

# FLY'S SYSTEMS CHANGE FRAMEWORK

## INTRODUCTION

Fresh Lifeline for Youth's (FLY) theory of change and strategic plan, *Imagine 2030*, both prominently call out systems change as an imperative to deepening the organization's impact. Thus, we are at a critical juncture in our growth: we must define our approach to helping to improve the justice and education systems to become more effective, innovative, and equitable. Historically and currently, we examine and at times seize opportunities to improve these systems as both a partner and an influencer. In this vein, as FLY evolves in its role as a change agent, it's critical that we understand the organization's role and responsibility in the change process. We understand that the pipeline-to-prison is a series of systems, structures and practices that suppresses young people of color and other marginalized young people's ability to grow and thrive; but it offers opportunities for intervention, disruption, and ultimately dismantlement for an effective agent of reform.

This document outlines an organizational approach to engaging in strategic activities intended to reform and/or increase the effectiveness of the systems that impact our young people—namely, the justice and education system. It provides a concrete framework for defining and nominalizing systems change efforts for FLY as an organization, its leadership, and youth voice. It attempts to align systems change efforts with our mission, model, vision, and values. Finally, it lists and concretizes strategies, activities, and intended outcomes of systems change efforts.

## OPERATING DEFINITION

FLY defines Systems Change as intentional and resourced organizational efforts that lead to shifts in policies, practices or priorities by a government-sanctioned department, office or agency; usually in response to a change in philosophy, strategy, or scale of need by a particular part of the public. For FLY, that part of "the public" is young people involved or at risk of involvement in the criminal and juvenile justice systems. While we prioritize the justice and education systems in our change efforts, given the intersectionality with foster care, public health, and other systems where poverty plays a role, we strive to make these systems more just and equitable as well.

In general, FLY's direct service program work is a separate strategy but at times, there will be overlap between the two strategies. In order for FLY programs to be considered a part of the systems change strategy, the intervention, service, or activity needs to directly influence shifts in policy, practices, or priorities in systems that impact youth who are at risk of justice system involvement. This also applies to FLY's technical assistance work which will often intersect with systems change but this may not always be the case.

## POSITION STATEMENT

FLY believes the systems that funnel children and young adults into prisons is failing them and our communities. Leveraging nearly 20 years of partnering closely with youth and the systems that impact them, FLY is in a unique position to support efforts to bring about positive, equitable, and lasting change.

We do this using the following principles:

- FLY creates the space for youth impacted by the justice system to be a part of developing innovative solutions.
- FLY approaches systemic challenges by identifying strengths as a starting point for effecting change.
- FLY orients toward fostering holistic solutions in all the systems that impact juveniles.
- FLY is effective in collective leadership, coming together with diverse stakeholders to realize the common goal that all kids be valued, supported, and able to live healthy, free, and productive lives.

## GUIDING/DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The guiding principles for the strategies and activities included in this framework are as follows:

- Only strategies and activities that align with our mission, model, vision, and values will be included in our framework; for example, we are a youth-centered organization, we are strengths based and operate from a customer-service orientation. These values will guide and govern our activities in the name of systems change.
- Strategies and activities will be engaged with consideration for their effect on our ability to gain access to youth, resources, and opportunities for influence. FLY is a youth-service organization, first and foremost. Our partnerships are key to our ability to meet the needs of youth, and often position us to effectively advocate on their behalf. We will always strive to strike an effective balance between being critical of systems (in private or in public) and speaking truthfully and authentically in solidarity with our young people.
- Systems change work requires being able to have courageous conversations. We will be more vocal about systems that are ineffective or doing harm, and we will be comprehensive in our analyses of systems' impact on our youth. We will highlight inequities and/or when marginalized groups are over-represented or under-served by the system. But we will do this in a professional and strengths-based way that invites partnership and collaboration to work towards solutions.
- We'll focus on strategies and activities that play to our strengths and don't duplicate the efforts of others. Historically, we have been a partner to the systems, and an elevator of youth voice. We've also always sought to be responsive to community needs. We understand that there are many approaches to changing the system, and we know that there are other organizations and collaboratives that are effective in ways we haven't proven to be, or aren't central to who we are. We will be strategic and authentic in our efforts to ally with others in the movement, and be clear about what we can and cannot do.

- We will follow the lead of people who have lived experience with the justice system. We believe that it is people who have been involved in the system who have the most innovative ideas to address systemic inadequacies and inequities. We actively seek this expertise while bringing resources and access to influence to the table while helping to elevate youth voice.

Since the following list of strategies and activities are meant to be comprehensive but not exhaustive, we will return to these principles when we are unclear or don't have consensus on a course of action as it relates how to deploy an existing strategy or activity, or how to develop a new one.

## STRATEGIES & ACTIVITIES

The following strategies will be employed in multiple activities and initiatives across FLY's body of work in ways that are consistent to our Theory of Change and are responsive to our Communities. The implementation of these strategies and activities are outlined in FLY's state and localized playbooks as guided by the policy agenda.

### YOUTH VOICE STRATEGY

FLY will elevate youth voice to influence policies and practices at the local, state, and national level. Creating opportunities for young people to serve as agents of change in formal and informal ways. Leveraging youth voice to employ all other strategies listed below whenever possible. Positioning young people in the community to identify solutions to a problem.

### ACTIVITIES

**Youth Advisory Councils:** FLY led or co-led groups of youth with former system involvement who analyze, design, recommend, and implement solutions to create a more just and humane juvenile justice system.

**Service Learning Projects:** Youth led long-term community projects that focus on social justice issues that are important to them. These projects integrate a process of learning about the social issue while providing service to the community. The project culminates in a public presentation about what was learned in addition to the sharing of recommendations based on these reflections with the intention of influencing decision-making bodies to improve the system.

**Positive Youth Development:** The intentional support of youth to develop agency and self-advocacy skills so that they can gain the confidence and consciousness to elevate their voices within their community. As youth grow in their development, we connect them with local opportunities to integrate their voice into spaces that influence system decision making.

# COMMUNITY AND SYSTEMS COLLABORATION STRATEGY

Serving as a convener or consistent and active member of collaboratives, tables, and coalitions where juvenile justice-related issues are discussed, prioritized, and actionized to influence policy and practice. These collaborative spaces can be community-led, systems-led, or a combination of the two. FLY will continue to identify and evaluate the relevance of these spaces to our mission, the effectiveness of participating in pursuit of our vision, and whether active participation is consistent with our values.

## ACTIVITIES

**Local and State Government Sanctioned Bodies:** We seek out and have regular presence at meeting and workgroup spaces that have direct influence on system decisions. FLY staff are trained and supported to contribute while in these spaces and report back important topics and trends discussed in the meetings. For example, the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Collaborative (JJNPC).

**Community Collaboratives:** We seek out and have regular presences at meeting and workgroup spaces that have community influence on system decisions. FLY staff are trained and supported to contribute while in these spaces and report back important topics and trends discussed in the meetings. For example, local Boys and Men of Color collaboratives.

**Coordination Councils:** We convene and lead or co-lead interagency gatherings to assess the strengths and challenges of system practices while responsively integrating program interventions. For example, the CAFA Coordination Council.

**Issue-Focused Think Tanks:** We convene and facilitate cross-sector gatherings to analyze social challenges and further hone strategies for community responsive solutions geared toward dismantling the pipeline to prison.



## SYSTEMS PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY

FLY will continue to serve as an active partner of systems in both formal and informal ways. FLY will enter contractual agreements with agencies to gain access to youth and resources to support programs; FLY will also cultivate and manage relationships with key government stakeholders in order to increase opportunities to influence decision-makers and agenda setters on behalf of young people in the justice system.

### ACTIVITIES

#### **1:1 Relationship Cultivation with System Leaders:**

We are consistent and persistent in connecting with local and state system leaders to gain insight on community needs, priorities, and opportunities to align and influence the system.

**System and Community Contracts:** We propose, negotiate, and execute financial and nonfinancial agreements that give us access to youth involved in the system, money to support FLY's approach, and access to influencing system policies and practices.

## INNOVATION THROUGH DEMONSTRATION STRATEGY

FLY will continue to develop new and innovative approaches to meeting unmet needs among young people at-risk or involved in the justice system. Through innovation, FLY will demonstrate to systems and community partners that programs that are responsive can be nuanced, effective, and scalable

### ACTIVITIES

**Demonstration Pilots:** In response to community need and opportunity, we design and implement projects internal to FLY through engaging our innovation protocol with the intention of changing the system. This may include demonstrated success in one community to make our case for our need in another community or for investment across the state. For example, the CAFA pilot where we focused on supporting African-American youth to successfully complete probation through courtroom advocacy in response to harmful practices related to disproportionate minority contact.

**Technical Assistance Projects:** We share our experience and expertise with systems and the community through formal project agreements that aim to develop, monitor, and evaluate other organizations and support them in institutionalizing practices and policies as a way to make the system more humane and just.

## RESEARCH AND POLICY ANALYSIS STRATEGY

FLY will continue to monitor cutting edge research and evaluation findings to stay abreast of evidence and best practices that could be used to influence juvenile justice policy or practice at the local, state, or national level. FLY will also continue to monitor key legislation or budgetary priorities at the state level to better understand their potential impact on young people throughout the state of California.

### ACTIVITIES

**Participatory Action Research:** We engage young people in research and evaluation efforts in service of evidence-building that supports FLY to advocate for systems change. In addition, we involve them as key participants in demonstration and technical assistance projects to include their perspective and ideas about how to support systems to change.

**Policy Analysis:** We review legislation, articles, and other media to gain a well-rounded perspective on policy impacting justice-involved and justice-at-risk youth and use this to determine FLY's position and potential action.

## ADVOCACY & LOBBYING STRATEGY

FLY will participate strategically and judiciously in advocacy and lobbying activities to support legislation or priority setting by state or local government agencies to advance our mission. FLY will meet with elected officials, participate in local and statewide coalitions, and lend its voice to issues or decisions where there are opportunities to effect policy and practice for the betterment of young people.

### ACTIVITIES

**Policy Agenda:** We develop, iterate on, and implement a plan that outlines FLY's priorities and commitments as it relates to advocacy and lobbying.

**Letter writing:** We add FLY's perspective and sign on to letter campaigns geared toward influencing government decision makers.

**Advocacy calls:** We contribute to phone call campaigns geared toward influencing government decision makes.

**Demonstrations at the Capital:** We partner with youth to have in-person presence and voice at policy-related events in Sacramento.

**Meetings with Elected Officials:** We initiate and develop relationships with elected officials who have influence on budgets and legislation that impacts youth in, or at-risk of being in, the juvenile justice system.



## OUTCOMES

1. Increased state and local funding to support community-based alternatives to incarceration and public safety
2. A reduction in racial and ethnic disparities in the communities in which FLY provides services
3. Increased youth advisory seats or bodies created across the state of California
4. FLY's advocacy/ lobbying efforts result in a 75% success rate for anything we put support behind



## FLY'S VISION AND GOAL

FLY envisions a country where all kids grow up valued and supported, and the pipeline to prison is replaced with meaningful opportunities for kids to live healthy, free, and productive lives that make stronger, safer, and more vibrant communities for us all.

By 2030, through partnering with kids, communities, and systems, FLY will help dismantle California's pipeline to prison, equip 30,000 juvenile-justice and at-risk youth to transform their lives, and strengthen services for marginalized youth in California and beyond.

To learn more, please contact:

Ali Knight  
President and CEO  
[ali@flyprogram.org](mailto:ali@flyprogram.org)

Cassidy Higgins  
Vice President of Community Impact  
[cassidy@flyprogram.org](mailto:cassidy@flyprogram.org)