



STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2025



Executive Summary

**BLACK
LIVES
MATTER**

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INTRODUCTION

Background

Equal Justice USA (EJUSA) became an independent organization in 2008 to push beyond a mission that focused largely on repealing the death penalty to address the role trauma and healing could play in ending violence. Since then, EJUSA has grown into a leader in building a community-centered public safety ecosystem that reimagines the traditional notion that justice equals punishment. Over the past several years, EJUSA has redefined its mission from reducing the harm of the existing system to building community-led solutions to violence rooted in healing and repair. The organization also has recently grown significantly in size and breadth.

EJUSA has partnered with Frontline Solutions to create a three-year strategic plan and roadmap. This plan will support efforts to clarify EJUSA's theory of change, values, mission, desired outcomes, and program alignment.

THE EJUSA DIFFERENCE

The combination of a healing-centered framework, community-driven practices, and diverse coalition building sets EJUSA apart from other organizations.

“There are few groups in the field – and fewer national groups – that are able to sit at national policy tables one day with the big, well-resourced organizations, and the next day be with the frontline groups.”

While some national organizations have a reputation for “parachuting” into communities without building relationships, EJUSA stands apart in being trusted voices in the communities they work in. As one external partner shared, “There are few groups in the field – and fewer national groups – that are able to sit at national policy tables one day with the big, well-resourced organizations, and the next day be with the frontline groups.” EJUSA’s ability to provide training and other services directly in communities, in addition to being a national voice, make it distinct from other national organizations. EJUSA’s Trauma to Trust (T2T) program is highly regarded in communities for providing training directly to law enforcement while centering and uplifting community members. At the same time, EJUSA was able to leverage its experience from these trainings and working in the community to publish – in collaboration with other grassroots organizations and the City of Newark a report on “The Future of Public Safety.” This report can serve as a national model and adds to the dialogue around what makes communities safe.

EJUSA’s work across the political spectrum also makes it a unique value-add in the progressive justice space, with many stakeholders describing EJUSA’s work as “bridge-building.” Very few peer organizations are actively seeking to work with conservative and evangelical constituents. Some peer organizations are even reluctant to engage with law enforcement, making EJUSA’s work in this space stand alone. EJUSA is able to strategically fall in the middle of a reform and abolition framework, allowing its healing-centered mission to be applicable across a variety of communities in which other organizations in the space may not work.



Furthermore, while many organizations operate in either the criminal justice reform space or frontline violence intervention coalitions, EJUSA looks to bridge the gap between these movements. Through education, policy change, and building community power, EJUSA seeks to shift system actors (police, prosecutors, judges) to create off ramps from the system's punitive responses to community-based solutions rooted in safety, healing, and accountability that repairs. And, while EJUSA is not a direct service provider working on the frontlines of violence intervention and prevention, EJUSA sees its work as building and sustaining a community-centered public safety ecosystem that advances narrative and systems change. EJUSA is also making intentional efforts to increase the use of data and research in the community-centered public safety space and equip grassroots leaders with data-driven tools to advance a community-centered public safety ecosystem.

“Through education, policy change, and building community power, EJUSA seeks to shift system actors (police, prosecutors, judges) from the system's punitive responses to community-based solutions.”

Finally, EJUSA's commitment to living its values internally as well as externally is a significant asset. The culture of prioritizing staff well-being, collaboration, and trust make it a uniquely empowering place to work. Balancing attention between internal and external needs and priorities is a difficult task, one that requires a lot of patience, humility, and clarity of vision. EJUSA succeeds at that balancing act admirably with flexible and human-centered personnel policies, an equity-based hiring process, transparency with budget planning, collaborative decision-making processes, and by prioritizing staff wellness. While there are many organizations in the justice reform and community violence intervention (CVI) movement, EJUSA's identity is distinct. It is a trusted organization at the local, state, and national levels. The strategic plan will build on this established identity and help to support the evolving work.

STRATEGIC PLAN

Vision

Equal Justice USA seeks to reimagine justice. For EJUSA that means rejecting the traditional definition of justice – that justice equals punishment – and instead redefining justice as safety, healing, and accountability. EJUSA envisions justice as healing for everyone who has been impacted by violence including: those who are survivors of crime or harm, those who have caused harm, and for communities entirely. Similarly, accountability should repair harm without inflicting more of it.

Justice also means safety for all. EJUSA believes safety is more than just the absence of violence. It is also the presence of well-being. Safety asks, “What does a community need to truly thrive?” Safety may look different for different communities, but safety is certainly broader and more encompassing than just the absence of violence. EJUSA envisions a world where every community – particularly communities most impacted by violence – is equitable, safe, healthy, and thriving.

Through EJUSA’s work and advocacy with its incredible partners, EJUSA hopes to achieve profound systemic change to replace policing, mass incarceration and executions as responses to violence. Instead, EJUSA is building responses that center healing for all and reduce the harm of the current system, while building and supporting a new ecosystem of safety.



Mission

Equal Justice USA is a national organization that works to transform the justice system by promoting responses to violence that break cycles of trauma. We work at the intersection of criminal justice, public health, and racial justice to elevate healing over retribution, meet the needs of survivors, advance racial equity, and build community safety.

Values



Equity. Power and resources have been unjustly distributed in our society, disproportionately impacting many lives – particularly people of color. We are committed to creating space for the leadership of those most impacted by inequity, and mobilizing resources, power, and love to right these wrongs.



Healing-centered. Healing is an environment through which any harm, past or present, can be named, witnessed, contained, and redirected towards wisdom, honor, and love. EJUSA puts healing at the center of our work and our vision for justice, creating a community of staff, board members, system actors, healers, and trauma survivors whose response to harm is repair.



Partnership. Change takes more than the work of any one organization. We are committed to movement-building through deep relationships that emphasize strengthening the capacity and confidence of local change agents. We believe that our impact as a national organization depends on unwavering respect and authentic partnership with leaders on the ground.



Transcending Divides. Some differences are deemed irreparable and intractable. At EJUSA, we reject that assumption, creating new pathways for dialogue that generate learning, transformation, and action.

Theory of Change

“How do we reimagine justice? We do this by promoting responses to violence that break cycles of trauma, that are rooted in racial equity and are also rooted in well being. It’s why we talk about our work as being at the intersection of racial justice, criminal justice, and public health. There’s a really deep understanding that the foundation of our current criminal legal system is one of racial oppression. And we [reimagine justice] through a number of strategies. We do it through campaigns. We do it through organizing with the communities who are most impacted to strengthen their power, their voice, and access to resources.”

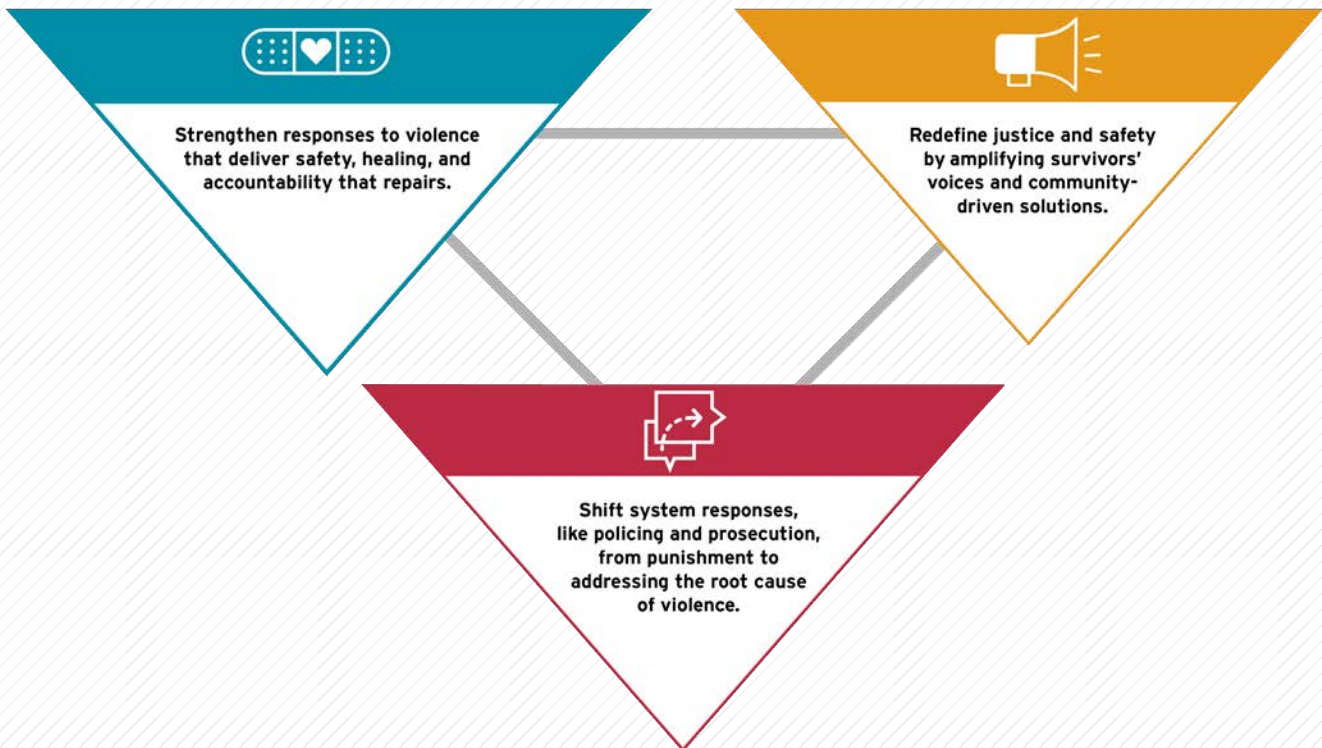
– Jamila Hodge, Executive Director

EJUSA provides vision for a new paradigm of justice rooted in equity, restoration, well-being, and freedom; a “chess master” campaign strategy to translate that vision into action and real-world change; grassroots power built via facilitating community-centered public safety ecosystems and organizing; and accompaniment that supports impacted communities to build their leadership, voice, and access to resources. Together, these inputs – vision, strategy, and grassroots power – can create new solutions for violence that ultimately transform society and deliver true justice: safety, healing, and accountability that repairs for all.

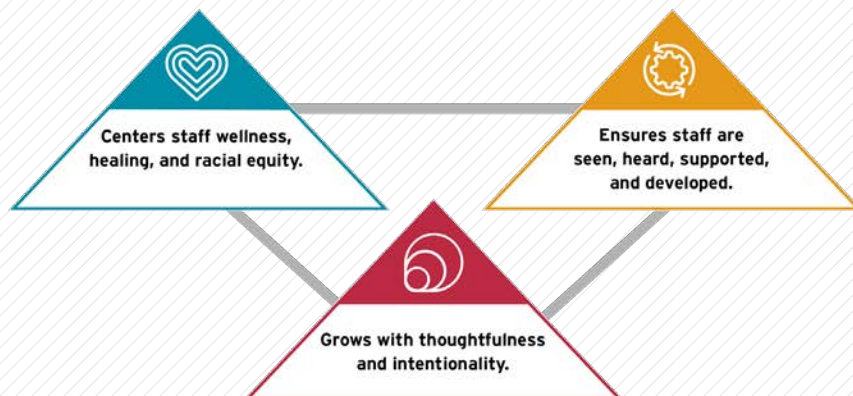
EJUSA believes it can promote responses to violence that break cycles of trauma and transform the justice system by:

- 1** Strengthening the capacity of organizations and leaders in state and local death penalty repeal and those building community-centered public safety ecosystems to end state violence and promote safety, healing, and accountability that repairs.
- 2** Shifting the current narratives around justice as violence and punishment towards narratives that redefine justice and safety by centering the voices of survivors and solutions from communities directly impacted by historical trauma and violence.
- 3** Helping system actors shift from the current reliance on punishment to responses that address the root causes of violence.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



TO SUCCEED IN ACHIEVING THIS IMPACT, EJUSA:



An assessment of key stakeholders – board, staff, and partners – was conducted as a part of this strategic planning process to learn what opportunities and strategic priorities EJUSA should focus on to make a deeper impact. In addition, a series of working sessions were conducted with staff. The following key strategic priorities reflect the feedback that was shared. They are divided into external and internal facing priorities.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES – EXTERNAL FACING



Priority 1:

Strengthening the capacity of organizations and leaders in state and local death penalty repeal and those building community-centered public safety ecosystems to end state violence and promote safety, healing, and accountability that repairs.

Goals

- Utilize a strategy screen to determine partnerships with local and state campaigns, organizations/organizing in which EJUSA can be best leveraged. (See Appendix B.)
- Identify partnership stages (i.e. early, growth, mature, late-stage) of working with local and state campaigns, organizations/organizing in which EJUSA can be best leveraged.
- Support and build the capacity of state and local death penalty repeal and community-centered public safety ecosystem organizations and leaders.
- Support and advance grassroots organizing to end the death penalty and promote trauma-informed policies/practices.

Outcomes

- Community members feel safer and are connected to resources in the public safety ecosystem.
- State and local organizations and leaders are well-supported and have the tools needed as they work to end the death penalty, end state violence, and promote trauma-informed, community-led responses to harm.
- Additional funding is secured for organizations in the public safety ecosystem to support sustainability and greater impact for coalition partners on advancing advocacy goals.
- EJUSA's impact is expanded into additional communities while maintaining one or two deep-dive jurisdictions.



Priority 2:

Shift the current narratives around justice as violence and punishment towards narratives that redefine justice and safety by centering the voices of survivors and solutions from communities directly impacted by historical trauma and violence.

Goals

- Build strong coalitions to advance campaigns that:
 - respond to regressive narratives about violent crime;
 - redefine safety and justice by centering survivors and communities directly impacted by historical trauma and violence;
 - end the death penalty and stop state violence.

- Strengthen EJUSA's relationships with leaders and powerful/unlikely allies to redefine safety and justice.

- Strengthen relationships with community-based organizations, healers, and organizers to elevate the voices of those impacted by violence.

- Consistently challenge dominant narratives about crime and punishment, and advance narratives rooted in community, equity, and safety.

- Assert EJUSA's voice, influence, and thought leadership on reimagining safety, justice, and healing; and elevate a healing-centered vision of public safety and community-safety ecosystems.

Outcomes

- Public opinions and viewpoints on safety and justice shift away from punishment and violence to understanding trauma and healing, and their role in reducing violence.

- EJUSA's partners, EJUSA staff, and the organization as a whole are seen as leaders and influencers in the field of reimagining community safety and justice.

- People who have been directly impacted by violence are seen as experts in their communities and included in decision making.



Priority 3:

Help system actors shift from current reliance on punishment to responses that address the root causes of violence.

Goals

- Shift away from systems and systems actors currently reliant on violence and harm.
- Promote community-based solutions rooted in healing, and accountability that repair violence and harm.
- Provide leadership to the community-based public safety movement and inform large scale systems and policy change.

Outcomes

- EJUSA supports partners who are addressing current harm within the system and those who are creating new systems.
- Communities shift investments away from the carceral system and direct resources towards a community-centered public safety ecosystem.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES – INTERNAL FACING



Internal Priority 1:

Cultivate an organizational culture where staff wellness, healing, and racial equity are centered and where organizational values are practiced both externally and internally.

Goals

- Embed trauma-informed and healing-centered practices in all aspects of the organization.
- Maintain EJUSA's people-centered culture as the organization grows and evolves.

Outcomes

- EJUSA is a healing-centered workplace that provides fulfilling work, aligned with fair compensation and work-life balance.
- Staff feel alignment between the external and internal values of EJUSA.



Internal Priority 2:

Continue to strengthen internal operations and management practices that ensure EJUSA's leadership hears, develops, and supports the team by hiring and developing staff that is representative of the communities EJUSA serves and providing them with the tools necessary for success.

Goals

- (Re)Define staff and department roles and how they contribute to EJUSA's external priorities, mission, and values.
- Build and retain a strong, diverse talent pipeline for programmatic and non-programmatic staff that prioritizes lived experience and multidisciplinary backgrounds, e.g. criminal justice, public health, racial justice, etc.
- Leverage internal communications to build collaboration and knowledge sharing across departments.
- Reinforce a culture of feedback and collaboration.

Outcomes

- EJUSA operates at high levels of efficiency, collaboration, and transparency.
- EJUSA staff feel heard and included in internal operations and management.
- EJUSA staff are supported and given the tools they need to thrive at EJUSA and beyond.
- Staff at EJUSA are able to bring their full selves to the work, and feel their work is advancing the mission of the organization.
- EJUSA staff use and embrace internal systems and software that allows the organization to effectively celebrate programmatic successes.



Internal Priority 3:

Maintain and strategically grow, as needed, the organization's capacity (staffing, resources, leadership/governance) to fulfill EJUSA's mission.

Goals

- Attract sustainable resources that are aligned with EJUSA's mission and its movement partners.
- Raise funds to adequately cover 100% of the operational budget and eliminate the need to draw on board-designated resources.
- Identify and prioritize staff needs that promote retention and areas that need additional staffing capacity.
- Streamline EJUSA's hiring process while maintaining EJUSA's strong sense of culture.
- Advance EJUSA's leadership and governance to match the organization's growing capacity and impact in the field.

Outcomes

- Staff capacity is addressed, preventing avoidable overwork and burnout.
- Staff remain engaged in defining and supporting EJUSA's organizational culture.
- EJUSA remains grounded in its values and connection to community while (potentially) scaling up.
- Budget needs are met from fundraising, and board reserves remain for emergency use.