



Council for
Court Excellence
Improving Justice for the Community

2025-2029 STRATEGIC PLAN

Introduction

A Strategic Plan is a comprehensive framework that aligns an organization's Mission, Vision, and Values with actionable strategies to address current challenges and seize future opportunities over a finite amount of time. A good Strategic Plan should provide clear direction for decision-making, resource allocation, and performance evaluation, fostering alignment and accountability across all levels of the organization. The ad hoc 2024 Strategic Planning Committee, made up of Board and staff members, worked collaboratively for a full year and is proud to have developed a 2025-29 Plan for CCE that achieves those purposes.

For 43 years, CCE has worked to improve the efficiency and operations of the District's courts. In the last 30 years, that work expanded to encompass more of the legal system including courts, executive agencies, and the community, in the areas of criminal, civil, and youth legal system reform and education. Most recently, CCE firmly embraced using a race equity lens to review and guide our programmatic work and internal processes on a consistent basis.

This Strategic Plan represents the next step in CCE's evolution as an organization. It is designed to help us operate with improved clarity, focus, and purpose in three ways:

- 1) It re-establishes our Mission and Vision and establishes new Values so that we can telegraph our "what," "why," and "how" to the world and have a shared North Star for our staff and leaders.**
- 2) It recommends more clarified, precise decision-making processes, developed specifically around CCE's unique structure.**
- 3) It sets programmatic and organizational Pillars that clarify and hone our priority areas of focus for the next five years.**

As of the writing of this Plan, the rule of law, judicial independence, and separation of powers are under an unprecedented level of threat in the District and around the country. The nature of these threats, and other challenges facing D.C. specifically and nonprofits generally, requires a renewed focus on CCE's core strengths, an honest assessment of what work is most needed, and a close examination of our structures and systems to ensure that we can be as nimble, inclusive, and as effective as possible over the next five years.

We expect the next five years will be a challenging time. CCE will need all our Board leaders, staff, funders, and community partners working together to protect D.C. residents and our legal systems, while still striving for the change we want to see. With the Vision, Values, and priorities laid out in this 2025-29 Strategic Plan, CCE will be well positioned to address the present challenges and approach our fifth decade of service to the residents of the District as an even stronger and more impactful organization.

Section 1: CCE's Vision, Mission, and Values Statements

An organization's Vision is an articulation of what the future would look like if it achieved all its goals. Its Mission describes the work the organization does every day to drive toward its vision — what it does, who it does it for, and the intended impact. Values are a set of guiding principles that shape the behavior and decision making of everyone in an organization.

The following framework was also used when discussing Vision, Mission, and Values (provided by our consultant Kristi Matthews-Jones):

- Vision: the "head" or "imagination" of the organization – helps us aim for the type of world we want to see because of our work
- Mission: the "body" or hands of the organization – how we do our work, the tools we will use to get to the world we want to see
- Values: the "heart" of the organization – the things we believe in and the way we approach our work

The following are CCE's updated Vision and Mission Statements and new Value Statements.

Vision Statement

We envision a D.C. where individuals, organizations, and government work together to build safe and thriving communities with a trusted legal system that meets the needs of its people, protects their rights, and promotes dignity and justice for all.

Mission Statement

We bring people together to conduct research, educate, and advocate to make D.C.'s unique legal systems more just, equitable, and accountable to the community.

Values Statements



Accountability: We are committed to holding our institutions accountable for how the legal system impacts D.C.'s communities, particularly those who are most marginalized. We understand that to truly be accountable transparency is necessary – both in the way D.C.'s legal system operates and in the way we operate our organization. We will actively strive to be transparent as an organization and advocate for system transparency.



Care & Respect: We strive to ensure that anyone who works for or with CCE feels included, valued, and safe. We seek to create a caring environment that honors varied knowledge and identities, prioritizes well-being and development, and respects unique contributions



Collaboration: We know that bringing together diverse groups of people to work collaboratively increases our ability to build lasting change. We believe that those closest to problems create the most innovative, effective solutions, so we prioritize partnering with those involved in or affected by the legal system.



Evidence-Based Methods: We are committed to serving as a trustworthy, reliable source of high quality, research-driven ideas and evidence-based solutions for decision-makers and D.C. residents. We value the use of quantitative and qualitative data, community engagement, and the views of diverse experts, including those with lived expertise.



Justice: We believe that D.C.'s legal system must be fair, equitable, and impartial. We strive for a legal system where personal circumstances or identity do not determine or impact involvement or outcomes in the system.



Race Equity: We are committed to consistently evaluating practices, internal policies, and decision-making through a racial equity lens to ensure we are addressing the impacts of race on the legal system, on the people of D.C., and within our own organization. Our work acknowledges and addresses the harms of the past and seeks to ensure current and future policies do not repeat those harms.

Section 2: Decision Making and Community Participation

One of the primary goals in developing this Plan was to evaluate CCE's formal and informal decision-making processes and ensure that they were aligned with CCE's new stated Values. This was intended to help create clarity around what programmatic decisions are made by staff, the Executive Committee, programmatic committees, the full Board, etc. and what role these parties and other external partners and impacted people have in making various types of decisions related to key programmatic choices.

First, some key questions needed answers, and definitions needed to be established. What do we mean when we say “community” at CCE? What communities do we regularly interact with? Which communities should be part of our decision-making process? What decisions need to be made? What role should each community have in each of those decisions?

Defining Potential Decisionmakers and Levels of Participation

For the purposes of this Plan, our definition of **community** is “people who are considered as a unit because of their common interests, social group, life experiences, place they live, or nationality.” Throughout this document, we may also utilize the term **stakeholder** interchangeably with **community**.

CCE works with and interacts with many different types of stakeholders/communities both internally and externally including:

- Advocacy Organizations/Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) – other policy and advocacy nonprofit organizations working on D.C. legal system issues, direct service providers that also do policy work, researchers
- Board of Directors (the Board) – the organization’s governing body that includes representatives appointed by law firms and companies, individual civic directors, and ex officio members
- Directly impacted people/Front-line community – community-based organizations, directly impacted residents, legal advocates, ANCs, churches, etc.
- Executive Committee (EC) – the Officers and other selected members of the Board who provide day-to-day governance of the organization and are delegated significant authority per the Bylaws
- General public – the residents of D.C. who may or may not be involved in or know about CCE’s work
- Government – Councilmembers and their staff, federal and local government agencies related to D.C.’s legal system, and the Courts
- Programmatic Committees – members of CCE’s committees usually include Board members, advocates, and subject matter experts; this category includes not only the four (4) main programmatic committees identified by the Board, but numerous subcommittees, ad hoc committees, working groups, etc.
- Staff – the paid professional staff of CCE, including the Executive Director

Once key communities were identified, the levels of input/authority over various decisions were established. The Spectrum of CCE Community Participation developed as part of this Strategic Plan was adapted from the International Association for Public Participation.

Five levels of decision-making were established, listed from most to least impact on decisions:



Final Decider - The community which holds final decision-making authority. The final decider leads and participates in all engagement related to a decision and usually initiates or leads all communication with others involved in the decision-making process.

Collaborator - Partners with the Final Decider in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution. There will be full communication between the Final Decider and collaborators from the beginning of any decision-making process.

Involved - Final Decider and/or Collaborators work with these communities during the decision-making process to ensure that concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered. The Final Decider will incorporate feedback from those involved as much as possible and should be prepared to share which feedback was or was not used.

Consulted - Final Decider and/or Collaborators obtains feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions from these CCE communities. The Final Decider and/or Collaborators will incorporate feedback if possible.

Informed - Receives information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives, opportunities, solutions, and/or CCE decisions made. CCE will communicate decisions at appropriate intervals.

See **Appendix A** for a visual representation of the **Spectrum of CCE Community Participation**, including definitions of each level of decision-making input, and the type or level of communication and engagement associated with each.

Identifying Types of Programmatic Decisions

The final piece of clarifying decision-making structures was to identify the types of decisions about which to gather community feedback and who should be included in the **Spectrum** for each decision. The types of decisions the Strategic Planning Committee identified, along with some definitions or explanation, are:

- **Approving overall policy position “platform”**
 - A “Platform” is a collection of overall goals and positions of the organization or the themes of the work an organization wants to do related to its mission and vision especially. The platform serves as a roadmap or guiding light of the work; what an organization will do and what they ultimately want to achieve. The time horizon is beyond that of a single strategic plan; platforms reflect the universe of the work we do now or may do in the future.
- **Developing proposed positions on and solutions to policy problems**
- **Deciding our policy priorities and their order of importance (from within the approved platforms)**
 - Policy priorities will be developed no less than annually, unless anything substantial changes.
- **Dealing with issues/changes as they come up (within existing platforms), including taking positions, submitting testimony, and public statements on legislation or regulatory change**
- **Dealing with emergent issues/changes as they come up (when they are NOT in existing platforms, ARE urgent/time-sensitive, and are within CCE’s mission)**
 - This is intended to be rarely used and based on a clear understanding of our organizational platform/positions by the Executive Director. As new issues emerge that look like CCE should begin taking longer-term positions, the ED/staff will bring the issue to the platform/position development process.
- **Deciding which committees, subcommittees, or working groups are created, staffed/active, or ended**
 - CCE organizes and supports a number of committees, subcommittees and working groups. There are the four main Programmatic Committees (i.e., Civil Justice, Criminal Justice, Youth Justice, Justice Education) and most of them have at least a couple of subcommittees or working groups attached. These groups are usually formed to focus on an issue area, specific project or publication (often related to term-limited projects and/or standing/multi-year big projects). Sometimes these committees meet for a limited amount of time and sometimes they become ongoing. Currently, there are no clear criteria for when a subcommittee should be formed, who leads it, who determines when or whether it ends, etc.

- **Deciding requirements/expectations for committee membership and processes**
 - Currently there are no criteria for who can join committees, what the requirements or expectations of membership are, whether there are term limits, etc.
- **Deciding which standing/multi-year projects are created, staffed/active, or ended**
 - Standing/multi-year projects – Projects that involve multiple CCE staff and hundreds of hours of staff time; often have a steering committee composed partially of board members; the project is either ongoing or recurs at some regular frequency.
- **Deciding which term-limited projects are created, staffed/active, or ended**
 - Term-limited projects – Projects that involve multiple CCE staff and hundreds of hours of staff time; often have a steering committee composed partially of board members; usually involve production of a publication and rollout of that publication; take several months and sometimes over a year but have a clear end date.
- **Deciding which recurring/occasional programmatic events are created, staffed/active or ended**
 - Recurring/occasional programmatic events – Projects that involve multiple CCE staff and dozens of hours of staff time; sometimes can be used as fundraising events but often have very little connection to CCE's ongoing work.
- **Other policy/programmatic decision-making not explicitly included here**

Using these definitions, a **Decision & Participation Guide** was developed that can be found in **Appendix B**. This guide cross-references all identified decisions against the **Spectrum of CCE Community Participation** and establishes which CCE **communities** will participate in each decision and at what level they will participate.

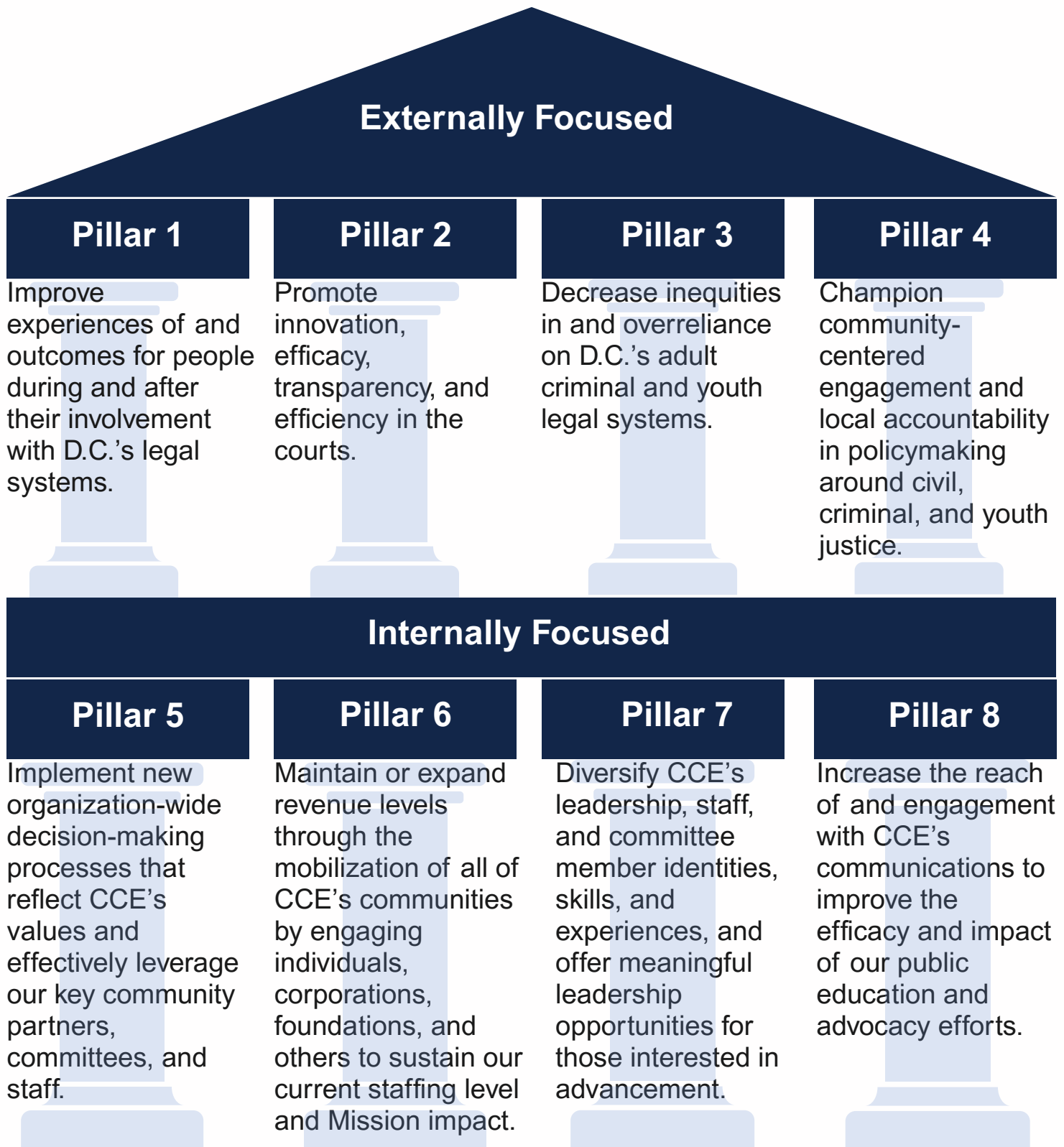
CCE's capacity will need to grow, and new processes will need to be built over time to achieve the desired engagement level from various communities, in particular, directly impacted people/frontline community. And some of the existing communities (especially the Programmatic Committees) will likely need to change their structures and decision-making processes to implement this Plan. These changes will need to be rooted in our Values – especially Care & Respect, Collaboration, Race Equity, and Accountability. Some suggestions for beginning those next steps are included in the implementation section below.

Section 3: Pillars of Work and Potential Measures of Success

The Pillars describe the categories of work CCE will focus on over the next five years. The Pillars will help us prioritize our existing work and new work, enabling us to make strategic choices about how to use organizational resources. If a particular project, grant or policy reform does not fit logically into one of the 2025-2029 Pillars, then CCE will not prioritize, or even start/continue work in that area. This is important because even within these Pillars there are sure to be many more potential problems, projects, and opportunities than CCE can tackle during the next five years; relying on this Strategic Plan will help us be more effective as an organization.

This Plan contains eight (8) Pillars: four (4) focused on external, policy-related goals and four (4) focused on internal, organizational goals. The Pillars are grouped into external and internal but are otherwise listed in no particular order below. These Pillars are intended to be measurable such that we can tell whether we accomplished them or made progress by the end of the Strategic Plan.

Summary of 2025-2029 Strategic Plan Pillars



Externally Focused Pillars

Pillar 1

Improve experiences of and outcomes for people during and after their involvement with D.C.'s legal systems.

This Pillar builds on many aspects of CCE's longstanding work and speaks to themes identified by stakeholders related to improving access to and education about the legal system, improving conditions for those already involved in the system, and ensuring that involvement in the legal system does not have longstanding negative impacts on people's lives.

Pillar 2

Promote innovation, efficacy, transparency, and efficiency in the courts.

This Pillar is based on the work for which CCE was founded and in which we continue to engage. It also reflects significant stakeholder feedback on the need for court improvements, as well as data and information on how the courts operate. Because D.C. does not control the budgets of the Superior Court or Court of Appeals nor the confirmation of these courts' judges, much of our work related to these courts is accomplished through collaboration and finding common ground for innovation.

Pillar 3

Decrease inequities in and overreliance on D.C.'s adult criminal and youth legal systems.

This Pillar builds on much of CCE's existing work but names the need to simultaneously reduce the footprint of the criminal legal system in D.C. while also supporting community safety and wellbeing. It speaks to themes identified by stakeholders including the need for more prevention, intervention, and diversion, especially for youth. It also strongly reflects our racial equity Value in terms of reducing the inequities in the legal system.

Pillar 4

Champion community-centered engagement and local accountability in policymaking around civil, criminal, and youth justice.

This Pillar builds on CCE's efforts to seek transparency in our legal systems and policymaking and to lift up community perspectives and knowledge in developing policy solutions. It also reflects the need to protect the rights of D.C. residents and protect Home Rule, especially in terms of local control of D.C.'s budget, lawmaking, and legal system agencies. While federal powers and decisionmakers in our legal systems have long been part of what makes our local landscape complicated, there are also new challenges to the rule of law and judicial independence for D.C. courts.

Internally Focused Pillars

Pillar 5

Implement new organization-wide decision-making processes that reflect CCE's values and effectively leverage our key community partners, committees, and staff.

This Pillar speaks to implementation of the Strategic Plan, recognition of the need to clarify the work and structure of our Programmatic Committees, and promote the participation of directly impacted people in our work.

Pillar 6

Maintain or expand revenue levels through the mobilization of all of CCE's communities by engaging individuals, corporations, foundations, and others to sustain our current staffing level and Mission impact.

The last Strategic Plan set ambitious growth goals, many of which we achieved before the Plan cycle was over. Given the current political and funding climate, maintaining CCE's current level of funding/staffing is ambitious in its own right.

Pillar 7

Diversify CCE's leadership, staff, and committee member identities, skills, and experiences, and offer meaningful leadership opportunities for those interested in advancement.

The last Strategic Plan set ambitious goals for diversifying CCE staff and Board leadership, some of which were accomplished. This Pillar reflects the need to be more targeted in our efforts to expand diversity, and to provide leadership and growth opportunities for our staff and Board.

Pillar 8

Increase the reach of and engagement with CCE's communications to improve the efficacy and impact of our public education and advocacy efforts.

With an updated, modern website and expanded social media and communications presence, CCE can continue to grow our reach and reputation in the District. Our updated Mission, Vision, and new Value Statements will also provide a useful framework to craft our communications around and to communicate to District residents.

Section 4: Implementation

This Plan is intended as a living document meant to guide priorities rather than set a rigid framework that must be followed precisely. The process of implementation will likely require iteration and changes to some of the Pillars and/or decision-making structures. It will also require substantial effort and dedication from CCE staff, committees, and Board leadership to implement. Any Board Member interested in getting involved in Strategic Plan implementation should contact CCE staff.

While not an exact roadmap, the following section offers a general overview of what the implementation may look like. See [Appendix C](#) for a graphic representation of what the implementation timeline could look like.

The full version of the Strategic Plan will be streamlined/shortened and shared with CCE's various communities and stakeholders. The participation and decision-making elements in particular will be presented to/shared with CCE's stakeholders. The new Mission, Vision, and Value Statements will be integrated into all of CCE's communications, funding proposals, and website, and infused into staff hiring, onboarding, and evaluation processes.

One of the first major pieces of implementation will be to create new procedures and practices related to the decision-making and participation changes. This will likely take place in tandem with decisions that need to be made including creating policy platforms, deciding on annual policy priorities, etc. In other words, we may create the decision-making processes as we are making the decisions themselves. This work will also likely overlap with structural elements like deciding requirements/expectations for committee membership.

As decision-making procedures and practices are developed, they will be applied to decisions affecting CCE's current work like deciding which committees, standing/multi-year projects, term-limited projects, and recurring/occasional programmatic events are created, staffed/active, or ended. CCE's current work streams will also be reviewed against the Pillars in the Plan and the Mission, Vision, and Value Statements to determine whether they are still relevant. While work streams will not be abandoned immediately, the process for winding them down will be developed and then implemented.

Measures of success or intended impacts will then be developed for any work stream that will continue throughout the course of the Plan. Those measures will have a baseline established that can then be compared against data collected in 2029 at the end of the Plan cycle. Annual policy priorities will likely shift, new issues identified, and some issues may be dropped completely, but CCE will continue to drive toward our Pillars throughout the course of the Plan.

Just like the process of developing this Plan took longer than originally expected, the various pieces of implementation may take longer than anticipated. However, even if developing new processes and procedures takes most of the Strategic Plan period to complete, the work will pay dividends well beyond the next five years. Clarity will bring focus, and focus will lead to even greater positive impacts on D.C.'s legal systems and its residents.

Acknowledgements

Our thanks go out to **Kristi Matthews-Jones**, independent consultant, and **Lisa Gaffney**, Director of Strategic Planning at Compass Pro Bono. Kristi led the planning process, developed agendas for each meeting, and facilitated meetings to ensure that the Committee's time was spent as effectively as possible. Lisa led and facilitated most of the stakeholder engagement process in 2024 and compiled/analyzed the results.

We also wish to thank **Steptoe LLP, Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP, and Non-Profit Solution** for their pro bono support with the competitive landscape analysis.



Appendix A: Spectrum of CCE Community Participation

This material was adapted from the International Association for Public Participation's (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation guiding document.

					
	Final Decider	Collaborate	Involve	Consult	Inform
Definition	Final decision-maker.	Partners with the Final Decider in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	Final Decider and/or Collaborators work with these communities during the decision-making process to ensure that concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	Final Decider and/or Collaborators obtain feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions from these communities.	Receives information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives, opportunities, solutions, and/or CCE decisions made.
Type/Level of Communication and Engagement	Leads / participates in all engagement; usually initiates or leads all communication with others involved in the decision.	Full communication between Final Decider and Collaborators from the beginning.	Final Decider and/or Collaborators will incorporate feedback as much as possible, should be prepared to share which feedback was or was not used.	Final Decider and/or Collaborators incorporate feedback if possible.	CCE communicates decisions at appropriate intervals.

Appendix B: Decision & Participation Guide

		Spectrum of Participation				
		Most → Least Engagement				
		Final Decider	Collaborator	Involved	Consulted	Informed
Policy and Programmatic Decisions		Final decisionmaker.	Partners with the Final Decider in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution. (Full communication between CCE and collaborators from the beginning.)	Final Decider and/or Collaborators work with these communities during the decision-making process to ensure that concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered. (CCE will incorporate feedback as much as possible, can share which feedback was or was not used.)	Obtains feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions from these CCE communities. (CCE incorporates feedback if possible.)	Receives information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives, opportunities, solutions, and/or CCE decisions made. (CCE communicates decisions at appropriate intervals.)
1	Approving overall policy position "platform"	EC	Staff	Programmatic Committees; Advocacy orgs/Subject Matter Experts (SMEs); Directly impacted people/front-line community	Board of Directors	General public; Government
2	Developing proposed positions on and solutions to policy problems	Staff	Directly impacted people/front line community; Advocacy orgs/SMEs	Programmatic Committees	Government; EC	
3	Deciding our policy priorities and their order of importance (from within the approved platform(s))	Staff	EC		Programmatic Committees	Board of Directors; Directly impacted people/front-line community; General public; Government
4	Dealing with issues/changes as they come up (within existing platform), including taking positions, submitting testimony, and public statements on legislation or regulatory change	Staff		Programmatic Committees	EC; Advocacy orgs/SMEs	Directly impacted people/front line community; General public; Government
5	Dealing with emergent issues/changes as they come up (when they are NOT in existing platform, ARE urgent/time-sensitive, and are within CCE's mission)	Staff	President or a CCE Officer or co-chair as deemed appropriate by the Staff		Programmatic Committees; EC; Advocacy orgs/SMEs	Directly impacted people/front line community; General public; Government
6	Deciding which committees, subcommittees, or working groups are created, staffed/active, or ended	EC	Staff; Programmatic Committees		As relevant: Advocacy Orgs/SMEs; Directly impacted people/front line community; Government	Board of Directors
7	Deciding requirements/expectations for committee membership and processes	EC	Staff; Programmatic Committees			Board of Directors
8	Deciding which standing/multi-year projects are created, staffed/active, or ended	Staff	EC	Programmatic Committees	Board of Directors; Advocacy Orgs/SMEs; Directly impacted people/front line community	
9	Deciding which term-limited projects are created, staffed/active, or ended	Staff	EC	Programmatic Committees		Board of Directors; Advocacy Orgs/SMEs; Directly impacted people/front line
10	Deciding which recurring/occasional programmatic events are created, staffed/active or ended	Staff	EC		Programmatic Committees	Board of Directors; Advocacy Orgs/SMEs; Directly impacted people/front line
11	Other policy/programmatic decision-making not explicitly included here	EC	Staff	Based on decision	Based on decision	Based on decision

Appendix C: Implementation Timeline

