	<i>How will we achieve what we want?</i>	Walk to work as often as possible
<b>Objective</b> (Objectives will be in an Annual Implementation Plan) A specific statement of action with a measurable target and time frame; a "sign post" along the path of travel	<i>What specifically do we want to achieve, by when?</i>	Walk 50,000 steps per week for at least three weeks of each month until December 2015
<b>Action</b> (Actions will be in an Annual Implementation Plan) A specific task or step that is taken to implement a strategy	<i>How, specifically, will we implement this strategy?</i>	Use a calendar and alert on my phone to schedule walk days to work. Walk with my colleague to work three times a week

## Strategic Vision

The foundational elements for the organization include our vision, mission, and values, which all stakeholders deemed as remaining vibrant and relevant, and we have thus carried them forward from our prior Strategic Plan. We added a new element--Positioning Statements—to our updated plan. These statements are a direct result of CYC staff and Board deliberations following the Environmental Scan, which demonstrated that the changing landscape of child welfare in the state presented new opportunities for CYC's work and value proposition. Some of these opportunities were seen as tensions or choices of emphasis. Staff and Board agreed that defining where CYC stands in relation to these choices would provide strategic focus for the future and clarity of intent, both internally and externally. The positioning statements in turn are reflected in the new strategic plan goals and focused strategies for the next five years.

### **Vision:** *Where we are going, our destination*

Foster youth will be equal partners in contributing to all policies and decisions made in their lives. All youth in foster care will have their needs met and the support to grow into healthy and vibrant adults.

### **Mission:** *What we are about, why we exist*

California Youth Connection is a youth led organization that develops youth leaders who empower each other and their communities to transform the foster care system through policy, legislative and practice change.

### **Youth Leadership Definition**

Youth leadership is young people empowered to find their voice, inspire and mobilize others to make personal, political and social transformations toward a collective vision.

### **Equal Partners Definition**

CYC defines equal partners as: A youth-adult partnership where the youth voice is as respected and validated as other stakeholders at the table. This youth-led model serves as the foundation for the entire organization.

## Values: *What is most important to us, what guides our work*

**E****mpowerment:** We value empowering current and former foster youth to assume leadership and advocacy roles.

**M****ember Leadership:** We value members assuming leadership positions both within the organization and within the community.

**P****rofessional and Personal Development:** We value the professionalism and skill of our members and value providing the training needed to enable all members to reach their fullest potential.

**O****rganizing Foster Youth:** We value organizing current and former foster youth on a county, state, and ultimately a national and global level to advocate for their rights and improve the foster care system.

**W****illingness for Responsibility:** We value the commitment and responsibility of our members and Supporters to the organization and to improving the foster care system.

**E****xpertise of Youth:** We value foster youth as experts with valuable, insightful information and ideas on the foster care system and how it can be improved.

**R****espect:** We value respect as the foundation of our organization and the basis for our relationships with each other.

**I****nclusion:** We value the inclusion and acceptance of everyone and value our strengths and diversity.

**N****etwork of Committed Organizations and Individuals:** We value the network of committed organizations and individuals who share our common goal of improving the foster care system and youth advocacy.

**G****oals of Organization:** We value holding the goals and missions of the organization as priorities, and value putting self-serving interests aside for the betterment of the whole.



## Positioning Statements: *Where we stand*

### **1. Integrating Youth Development and Advocacy**

CYC's mission embodies a unique blend of youth development and advocacy.

CYC will continue its historic role as an effective channel for foster youth advocacy, and will commit to expanding the professionalism, leadership capacity, and personal growth of our members.

*The strategic plan responds with initiatives that deepen our training, outreach, and policy efforts to deliver on the dual aspects of our mission.*

### **2. Maintaining CYC's Statewide Role while Taking Strong Local Action**

We are committed to remain vigilant and active at the statewide level, our historic and critical role.

Given changes in the external environment, we are committed to greater attention, effort and resources at the regional and county level.

*The strategic plan initiatives increase CYC's focus on the local level in order to strengthen county-based Chapters, create regional structures and engage more staff/adult supporters and members in youth development, collaboration and impactful policy implementation.*

### **3. Engaging with Chapters more Intensively**

We will continue to seek engagement of youth from every county across the state; however, CYC will **focus** its youth and Chapter development activities to maximize the impact, efficiency and vitality of its county-based Chapters, rather than establishing Chapters in every county.

*The strategic plan initiatives shift CYC's efforts from simple numerical growth to deepening the quality and duration of its interaction with members and Chapters.*

### **4. Helping Youth Members Respond to Emerging Issues and Advocate for Long Term Change**

CYC confirms our fidelity to a youth-led approach, recognizing the necessity to inform and empower youth to respond to emerging policy and implementation opportunities.

We acknowledge the increasing need for responsiveness, flexibility and sustainable advocacy.

*The strategic plan responds to these needs by creating new policy structures and processes that expand sustained engagement with a wider variety of issues and stakeholders.*

## 5. Collaborating in Partnership to Leverage Impact

CYC will forge new and stronger partnerships with colleagues in relevant state, county, non-profit, philanthropic and business organizations to advance legislative and practice change and leverage greater impact.

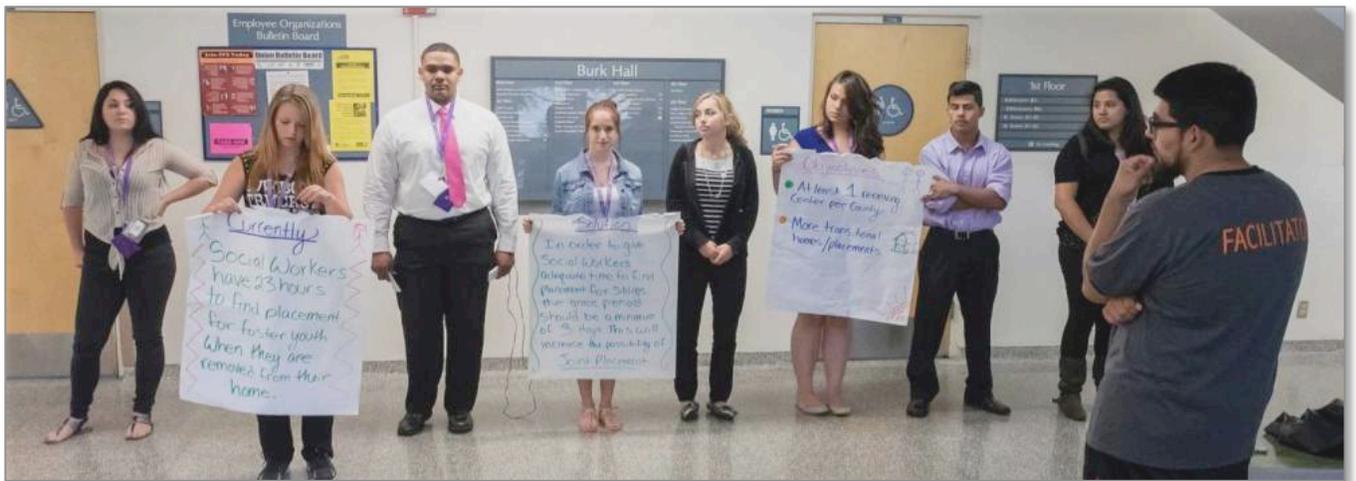
*The strategic plan initiatives emphasize collaboration at the state and county levels whenever appropriate, efficient and practical, and enhanced communication with partners.*

## 6. Attending to Infrastructure and Operational Improvements

CYC recognizes that in order to effectively deliver on our mission, we must continue to develop the infrastructure of an effective, sustainable nonprofit professional organization.

We will enhance program assessment capacity to measure our success, enhance external messaging to communicate our success, and improve fund development capacity to support future growth.

*The strategic plan responds to the need for infrastructure improvements by calling for investments in CYC's fundraising and program assessment capacity, communications, and other key operational systems. Additionally, the plan calls for increased levels of integration among CYC's internal training, outreach and policy programs.*



## Focused Goals & Indicators of Success

These five goals and associated indicators of success communicate the direction we will pursue as an organization, getting us closer to achieving our vision. CYC will monitor these annually and complement them through more specific indicators in each annual plan.

### **1. Impact policy and practice change at the county level**

- **Indicator of Success:** At least one policy or practice change we advocate for will be actively considered in a majority of counties in which we are engaged.
- **Indicator of Success:** Youth engagement at the county level will increase each year from current baselines in all of the counties in which we have Chapters.

### **2. Sustain engagement on policy priorities and systems reforms at the state level**

- **Indicator of Success:** Sponsor at least one legislative bill annually that targets systems reform, ensuring youth voices are heard and the bill is actively considered.
- **Indicator of Success:** Engage at least 10 youth annually in at least five forums at the statewide level that address systems reform.

### **3. Build youth leadership**

- **Indicator of Success:** At least 75% of youth report a greater sense of personal agency, increased knowledge of the foster care system and their role in positive change, and greater capacity to become self-sufficient.
- **Indicator of Success:** At least 150 youth will complete 30 hours of youth leadership and development curriculum.
- **Indicator of Success:** At least 75 youth will mobilize others to take action with key stakeholders in the foster care system utilizing their youth leadership skills.

### **4. Strengthen CYC's governance, infrastructure, communication and overall organizational effectiveness**

- **Indicator of Success:** Staff, Board, and major partners report that CYC has made excellent progress in each of these areas.

### **5. Build a financially sustainable organization with broad community support**

- **Indicator of Success:** Funding is diversified and unrestricted revenue is increased annually by 5%.
- **Indicator of Success:** Number of donors and community supporters is increased annually by 5%.
- **Indicator of Success:** Amount of county financial support is increased annually by 5%.

## Impact Strategies: *How we will achieve our goals*

The following strategies represent the focused and high priority actions we will take to achieve our goals; the “how to,” or means to an end. We provide implementation strategies for each goal and will complement these in each annual operations plan by establishing specific actions and tactics, identifying lead and support champions, and determining a phased timeline for implementation. Where we list two strategies under two different goals, they advance both.

### *Goal 1. Impact policy and practice change at the county level.*

#### **A. Shift program structure to facilitate more county and regional work.**

1. Increase number and expand role of adult supporters.
2. Expand Youth Advisory Board (AB) structure to include new regional/county based representatives.
3. Deploy youth and adult supporters to build relationships and influence county policy and practice.
4. Create youth policy (implementation) committee with regional representation to advance multi-year local policy implementation.
5. Enhance deployment of Policy Coordinator as the policy point person within regions (with Regional Coordinators).
6. Conduct quarterly regional advisory meetings/trainings (with consistent messaging, quality control of Chapters, professional development).

#### **B. Focus staff and training resources on effective Chapters.**

1. Deepen engagement with effective Chapters to pilot greater staff support, adult supporter training and Chapter engagement with local stakeholders.
2. Allocate more Regional Coordinator and Policy Team time to established Chapters.
3. Expand the number of regional trainings for adult supporters and youth leaders on local advocacy, youth development and community organizing.
4. Reduce Regional Coordinator to Chapter ratio from 1:6 to 1:3.
5. Expand and develop a robust alumni mentorship program to add to the capacity of Regional Coordinators in supporting youth and Chapters.
6. Establish a statewide policy agenda and focus Chapter local work on that agenda.
7. Identify and implement recruitment and retention best practices for sustained youth engagement.
8. Create a best practices tool kit to implement for future growth.

### **C. Pivot from new chapter development to deeper local youth leadership development.**

1. Create a training curriculum and delivery system for developing youth and keeping them engaged at the local level modeled after the Bay Area Intern Project.
2. Regional Coordinators expand local advocacy and leadership development efforts with integrated best practice assistance from Training and Policy Teams.
3. Increase youth training and professional development through training curricula and Foster Youth Museum apprenticeships.

## **Goal 2. Sustain engagement on policy priorities and systems reforms at the state level.**

### **A. Expand statewide policy capacity through staffing increases and strategic focus on emerging issues.**

1. Recruit full time Director of Policy to focus on broad statewide organizational policy strategy.
2. Allocate more Legislative Coordinator and Policy Team time to improve and expand internal and external communication around broad child welfare policies and systems.
3. Strengthen both Policy and Legislative Youth Committees through expanded training, preparation, and extended terms of youth members.
4. Expand number of regional trainings for adult supporters and youth leaders on statewide and local advocacy, youth development and community organizing.
5. Establish an annual and multi-year statewide policy agenda and focus chapter local work on that agenda.

### **B. Expand collaboration and communication with key statewide and national stakeholders.**

1. Continue to partner with advocacy and statewide stakeholders on CYC generated legislation and system improvements, as well as broader emerging concerns in child welfare and education relevant to foster youth.
2. Create a Communication Coordinator position to lead our proactive communication on our statewide policy and legislative work and expand our social media capacity.



3. Position CYC as a leader in preparing youth for authentic, informed policy and legislative reform by increasing staff support in collaboration with key stakeholders.
4. Position CYC as a youth development leader and foster care change agent in a national context by increasing collaboration with other state organizations and expanding our national engagement efforts.

### **Goal 3. Build youth leadership.**

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#### **C. Reorganize conference/training structure to better meet the needs of members.**

1. Maintain two large annual conferences: Day at the Capitol and the Summer Leadership & Policy conference.
2. Build Training team capacity to respond to Policy and Outreach training requests.
3. Increase utilization of Youth Training Project youth trainers at conferences and other trainings.
4. Expand Child Welfare curriculum development for key stakeholders and seek out more fee for service opportunities.
5. Create a museum apprentice program and expand youth engagement in museum future exhibits.

**Goal 4. Strengthen CYC's governance, infrastructure, communication and overall organizational effectiveness.**

**A. Build Board and staff level communications capacity by adding positions, consultants and training.**

1. Add a Communications Coordinator to the Policy Team to facilitate statewide and local messaging.
2. Utilize communications experts to support the Board and Development teams to create new marketing channels.
3. Retain consultant to help Board develop and implement strategic communications plan.
4. Focus increased Director of Programs/Director of Training capacity towards improving assessment, reporting, collaboration and best practice documentation.

**B. Create and implement processes for organizational effectiveness at the staff and Board level.**

1. Identify staff lead for improving and implementing key internal organizational processes (planning, communications, reporting, & evaluation).
2. Implement Board governance, communications and fundraising training.
3. Conduct Board effectiveness survey and integrate feedback from environmental scan into creating a more effective governing and fundraising Board.

**Goal 5. Build a financially sustainable organization with broad community support.**

**A. Explore new approaches for generating revenue.**

1. Encourage in-depth county involvement to support youth development and engagement throughout the year (conduct a five county pilot).
2. Define a business model for sustainability that includes stronger county support.
3. Expand Foster Youth Museum fee for service opportunities; develop additional exhibits.
4. Explore endowment campaign and additional fundraising events and approaches.
5. Recruit and expand fundraising talent on the Board.

