

JustLeadershipUSA
BUILDING LOCAL POWER.
DISMANTLING OPPRESSIVE SYSTEMS.

JustLeadershipUSA Strategic Direction
Executive Summary
2021–2024

DEVELOPED IN COLLABORATION. PRODUCED BY



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO

Dear Leaders, Friends, and Supporters,

I am pleased to share with you JustLeadershipUSA's three-year strategic plan, "Building Local Power to Dismantle Oppressive Systems." This plan, which covers 2021 to 2024, is the fruit of an intensive collaborative and collective process that took place over many months. The voices in this plan include JustLeadershipUSA staff, board, alumni, and community partners. I am grateful to all for their dedication and expertise and for their steadfast support during this incredibly challenging year. This plan reflects the moment we are in as a movement.

Not so long ago, we were millions of men and women rendered voiceless by stigma, marginalization, and oppression. In the early days, the ground was unyielding. Over fifteen years ago, Eddie Ellis, the founder of the Center for NuLeadership on Urban Solutions, kicked open the door with his "Open Letter to Our Friends on the Question of Language." Language matters, he explained. Stop calling us "convicts," "felons," and "inmates." We are people. A connection with other people who were formerly incarcerated across the United States began to form. From the East Coast to the West Coast to the South and Midwest, a common thread was discovered. People who had experienced incarceration were demanding equal rights, fair treatment, relief from collateral consequences, and access to basic human needs. We were raising awareness and educating in our local communities in silos.

Those of us who were actively trying to make a difference in our own communities were not taken seriously, even by other progressive groups. Our expertise and our contributions were largely unacknowledged. But through the work in local areas, people came together, and the movement grew. We worked to soften the soil and plant the seeds of change. Our guiding principle, that those closest to the problem are closest to the solution, began to take hold.

Today the movement of directly impacted people is at a pivotal moment. More and more our voices are coming to the forefront. We are assuming our seats at policy tables, exercising our rights in the voting booths, and having our voices heard on the steps of city halls and state and federal capitols and in the streets across the United States, and we are achieving victories. But these incremental changes, while important, are not the endgame, and now is not the time to sit back, go quiet, and rest on our laurels. Now more than ever our movement must keep our collective foot on the gas pedal until we succeed in tearing down the racist and oppressive systems that buttress oppression, marginalization, and the carceral state. These are the very systems that block access to people's basic human needs, and they are resistant to change. As we move forward, JustLeadershipUSA has identified its vital, singular, and significant role in this movement.



Those who are directly impacted are closest to the problem and closest to the solution, but as our rallying cry reminds us, we have been farthest from resources and power. JustLeadershipUSA's mission is to bring those resources and tools to leaders in the most marginalized and impacted communities and to empower them to be the change agents they are meant to be. We base our work on the ancient proverb, "Give a person a fish and you feed them for a day; teach a person to fish, and you feed them for a lifetime." Our goal is to teach (train/educate) communities so they can feed (advocate/organize) themselves. We pledge to be a national platform and go-to resource for people directly impacted by the criminal legal system. By supporting and developing the next and future generations of leaders from the most marginalized and oppressed communities and empowering them with the skills and tools they need to build strong and thriving communities, we will continue to build the nationwide network necessary to get the job done.

I am confident that this strategic plan is sound, realistic, focused on our guiding and founding principles, and aligned with our mission. I look forward with great anticipation to working with JustLeadershipUSA's staff, board, alumni, partners, funders, and supporters to take JLUSA to the next level. We seek not only to be recognized but to become a force to be reckoned with as we dismantle racist and oppressive systems and reimagine our world together.

Onward,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "DeAnna Hoskins", located below the text "Onward,".

DeAnna Hoskins

OUR PLAN

Build local power with a national purview to dismantle racist and oppressive systems

The criminal legal system is part of systemic oppression that disproportionately plagues Black, Brown, and poor communities in this country. Dismantling and rebuilding the criminal legal system require an intersectional approach as the system is intertwined and empowered by existing economic, social, and political customs, policies, practices, and laws that affect people's ability to live thriving lives.

We can't skip seeing the dehumanization of people who are currently or formerly incarcerated.¹ We can't omit seeing the persistent harms. We can't miss the prejudicial narratives in the media about formerly and currently incarcerated people. We can't ignore the disparities among Black, Brown, people of color, and Whites. We can't deny when viewing from a race-based lens who benefits (and has historically benefited) the most as it relates to civil rights, liberties, and freedoms to simply be.

We at JustLeadershipUSA hold that oppressive systems are a continuation of slavery. We know that by empowering people directly impacted by the criminal legal system and elevating their voices in working to dismantle systemic oppression so that their communities can thrive, together we can build an equitable and just America.

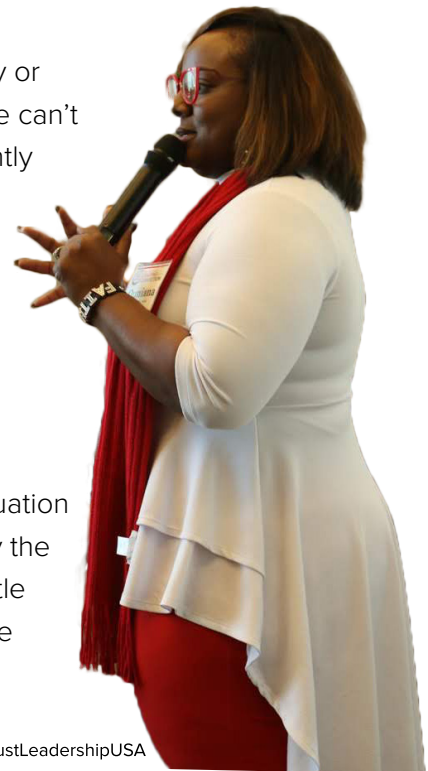


Photo credit and source: JustLeadershipUSA

OUR VISION IS TO BE A NATIONAL PLATFORM—A GO-TO RESOURCE—FOR PEOPLE DIRECTLY IMPACTED BY THE CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM TO USE AS THEY HONE AND GROW LEADERSHIP SKILLS NEEDED TO EFFECT POLICY REFORMS THAT DISMANTLE SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION AND BUILD THRIVING, SUSTAINABLE, AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES.

¹ This report will use “we” and “our” pronouns throughout the document to reflect JustLeadershipUSA's thinking.



The future we seek is where hundreds, thousands, millions of people who are directly impacted by the criminal legal system know and elevate their agency and power to bring transformational change to their communities—a future where those historically silenced and marginalized are heard, valued, and equipped with skills and other resources needed to self-organize and dismantle oppressive systems that plague their communities.

**WE SEEK TO BUILD LOCAL POWER WITHIN COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE NATION TO
DISMANTLE RACIST AND OPPRESSIVE SYSTEMS.**

OUR MISSION

JustLeadershipUSA's mission is to amplify the power of people who have been directly impacted by the criminal legal system to self-organize and dismantle oppressive systems in their communities to build a just U.S.

JustLeadershipUSA was founded on a principle that “those closest to the problem are closest to the solution but farthest from resources and power to do anything about it.” We amplify the power of directly impacted people by educating, empowering, and investing in them, elevating their voices so they have the tools and resources to self-organize and advocate for themselves, their families, and their communities.

Together we build an equitable, fair, and just United States.

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WHY US? | WHY NOW?

Time of Elevated Collective Consciousness

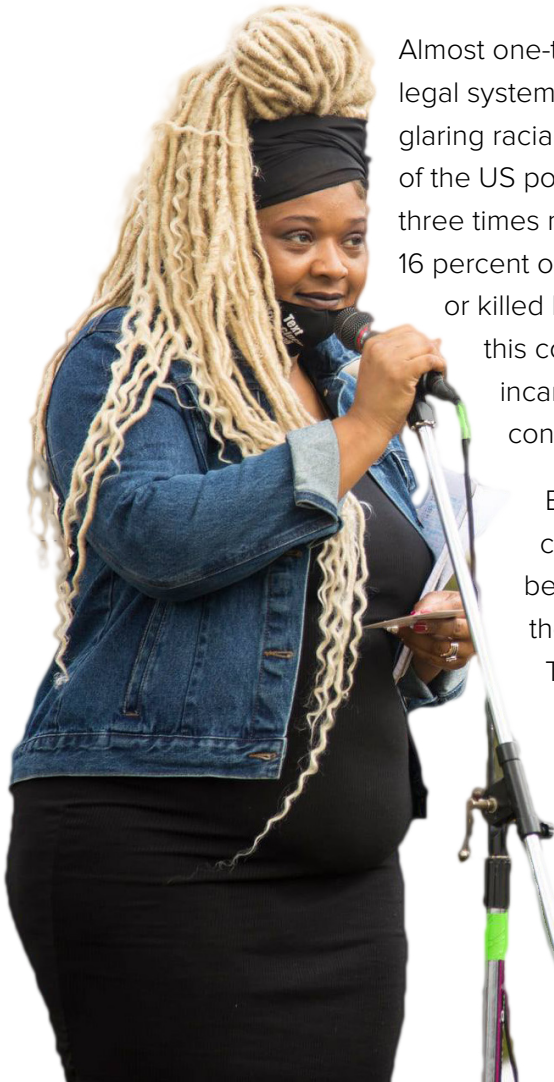


Photo credit and source: JustLeadershipUSA

Almost one-third of the US population has directly experienced the criminal legal system. However, not all communities are impacted the same. There are glaring racial and ethnic disparities. Black people, who make up only 13 percent of the US population, are five times as likely to be incarcerated than Whites, and three times more likely to be killed by the police. Latinx people, who make up 16 percent of the total population, are nearly twice as likely to be incarcerated or killed by the police as Whites. Whites, who make up 64 percent of this country's population account for only 39 percent of the total US incarcerated population. Racial disparities in the criminal legal system continue to disproportionately fall on Black and Latinx communities.

Events in 2020 elevated the movement for racial justice into the collective consciousness of the nation (and the world). People became more aware of racist and oppressive systems that undergird the country's history and status quo. The tragic killings of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Rayshard Brooks, Daniel Prude, Atatiana Jefferson, and many others by the police brought police brutality and the criminal legal system under closer scrutiny, prompting more people to demand divestment from law enforcement enhancement, and investment in building community solutions that result in reimagining the criminal legal system.

Increased awareness of racist and oppressive systems creates more opportunities for those directly impacted by those systems to be seen, heard, and included in policy conversations.

Positioned to Grow

JustLeadershipUSA was founded on the principle that those closest to the problem are closest to the solution but farthest away from resources and power. For the past seven years, since the organization's inception, we have been educating and empowering people who have traditionally been excluded from power and solutions, elevating their voices so that they can be active change agents in dismantling systemic oppression.

2 Sources: <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/rates.html> and <https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/>. Statistics can also be accessed in the appendix.



#JUSTUS

POWERED BY JLUSA

NO ONE DESERVES TO DIE IN PRISON.

Photo credit and source: JustLeadershipUSA

Our leadership training programs, ***Leading with Conviction*** and ***Emerging Leaders***, have supported over a thousand people directly impacted by the criminal legal system across the nation with expertise, skills, and social or financial capital so they can lead, amplify, and sustain policy reforms that steward thriving and just communities across the nation.

Through our Leadership in Action programming, which encompasses leadership and strategic participation in campaigns such as **#CloseRikers**, **#FreeNewYork**, **#JustUS**, we, along with our partners and allies, helped usher meaningful legislative action to change how people who are currently incarcerated are seen, heard, and treated.

We walk the walk. We are led by people directly impacted by incarceration. We have campaign and leadership training experience and expertise, and we have an expanding base of trained community leaders.



2021–2024 STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Building local power within communities across the nation to dismantle racist and oppressive systems.

Our focus on local leadership training combined with an institutional infrastructure and the purview of a national organization positions JustLeadershipUSA to be a connector and amplifier of local power into a national movement.

2021–2024 PRIORITIES

To be a national platform, a go-to resource, for people directly impacted by the criminal legal system to use as they hone and grow leadership skills to lead policy reforms that dismantle incarceration and other systemic oppression in the United States, our priorities for the next three years are

- 01 **(Re)Introduce JustLeadershipUSA to stakeholders:**
(Re)introduce JustLeadershipUSA as a national leadership training institution for people directly impacted by the criminal legal system.
- 02 **Shape public narrative about racism and oppression:**
Uplift the history of racism and oppression in this country, and elevate the humanity of communities most impacted by those oppressive systems.
- 03 **Build a stronger movement via leadership training and partnerships to dismantle racist and oppressive systems:**
Educate, elevate, and amplify people directly impacted by the criminal legal system so they can lead actions for positive change in their communities; forge intersectional partnerships across organizations that are fighting against oppressive systems.
- 04 **Connect local power to a national network:**
Activate a network of JustLeadershipUSA leaders to lead policy reforms that liberate their communities from racist and oppressive systems.
- 05 **Influence policy:**
Build relationships with local, state, and federal policymakers to join existing policy tables or create new policy tables where people directly impacted by the criminal legal system are always at the forefront.
- 06 **Steward a thriving organization:**
Resource the organization, and steward a workplace culture that supports staff and board in advancing the organization's mission.

EACH PRIORITY AT A GLANCE

PRIORITY: (Re)Introduce JustLeadershipUSA to Stakeholders

(Re)introduce JustLeadershipUSA as a national leadership training institution for people directly impacted by the criminal legal system.

WHY THIS PRIORITY?

- JustLeadershipUSA is perceived as a New York–focused organization that leads campaigns. We need to clarify and amplify the national scope of JustLeadershipUSA's work to educate, elevate, and amplify the leadership of those directly impacted by the criminal legal system.

IN THE NEXT THREE YEARS, WE WILL

- nationally and publicly disseminate the message that JustLeadershipUSA is about inspiring and empowering people and providing tools, such as leadership training and connection to resources, to those directly impacted by the criminal legal system so they can build local power within communities. (2021 focus)
- be known as thought leaders and go-to experts for all who want to know how to work with, activate, and mobilize people who are directly impacted by the criminal legal system. (ongoing)
- regularly monitor the criminal justice movement to track what is happening, and to determine where JustLeadershipUSA needs to insert its voice. (ongoing)
- to achieve the goals above, publish and produce content across media (audio, video), and speak at conferences, panels, podcasts, and other public events.

HONORING #CLOSERIKERS CAMPAIGN

In 2019, the New York City Council voted to close Rikers Island jail complex, often described as a symbol of mass incarceration in the United States. The decision culminated years of grassroots advocacy, led by people who have been impacted by the criminal legal system, pushing elected officials in New York City to commit to closing one of the biggest and notorious jail complexes in the nation.



JustLeadershipUSA launched the #CLOSErikers campaign in 2016 and was a leading voice and resourcer in a coalition of over a hundred organizations that relentlessly advocated to close Rikers Island jail complex and invest into building communities that are most affected by incarceration in the United States—Black and Latinx.

We are proud of #CLOSErikers collective success.

In 2020, we chose to step out of the forefront of the campaign and refocus on our founding principles of educating and empowering people and elevating the voices of those who are directly impacted by the criminal legal system so they can self-organize and advocate for themselves, their families, and their communities. We continue to amplify and drive #buildCOMMUNITIES, a road map developed in collaboration with people directly impacted by the criminal legal system and over sixty partners and advisors. It maps out where the money saved from divestment of the criminal legal system should be directed for building equitable and just communities. #BuildCOMMUNITIES is part of Leadership in Action programming at JustLeadershipUSA.

PRIORITY: Shape public narrative about racism and oppression

Uplift the history of racism and oppression in this country, and elevate the humanity of communities most impacted by systemic racism and other oppression.

WHY THIS PRIORITY?

- While public awareness of oppression of Black and Brown people in the United States is more prevalent now than before the mass global protests for racial justice of 2020, there is more work to be done in telling the stories of how current oppressive systems represent an intentional continuation of slavery in this country. Black humanity in the United States and in many parts of the world is not recognized. Anti-Blackness prejudice dehumanizes and systemically marginalizes Black people.
- People who are currently or formerly incarcerated carry a societal stigma that strips them of human dignity and rights. It is critical to increase the visibility and credibility of those folks to change oppressive societal views.

IN THE NEXT THREE YEARS, WE WILL

- tell stories that show how systemic racist and oppressive policies, practices, and structures instituted by the government affect the lives of our fellow human beings in our neighborhoods, towns, and cities. (ongoing)

- counter the existing public narrative that currently dehumanizes people who are or have been incarcerated and strips them of their humanity and dignity. (ongoing)
- continuously aggregate empirical data and lived stories for analysis and conversion into layperson's terms for all US society to understand, and engage in discourse about JustLeadershipUSA's mission and work. (ongoing)
- to reach the goals above,
 - develop a comprehensive communications plan that maps out how relationships with each stakeholder group that JustLeadership serves are built, deepened, and sustained. (2021–22 focus)
 - The plan should note the reciprocal value between the stakeholders and JustLeadershipUSA, map the desired outcomes of engaging with each stakeholder group, and envision the frequency and type of communications with each group.
 - develop and distribute tool kits with bold language to engage in discourse and shift narratives and to share with leaders to educate their communities. (2021–22 focus)
 - create and distribute content developed by JustLeadershipUSA and its leaders. (ongoing)
 - partner with organizations in adjacent sectors, such as workforce development, education, housing, and health, to cocreate and publish content. (ongoing)

PRIORITY: Build a stronger movement via leadership training and partnerships to dismantle racist and oppressive systems

Educate, elevate, and amplify people directly impacted by the criminal legal system so they can lead actions for positive change in their communities; forge intersectional partnerships across organizations that are fighting against oppressive systems.

WHY THIS PRIORITY?

- We at JustLeadershipUSA believe that people must be the leading voices in all conversations that impact them. Providing leadership training, tools, and other resources to people directly impacted by the criminal legal system creates a cadre of local change agents to self-organize and dismantle oppressive systems in their communities. More active voices, more action.
- Incarceration is not a siloed issue. It is part of systemic oppression that is bolstered, protected, and



empowered by discriminatory and oppressive economic, social, political, and regulatory customs, policies, practices, and laws that impact people's lives, finances, health, housing, unionized protections, access to opportunities, civil liberties, scalability, assets aggregation, and public image as a group. More active voices, more action.

IN THE NEXT THREE YEARS, WE WILL

- refine and expand the *Emerging Leaders* program to reach more constituencies. (2021 focus)
- through the *Leading with Conviction* program, develop a pipeline of leaders who can serve in positions of power advancing systems change work (executive directors, board members, as examples). (2023–24 focus)
- continuously produce tool kits and other resources, responsive to what is happening at the time, under our Leadership in Action programmatic arc to support JustLeadershipUSA local leaders in leading policy change for their communities. (ongoing)
- To do so,
 - reengage with existing *Emerging Leaders* alumni to offer additional leadership training to build coalitions and uplift the invitation to join JustLeadershipUSA's network of leaders. (mostly 2021 focus)
 - build new and expand existing partnerships with cross-sectional organizations across the nation to build a stronger base of change agents fighting for an equitable and just United States. (ongoing)
 - grow the capacity of JustLeadershipUSA's leadership training programs, such as by using remote learning opportunities, to train more leaders who are actively engaged in bringing positive change to their communities. (ongoing)

PRIORITY: Connect local power to a national network

Activate a network of JustLeadershipUSA leaders to lead policy reforms that liberate their communities from racist and oppressive systems.

WHY THIS PRIORITY?

- By building power in partnership with leaders who are directly impacted by the criminal legal system,

JustLeadershipUSA decenters itself. It connects people to a national network, resulting in a greater scale of impacts.

- A national network creates a space of belonging, knowledge exchange, tools, and other resources to activate change in communities.

IN THE NEXT THREE YEARS, WE WILL

- introduce and grow the JLUSA ENGAGE network nationally. (2022–23 focus)
 - JLUSA ENGAGE is a community where JustLeadershipUSA's leaders, members, and alumni can meet and get to know people, create profiles, communicate, and stay in touch with one another with the goal of creating and strengthening relationships. It is a platform that provides exclusive access to learning materials via online courses, as well as other relevant and critical information, to further JustLeadershipUSA's long-term mission goals.
- use partnerships (who have influence, reach) within the field and adjacent sectors to connect alumni and their networks to resources. (ongoing)

PRIORITY: Influence policy

Build relationships with local, state, and federal policymakers to join existing policy tables or create new ones where people directly impacted by the criminal legal system are always at the forefront.

WHY THIS PRIORITY?

- Ultimately, for sustainable change, existing oppressive policies must be eliminated. Having relationships with local, state, and federal policymakers and being their trusted source for information create pathways for JustLeadershipUSA leaders to be seen, heard, and invited to be part of policy conversations and decision-making.

IN THE NEXT THREE YEARS, WE WILL

- be seen by local, state, and federal legislators working on criminal legal system reform as a go-to expert that centers and leads with first-person voices. (ongoing)



- advance the #buildCOMMUNITIES road map as a resource and tool for people working toward systems change—JustLeadershipUSA alumni, other leaders who are directly impacted by the criminal legal system, and policymakers. #buildCOMMUNITIES is a road map that offers thinking about how states, on a local and federal level, can divert the cost savings from criminal legal reform to building communities. (ongoing)
- support local JustLeadershipUSA leaders in building relationships with policymakers. (ongoing)
- to reach our goals,
 - focus on being part of existing federal policy tables. (ongoing)
 - continue deepening existing relationships with policymakers across states. (ongoing)
 - build new relationships with policymakers, focusing on states that have the highest concentration of JustLeadershipUSA active alumni (to maximize impacts). (2022–23 focus)
 - use partnerships on a local and national level to open doors to decarceration policy tables where JustLeadershipUSA cannot gain access by itself. (2022–23 focus)

PRIORITY: Steward a thriving organization

Resource the organization, and steward a workplace culture that supports staff and board in advancing the organization’s mission.

WHY THIS PRIORITY?

- To effectuate its mission, JustLeadershipUSA must be financially well resourced and steward a work environment where staff are equipped and inspired to advance the work.

IN THE NEXT THREE YEARS, WE WILL

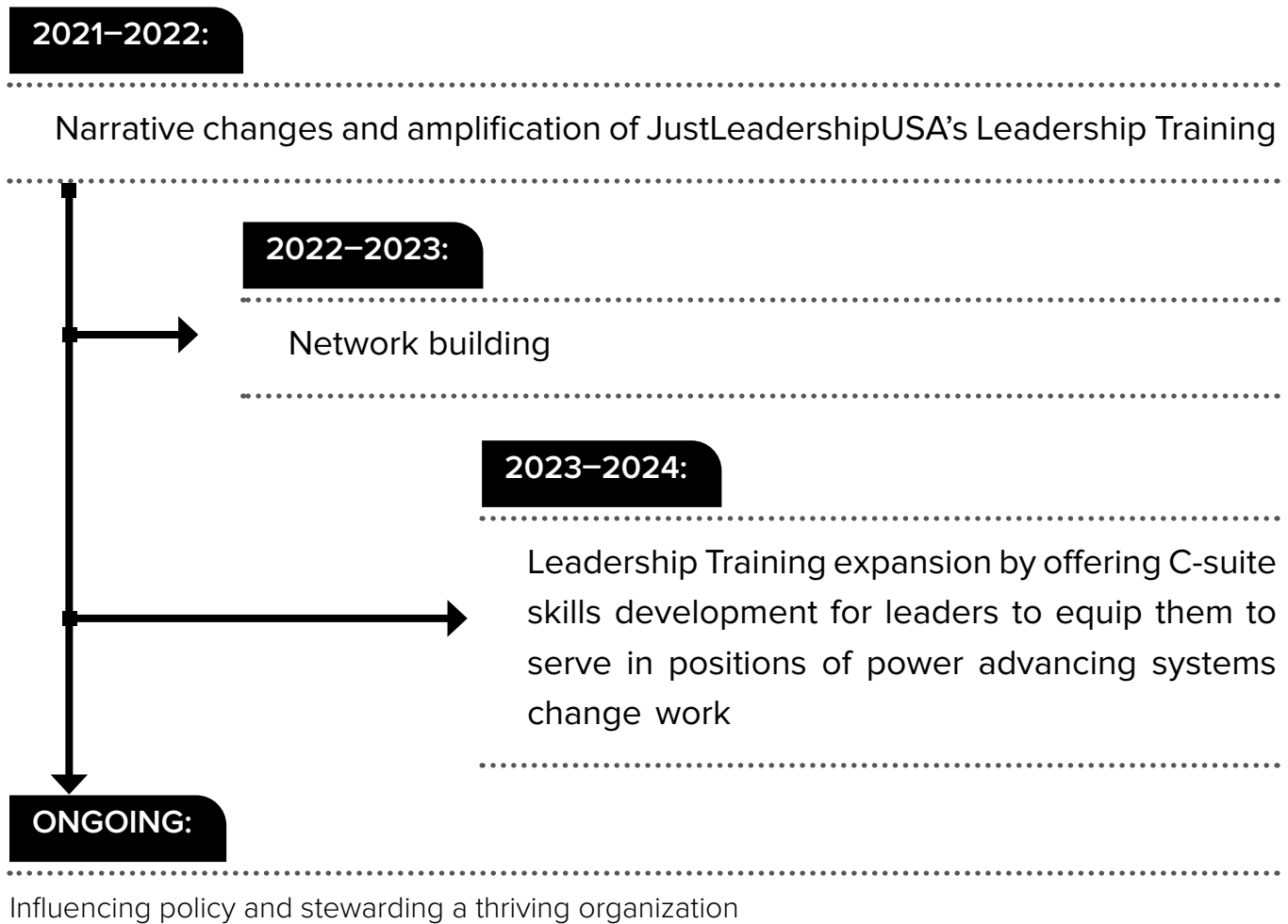
- diversify revenue streams. (ongoing)
- streamline the budgeting process. (2021 focus)
- grow a board of directors that is diverse across race, ethnicity, age, gender, ability, experiences, and perspectives. (2023–24 focus)
- steward workplace culture that is transparent and supportive and centers the personal and professional well-being of its staff. (ongoing)

- to reach our goals,
 - operationalize an organization-wide budgeting process that has been mapped out during this strategic planning process. (2021–22 focus)
 - build out a corporate sponsorship program. (2021–22 focus)
 - grow individual giving by stewarding existing donors and engaging new. (2022–23 focus)
 - working together across staff and board, develop an action plan to address work areas that inhibit transparent and supportive work environments where staff and board are inspired and feel proud to work for JustLeadershipUSA. (2022–23)



2021–2024 HOW WE SCAFFOLD

While work across priorities is interwoven, the big picture focuses across years:



JOIN US | CLOSING THOUGHTS

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Those closest to the problem are closest to the solution but farthest from resources and power to do anything about it. That is the foundation of who we are and why we were created. We must never deviate or lose our founding core.

DeAnna Hoskins, President and CEO, JustLeadershipUSA



To build local power and dismantle oppressive systems across other sectors, such as housing, health, education, and workforce development, we cannot do it alone. We do not want to do it alone. We will build partnerships across sectors to amplify efforts to dismantle oppressive systems that target Black and Brown people and the poor.

We will continue building a robust base of people—currently and formerly incarcerated, and their daughters, sons, parents, family members, and others who have encountered law enforcement in ways that have been traumatic—to be advocates for positive change in their communities.

We will build and amplify local power by being a national connector and resource for the people who are directly impacted and their communities.

We will build greater general public awareness of the criminal legal system and its psychological and physical consequences on people who have directly experienced and continue to experience crippling consequences after their or their loved one's sentence, such as lack of stable and affordable housing, job training and placement, access to education and health care, and civic participation, to name a few.

OUR VISION IS TO BE A NATIONAL PLATFORM—A GO-TO RESOURCE—FOR PEOPLE DIRECTLY IMPACTED BY THE CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM TO USE AS THEY HONE AND GROW LEADERSHIP SKILLS NEEDED TO EFFECT POLICY REFORMS THAT DISMANTLE SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION AND BUILD THRIVING, SUSTAINABLE, AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES.

THE TIME FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE IS NOW. JOIN US!

