



STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-2025



NATIONAL
EMPLOYMENT
LAW
PROJECT

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Acknowledgements

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Summary

The National Employment Law Project (NELP) has taken on a strategic planning refresh for 2022-2025 to achieve clarity and alignment around our mission, vision, values, strategic priority, and to ensure that our long-term goals and nearer-term objectives and strategies hold these guiding tenets. The last year has spanned a turning point in the world—the COVID-19 pandemic, as both a health and economic crisis, has further exposed and worsened deep societal fissures. But the moment also generated grassroots energy, mobilization, and a powerful racial justice reckoning. We are inspired to tackle the deeply embedded labor market inequities in this nation with bold solutions that are systemic and focused on root causes, to advance racial and economic justice.

Strategic Plan Refresh Process

We began our strategic plan process in December 2020 as facilitated by Viveka Chen, our external consultant, in partnership with the Chief of Programs, Michelle Natividad Rodriguez and Chief of Strategy, Caitlin Connolly. Our prior strategic plan covered 2017-2020; although the pandemic delayed our process in 2020, we have found this moment to be generative for the development of the 2022-2025 strategic plan. Viveka, Michelle, and Caitlin, with the strategic guidance of Rebecca Dixon, our Executive Director, created a process to refresh our prior strategic plan with strong staff alignment. The process was intended to be a positive experience for staff with opportunities for skill-building in strategic thinking, prioritization, and planning.

We met as staff and received inputs from allies and partners. In this first phase of the process, we developed a conceptual framework exploring how to take NELP's work to the next evolutionary level of dismantling structural racism, our relationship and role with the workers' rights movement and other movements, and setting our course toward structural change. From this foundation, we began the second phase of the process by drafting. To finalize the strategic plan, Michelle, Rebecca, and the Director of Communications, Mónica Novoa, collaborated on the draft using the source materials from 14 staff discussions and eight external ally and partner inputs.

Mission

Our mission is to build a just and inclusive economy where all workers have expansive rights and thrive in good jobs.

Vision and Long-Term Goals

We hold an abundant vision that embraces a just and inclusive economy for workers, families, and communities:

1. **Work Quality.** People have good jobs—we count on just working conditions, benefits, and wages which allow us to thrive in our lives as individuals and collectively. We have accountable employers, and we shape the conditions of the job.
2. **Work Structures.** People—in any employment or labor structure created by businesses—have good jobs. We have expansive rights, protections, and benefits in any employment or labor structure, such as temp, staffing, contracted, or app work.

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3. **Work Equity.** People obtain good jobs where equity is built into the policies and culture. We advance at work inclusive of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, social class, conviction record, family or immigration status, and disability.
 4. **Social Insurance.** People have economic security over a lifetime. Workers can rely on benefits from our first job into retirement so we may thrive and meet our needs at every stage of life, when we are working and when we are not.
 5. **Worker Power.** People collectively shape the rights, protections, and benefits on the job. Workers build power and influence rules and structures to ensure communities rise together.

Values

1. **Dignity.** All people have intrinsic dignity and are worthy of respect. Our dignity and respect are upheld at work.
2. **Voice.** Workers collectively exercise voice and leadership to shape the rights, protections, and benefits on the job. We influence the policies, systems, and structures that ensure our collective well-being.
3. **Justice.** Anti-blackness has been used to exclude people from rights and benefits while exploiting their labor. We center Blackness to pursue the transformative, wholistic solutions that advance racial and economic justice. We recognize the intrinsic value of Black lives, and the experiences and needs of Black communities.
4. **Interconnectedness.** Our collective liberation—humanity’s ability to thrive in this world—depends on our shared recognition of mutuality and generosity of spirit toward each other. We rise together.
5. **Abundance.** We hold an optimistic vision of abundance; establish irresistible, bold goals; and greet ideas with a sense of inspired possibility.
6. **Leadership.** As a thought leader we offer a transformative vision of a just and inclusive economy informed by policy expertise and lived experience, and our unique role in the national workers’ rights landscape. We practice collaborative leadership by building capacity and amplifying our partners and workers’ voices.

Strategic Priority

Our strategic priority references our collective approach with the progressive ecosystem, our focus on building worker power by centering racial equity, and aiming for bold, structural change. The strategic priority is:

Together we will build Black, immigrant worker power and advance transformative solutions to achieve racial and economic justice.

Theory of Change

*The Theory of Change shows the causal connection between the **strategies** that will result in the **outcomes** that then will lead to the **impact** we are seeking. As a leading national advocacy organization, NELP deploys a toolkit of strategies, which span across all areas of our work to advance our collective mission. NELP is a “think and do tank.” We use a multi-faceted advocacy strategy to not only achieve policy, systems, and structural wins, but also build power; which can be distilled as **POLICY + POWER = STRUCTURAL CHANGE**.*

Our organizational toolkit includes these six interrelated strategies:

- 1. Develop Narratives and Educate Key Audiences.** We popularize the narratives that activate target audiences, supporting shifts in knowledge, values, attitudes, and behaviors. Through our strategic and narrative communications, we educate key audiences to support alignment with a pro-worker, racial equity agenda to achieve a just and inclusive economy.
- 2. Build Organizational Capacity.** Internally, we strengthen our infrastructure and core capacities to create the organizational conditions necessary for advocacy and policy change efforts. Externally, we build the capacity of partners by validating and amplifying their work to increase their influence. We strengthen partners’ capacity by providing tailored technical assistance including narrative and strategic communications, policy and legal analysis, research, coalition-building, and other support. We regrant to partners aligned with a pro-worker, racial equity agenda.
- 3. Build Base of Support.** We develop accessible materials to assist workers and their representatives in organizing campaigns, provide strategic and legal support, and amplify worker organizing objectives, experiences, and stories to generate public support for a pro-worker, anti-racist agenda. We assist worker organizations as they explore emerging models of organizing for underpaid workers of colors. We build the support of institutions, influential thought leaders, and policymakers for a pro-worker, anti-racist agenda by engaging in bold and successful campaigns, lobbying, and educating key stakeholders.
- 4. Strengthen Strategic Partnerships and Alliances.** We collaborate with national, state, and local partners, with a priority of strengthening alliances and building new partnerships with base-building groups to advance a just and inclusive economy. We help cultivate and strengthen partnerships and alliances by increasing coordination, goal alignment centering racial equity, and influence.
- 5. Develop Innovative Policy Solutions.** Rigorous, relevant policy and legal research and model policy design are a central component of our work. We consolidate and marshal secondary research to support the development of solutions and initiate original research around priority work. With an eye towards replicability, we incubate and assess the effectiveness of policy reform models.

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6. **Promote, Implement, and Enforce Policy Solutions.** We promote effective practices and policy reform models by engaging directly in advocacy before administrative, regulatory, and legislative bodies at the federal, state, and local level. We build stronger legal jurisprudence and policy models in support of workers' rights and deploy our legal and advocacy tools through enforcement forums that empower workers and deliver tangible and sustainable improvements.

NELP's organizational outcomes¹ are the following:

1. **Shift in Social Norms.** Social norms are the knowledge, values, attitudes, and behaviors that must be changed to bring about the impact we seek. Narratives are central to the mental models that guide our decision-making and behavior. Long-term narrative change efforts that center workers and challenge dominant narratives that reinforce racial inequities create the conditions for transformational systems change.
2. **Strengthened Organizational Capacity.** Organizational capacity refers to the skill set, staffing and leadership, infrastructure, systems, finances, and strategic planning of the groups that carry out advocacy, campaigns, or base-building. The development of these core capacities are critical organizational conditions for advocacy, policy wins, and building power. This outcome is both internal and external—we strengthen our own internal organizational capacity and externally we prioritize strengthening groups centering workers of color and base-building.
3. **Strengthened Base of Support.** The base of support is the grassroots, leadership, and institutional support for policy wins. A powerful base of support has the influence and capacity to build the necessary level of public support or public will for a pro-worker, anti-racist agenda, especially amongst opinion leaders, decisionmakers, and the generation of positive media coverage.
4. **Strengthened Alliances.** Alliances represent the level of coordination, collaboration, goals, values, and power dynamic alignment among grassroots, community-based, organizing, local, state, and national groups. Strong alliances are essential forces in presenting common messages, pursuing common goals, enforcing policy changes, and maintaining wins. We prioritize alliances centering communities of color.
5. **Improved Policies.** Policies represent different types of practices, policy, and legislative improvement that result from an initiative or campaign. The improvement could be from policy or practice adoption, changes to legislation, implementation of recommendations, or changes in practice or funding. We aim for improved policies that center the needs, lives, and experiences of workers of color.

¹ These outcomes were adapted from the following source: Jane Riesman, Anne Genipap and Sarah Stachowiak, *A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy* prepared for the Annie E. Casey Foundation by Organizational Research Services (2007).

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6. **Improved Conditions.** The impact of our policy wins and efforts to build worker power result in improvements in the physical and socio-economic conditions of workers, families, and communities. Some examples of improved conditions include increased income, increased labor market equity and integration, and improvements toward closing the racial wage, wealth, and work gaps.

NELP's impacts are the long-term goals and vision described above.



Sources

- Advocacy That Builds Power, Transforming Policies and Systems for Health and Racial Equity, Center for Evaluation Innovation (March 2021), [link here](#).
- The Bridgespan Group, Mission and Vision Statements, [link here](#).
- Jane Riesman, Anne Genipap and Sarah Stachowiak, [A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy](#) prepared for the Annie E. Casey Foundation by Organizational Research Services (2007).
- Julia Coffman, [A User's Guide to Advocacy Evaluation Planning](#), Harvard Family Research Project (Sept. 2009).