



YES Nature to Neighborhoods

2024-27 Strategic Plan Executive Summary

OVERVIEW

In 1999, YES Nature to Neighborhoods (YES) was formed to expand and enrich the out-of-school time for youth in West Contra Costa Unified School District (WCCUSD) with limited outdoor access. Through summer programming, YES broke down barriers to entry and helped students develop confidence, connection, and belonging in the outdoors. As YES has evolved in the 25 years since, the power of nature to inspire, teach, heal, and restore has remained central to our vision and work. With nature as our catalyst for change, YES has guided more than 13,000 youth and adults in unlocking their innate strengths and wisdom to become empowered leaders who champion the wellbeing of our community.

Through meaningful and lasting community relationships and generational impact, YES has established itself as an anchor organization in Richmond and West Contra Costa County.

Our 20-person team, whose diverse identities and experiences reflect the communities with whom we engage, accompany youth and families along their journeys in the outdoors for activities that include kayaking, biking, hiking, camping, and backpacking. Rooted in the historical context of Richmond and the social, health, and environmental justice challenges residents face, YES's Leadership Pathways offer participants a space to explore new ideas and perspectives, grow their leadership skills, and exercise their power to affect change in the community.

Our Youth Leadership Pathway immerses young people ages 8-18 in the joy of adventure, discovery, and community as they learn to care for their physical and mental wellbeing and how to change the built environment to promote healthy habits. Participants in the Adult Leadership Pathway leverage one strengths, open dialogue, and relationship building to become advocates and spokespeople for changes to unjust policies and practices, championing better systems and environments for themselves, their families, and their community.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR 2024-2027



Becoming an Antiracist and Black-Affirming Organization



Successful Completion of the New Base Camp Center



Supporting Staff Wellbeing and Evolving Organizational Culture



Deepening our Impact as an Anchor Organization in Richmond and the Outdoor Field

YES follows a strategic planning process that engages an array of stakeholders, including participant youth, families, and adults, staff and board members, program partners, volunteers, and funders. Our 2024-27 strategic plan will build on the success of the past four years, a period in which the size of YES's team and budget nearly tripled. Working alongside strategic planning partner Mission Met, YES has developed the following four overarching priorities to guide us over the next three years.

BECOMING AN ANTIRACIST AND BLACK-AFFIRMING ORGANIZATION

Since the year YES was founded, Richmond's Black population has decreased from 36% to roughly 18% as a result of gentrification and displacement, impacting resident representation and sense of belonging. As an organization rooted in a Community of Color and driven by racial equity and social justice values, we are compelled to meet this issue head-on. Our three-year vision is to make YES an organization where Black community members are represented and respected and where they experience physical, mental, and emotional safety. In order to become an actively antiracist organization, YES will work alongside our community to create a statement of commitment to Black liberation, and our staff will implement departmental work plans that include goals for participant outreach, partnership development, and hiring and onboarding practices that prioritize the representation and safety of the Black community.

SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF THE NEW BASE CAMP CENTER

In 2021, YES purchased our existing office building in the heart of Richmond and we immediately began planning for the ways it could better serve our growing staff and meet the increasing demand for our programs. After more than a year and dozens of conversations with stakeholders from every corner of the YES community, the vision for a larger, accessible, nature-inspired community center was finalized. When completed, the new space will be a gathering place where Richmond and West Contra Costa County residents can learn and grow, centered in love, wellbeing, nature, and YES values. Having raised 75% of the capital needed for the \$6M project (as of September 1, 2024), and a plan to raise the remaining funds by 2026, YES is poised to break ground on this state-of-the-art facility in 2025. In addition to fundraising, our priorities prior to the building's completion include moving our team and programming to a nearby temporary facility, and creating a communication plan that will amplify our identity as we prepare for a new and exciting chapter.

SUPPORTING STAFF WELLBEING AND EVOLVING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Rapid growth comes with hurdles, and maintaining YES's caring, connected culture while remaining open to change is paramount. As YES evolves its capacity and identity in the next three years, our vision is for YES to have a strengths-based and wellness-based work culture that retains talented staff who are working a balanced schedule that allows for rest, professional development, program planning, and program implementation. This will include utilizing technology and project management tools to keep teams and departments connected, participating in ongoing effective communication and mindfulness trainings, and implementing policies and practices that center the wellbeing of employees so they can support, inspire, and hold space for participant needs and development.

DEEPENING OUR IMPACT AS AN ANCHOR ORGANIZATION IN RICHMOND AND THE OUTDOOR FIELD

As our work has expanded to combine outdoor access, wellness, and advocacy across a broad age spectrum, YES's identity as a change agent in the community has grown complex. Therefore, we will embark on a journey to truly understand and celebrate our impact and identity within the vibrant landscape of organizations in Richmond and the Bay Area. Looking to the future, we will consider how YES can influence long-term policies and advocate for just transitions for families who have been denied justice, health, and safety. We will continue to serve as a backbone and fiscal sponsor for the Richmond Outdoors Coalition to expand multiple, repeat, reinforcing activities in the outdoors for WCCUSD students and families, and we will expand our capacity and budget to ensure the sustainability of our work and reach.