future focused
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I have spent my career working in and with communities to bring forth their purpose and value through creative expression. For me, the arts represent the process of combining different elements or ideas to create something new or to form a whole. It is also a way to integrate different perspectives to develop a comprehensive understanding. All of my prior career experiences led me to the Baltimore Children & Youth Fund (BCYF).

I was attracted to BCYF because of its unwavering and unapologetic focus on addressing systemic issues that prevent children in Baltimore from accessing their full potential. Baked into the formation of BCYF, was the belief that the solutions to the issues, opportunities, and challenges facing Baltimore youth were in the community’s people and organizations. Since 2020, BCYF has awarded $23 million to 101 grantees dedicated to creating opportunities for developing Baltimore’s young people.

BCYF is very fortunate to have the support of great partners—elected officials, houses of worship, philanthropists, non-profit organizations, and corporate and business leaders. All have a vested interest in the success of our community’s youth. As an organization, we want to ensure that we remain stellar stewards of the resources we’ve been granted.

To that end, we spent time developing a strategic plan, Future Focused: Baltimore Children & Youth Fund (BCYF) 2026. This plan represents input from key constituents, including Baltimore youth, board members, grantees, and other partners. This plan has been developed as a working document, designed to allow transparency into our work—what we do, how we do it, and for whom.

This three-year plan gets us closer to the ultimate goal of positively influencing the conditions in Baltimore so that our children can live, thrive, and lead in their communities and beyond. This plan, Future Focused: BCYF 2026, marks the creative and strategic process of evolving what has brought us to this point, delivering us to where we need to be—where our young people deserve to be.

I believe it is possible. I am excited about our journey to get there.

Yours in partnership,

Alysia Lee
President, Baltimore Children & Youth Fund
Every trip begins with knowing your final destination. In the journey of evolving the Baltimore Children & Youth Fund (BCYF), we have identified our final destination as a community focused on youth leadership development as a transformation lever to a better, safer, and healthier city and region. As a board, we recognize the best way to support our young people is by providing access to a general roadmap of how we plan to reach our final destination. This roadmap is our strategic plan—**Future Focused: BCYF 2026.**

Our strategic plan is the tool that will assist us in measuring the impact of BCYF. Our community-based approach empowers those who seek to have a direct effect on the outcomes of our young people. We remain committed to this as a foundational strategy for BCYF’s development; however, we know that in order to meet the vast and changing needs of our young people, we will need to deploy more aligned strategies, which will help us attract individuals and organizations that share similar values. We know who and how we engage partners matters. How we plan, organize, and execute the strategies in the plan is an excellent way to model leadership for our youth.

We are eager about the next leg of our journey. We are excited about strengthening current relationships and creating new ones. We also acknowledge the contributions and sacrifices of our founding board members and look forward to building upon that.

Yours in partnership,

Larry Carlton Simmons Jr.
Chairperson, Baltimore Children & Youth Fund
WE ENVISION

a more just, creative, and abundant Baltimore where all young people live, thrive, and lead.

WE ENVISION

an ecosystem of sustainable youth programs with full agency, liberated from the harm of structural racism and inequity, and able to thrive in abundance.
Mission

Build partnerships that support the ecosystem focused on opportunities for Baltimore youth by providing support to leaders and organizations.
What is the ecosystem?

Using the term ecosystem reminds us that we find truth and knowledge in the patterns in the natural world that we can apply in social justice movements and liberatory practices.

The ecosystem we envision is an extraordinary interconnected web of physical, psychological, and energetic networks that envelop the vibrant lives of Baltimore’s youth, positively shaping their very existence – producing compassionate, resourceful, innovative, and productive humans.

Who is in the ecosystem?

- Youth-serving organizations and programs, schools, government agencies, teaching artists
- Staff of youth programs
- Youth and adult leaders
- Children and youth
- Families and caregivers
- Community spaces (libraries, houses of worship, community centers)
- Funders
- Arts and cultural institutions
- Advocacy organizations

The work of BCYF is to invest in the people that support the creation and/or sustainment of that ecosystem.
The Baltimore Children & Youth Fund aspires to help the whole city of Baltimore embrace and live out the worldview embodied in the Maasai greeting. We firmly believe that the well-being of our children should be a collective responsibility embraced by all.

**Values**

**UBUNTU** (n.) I am because of who we all are. Ubuntu is the southern African philosophy that describes the interconnectedness of all people. It emphasizes the idea that an individual’s well-being is intricately tied to the well-being of the community. The philosophy promotes humanity, service, sharing, healing, and reconciliation.

In the West, we often greet each other by saying, “How are you doing?” The Maasai people of East Africa greet each other by asking, “How are the children?” This greeting represents the idea that the well-being of the children defines the well-being of the community.

**Racial Justice**
We honor and celebrate the cultural resources and assets within the Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities in Baltimore City. We acknowledge their history and power. We work to address the role of philanthropy in dismantling structural racism by engaging in internal and external work centering Black and Brown wisdom in our approach.

**Intergenerational Leadership**
We include youth along with adults in all aspects of our work. Having different generations work together reflects how our entire community must work together to improve the quality of life in our city.

**Community Ownership**
The community has equal, authentic decision-making power in distributing BCYF’s resources. Additionally, the organization must include a variety of people who are highly committed and accountable to the communities they serve. At the core of our organization’s mission lies the aspiration to embody our values. It is our desire that our grantees also share this commitment to aligning their values with ours.
A SUCCESSFUL BCYF GRANTEE UNDERSTANDS:

- **How to communicate effectively.** Communication skills are essential to navigating opportunities and challenges. It is an integral skill in developing advocates and the cornerstone of establishing impactful relationships.

- **The value of community.** They recognize strong community supports—what they feel like and how they can contribute to creating and maintaining strong community networks.

- **How to collaborate.** Collaboration exposes you to different viewpoints and approaches to problem-solving. It helps to foster critical thinking skills needed to solve complex issues, consider multiple perspectives, and find creative solutions through brainstorming and collective decision-making.

- **The necessity of strong internal organizational systemic efficiencies.** It isn’t enough to want the best for today’s youth, organizations must have a plan and a system to support that plan. In the spirit of entrepreneurship, it is crucial that our youth are exposed to excellence in all aspects of our work, including the modeling of effective business practices.
HOW THE PLAN WAS DEVELOPED

We live our values in our work. We believe in community ownership, so we pursued community input in the development of this plan. It was important to us that this plan be informed by our various stakeholders. Those stakeholders included staff, community members, board members, philanthropic organizations, and youth. We administered surveys and held focus groups and work sessions—all to prepare as many as we could for the strategic work ahead.

To provide Baltimore City children and youth with exposure and access to superior programs and activities focused on advancing their ability to live, thrive, and lead in their communities and beyond. The journey has three components:

1. Center the needs and dreams of Baltimore children and youth as the focus for programming, funding, and relationship development.

2. Convene organizations, individuals, and donors focused on increasing the economic mobility of children and youth in Baltimore.

3. Establish alignment of purpose, funding, and programming to maximize access and exposure to the greatest number of children and youth in Baltimore.
BCYF GOALS OUTLINE THE OUTCOMES EXPECTED BY 2026.
These goals help drive transparency, alignment, and cohesion throughout the organization on how to best meet the needs of our key stakeholders.

100% of infrastructure goals developed and implemented

>50% of community members surveyed who strongly agree/agree that BCYF shares results in a clear and effective way

At least 2,500 unique participants who attend community capacity building events

The baseline for the following goals will be established in 2023-2024:

Increase in percentage of staff that are measured exceeds expectations on identified focus competencies on an annual basis

Increase in percentage of grantees who have met or exceeded their identified grantee outcomes (baseline) - training and support
A theory of change is an organizational roadmap that articulates the steps and strategies that will bring about the desired impact. It offers a strategic rationale and a well-grounded hypothesis on how specific interventions will ultimately lead to desired outcomes.

- **If we identify and cultivate** Black and Brown-led nonprofits in Baltimore and provide them with capacity building, resources, and funding, then we can empower these organizations to address systemic challenges and improve outcomes for children and youth.

- **If we facilitate** bi-lateral learning among these nonprofits, experts, and community stakeholders, then we can foster collective problem-solving and create a supportive community for learning and growth.

- **If we support** these nonprofits in advocating for policy changes and reforms and amplify their voices in engaging with policymakers, then we can work towards systemic change that positively impacts marginalized communities.

- **If we regularly evaluate** the outcomes and impact of our efforts and adapt our strategies accordingly, then we can ensure maximum effectiveness and sustainability in our mission to empower Black and Brown-led nonprofits and enhance the lives of children and youth in Baltimore.
HOW TO READ THE PLAN
To realize our vision and outcomes and execute the theory of change, BCYF has established four strategies:
1) Training and Support (p. 14)
2) Communication and Partnerships (p. 15)
3) Operations and Growth (p. 16)
4) Culture and Capacity (p. 17)
These strategies represent the priority areas we will focus on over the next few years. Each strategy has aligned strategic initiatives that reflect the high-leverage actions we will take in the next three years.
Year one in the strategic plan is integral to the success of the delivery of the milestones and goals in future years. It sets the baseline for future action. In some instances, there are specific one-time, first-year initiatives that allow strategic baseline positioning for future sustained success.
HOW OUR STRATEGIC PLAN DRILLS DOWN

While the Future Focus BCYF Strategic Plan 2026 focuses on aligning our vision to actions that move us closer to the goals of the organization, each of the plan’s four major strategies includes key initiatives. These initiatives are monitored for progress to ensure continuous improvement.

Core strategies and their corresponding initiatives are all mapped to the established goals and timelines that have been created as part of the strategic planning process. The strategies were identified as a result of a collaborative effort, combining the contributions of the organization’s founders, research, valuable community feedback, active youth engagement, and insightful feedback from grantees.

Serving as the organization’s inaugural strategic plan, Future Focused: BCYF 2026 not only charts the path forward for our organization but also outlines its significant impact on the community we serve.
Training and Support

We believe that community-accountable organizations have the capability to provide Baltimore youth with opportunities and exposure to life-changing programs and experiences. It is our responsibility to provide organizations with the resources they need to realize this goal. We achieve this through strategic initiatives that increase their capacity to better manage, lead, and secure funding for long-term sustainability.

- **TIERED SUPPORTS** Improve the grantee experience by creating a tiered system of support to provide resources and varying levels of support based on the individualized needs of organizations.

- **PROGRAM EVALUATION** Develop and implement a rigorous program evaluation system to ensure organizations and programs are meeting the needs of children and youth.

- **ACCESS TO LEARNING** Ensure sustainability and growth of nonprofit leaders by leveraging and integrating technology to accelerate learning opportunities that increase competency, skills, knowledge, and abilities.

*Identifies year one initiatives*
Communication and Partnerships

It takes all of us to ensure the excellence we want for our children. Youth and children thrive when we work together to achieve an aligned goal. We believe in the power of transparent communication and strong community partnerships that will increase children and youth engagement, success, and access to opportunities.

- **YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND VOICE**  
  Strengthen youth representation and engagement on the BCYF board and activities by centering youth voice in decision-making and organizational direction.

- **COMMUNITY COLLABORATION**  
  Collaborate with other funders, government entities, and the business community to establish a holistic approach to supporting children and youth-serving organizations by providing networks of support and access to resources.

- **STRONG COMMUNICATION**  
  Implement a multifaceted communication approach to provide transparency of decisions and impact.

*Identifies year one initiatives*
Strategy 3

Operations and Growth

We must build the systems and infrastructure that support our desired results. We will create and optimize internal operations to expand access and growth of knowledge and services.

- **INTERNAL OPERATIONS** Build sustainable systems, operations, and policies to increase internal effectiveness and efficiency.
- **DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING** Utilize technology solutions to gather and manage data to enable data-driven decisions.
- **RESOURCE GENERATION** Pursue additional revenue sources to support expanded resources to the community and increase impact.
- **POLICY INFLUENCER** Establish BCYF as a convener and influential advocate in supporting grassroots organizations and facilitating access for children and youth.

*Identifies year one initiatives
Culture and Capacity

We must ensure that we cultivate and foster a culture of ongoing learning, growth, support, and accountability, where all staff and volunteers are valued for their diverse contributions, and can function at their highest level.

- **ROLE-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT** Expand internal capacity by implementing high-quality, differentiated professional development, training, and coaching for all employees to support strategic goals and career progression.

- **PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT** Increase employee engagement and accountability by implementing a strong performance management strategy for the company system that includes regular feedback, goal setting, evaluations, and recognition.

- **RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION PRACTICES** Develop and implement robust systems that effectively attract, select, onboard, and retain a committed and highly skilled workforce with aligned values.

*Identifies year one initiatives"
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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