

# CAUSE



## 5 YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

2023-2027

### CAUSE



Central Coast Alliance United  
for a Sustainable Economy



# WELCOME TO CAUSE'S 2023 - 2027 STRATEGIC PLAN!

After 22 years as CAUSE Co-Founder and Executive Director, this is my fourth and final strategic plan. I think it's perfect that next year begins a new strategic plan under the shared leadership of Hazel Davalos, Organizing Director, and Lucas Zucker, Policy and Communications Director, as in-coming Co-Executive Directors. What a special gift that both Hazel and Lucas began as youth leaders with CAUSE; both started as community organizers and both now have over a decade on CAUSE staff. Hazel and Lucas have grown with CAUSE and now take the executive leadership helm, together, to sustain and co-lead CAUSE. I know CAUSE will soar under their transformative co-leadership.

The 2023-2027 strategic plan was co-designed, reviewed and finalized by the Strategic Planning Committee including, Hazel Davalos, Gabe Escobedo, Michelle Hasendonckx, Alejandra Mahoney, Jeremy Meyer, Maricela Morales, Maria Navarro, Daniel Segura and Lucas Zucker, over a nine-month process. Thank you so much to our committee's leadership requiring the extra time and attention a strategic plan needs and deserves.

As I close out my final CAUSE strategic plan I feel deep gratitude and happiness for coming this far with the support of many partners, including staff, donors, funders and allies. Together we have moved mountains, we really have. Here's to the decades to come with new leadership but always, always, CAUSE dedication to grassroots-up social, economic and environmental justice.

Adelante con Amor, Paz, Justicia y Alegria / Onwards with Love, Peace, Justice and Joy.

**Maricela P. Morales**  
Co-Founder and Executive Director



Dear Friends,

As we look outward to our world in this turbulent time, strong movement-building organizations with a clear vision and strategy for change are more critical than ever. Two decades after our founding, CAUSE is entering organizational adulthood: finding clarity in our purpose, achieving financial stability, and reaching large-scale impact. The past few years have been deeply challenging. In just the last five years, we survived the Thomas Fire and growing threats of the climate crisis, the political turmoil and anti-immigrant assaults of the Trump Administration, and the COVID-19 pandemic and its ripple effects on front line workers, struggling tenants and more. We are immensely grateful to the tireless and talented work of the CAUSE staff team, who has weathered these storms and continued to carry us forward towards our vision. Despite these challenges, during this period CAUSE nearly doubled our staff and budget, creating a stronger organizing team structure and building a robust policy team to support our organizing centered and driven work.

Our 2023-2027 Strategic Plan is about focus. Serving for many years as a “go to” hub of organizing and advocacy in the Central Coast’s regional movement for social, economic, and environmental justice has come with challenges of taking on many issues, campaigns, and coalitions, often stretching the limits of our organizational capacity. In the next five years, we aspire to better define our role within the ecosystem. We are doubling down on organizing youth of color and immigrant adults around three core issue areas: 1) Affordable housing and tenant rights 2) Immigrant worker power and 3) Climate and environmental justice. We are ready to launch forward bold initiatives in these issue areas to build grassroots power and structural policy change. We will also seek opportunities to expand beyond our existing chapters in Oxnard, Santa Maria, Santa Barbara, Ventura, and Santa Paula and plant the seeds of a new chapter in the community of Lompoc.

A larger scale, more mature organization requires an investment in internal strength: from new systems and procedures to the development of a next generation of leadership. As we transition from our founding visionaries to a new wave of leaders who have been raised within our organization, CAUSE is reaping the benefits of our many years of investment in home-grown leadership development. CAUSE is positioned like never before to meet the challenge of this moment: the mounting housing crisis, the massive climate transition, and the resurgence of worker organizing.

Thank you for being with us on this journey.

**Lucas Zucker**  
Policy & Communications Director

**Hazel Davalos**  
Organizing Director



## MISSION

CAUSE is a base-building organization committed to social, economic, and environmental justice for working-class and immigrant communities in California's Central Coast. We build grassroots power through community organizing, leadership development, coalition building, civic engagement, policy research, and advocacy.

## VISION

CAUSE envisions a thriving Central Coast that provides a sustainable and just economy created by and for workers, immigrants, and communities of color.



# HISTORY

The Central Coast Alliance United for Sustainable Economy (CAUSE) is a base-building organization committed to social, economic, and environmental justice for working-class and immigrant communities of color in California's Central Coast. CAUSE began as two separate organizations, CAUSE in Ventura County in 2001 and PUEBLO in Santa Barbara County in 2003, which both emerged during the national living wage movement and won milestone victories to create a living wage region on the Central Coast. CAUSE and PUEBLO each grew in their own counties, developing their strength in grassroots organizing, policy analysis and advocacy, voter engagement, leadership development, and coalition building. They advanced transformative campaigns throughout the region for immigrant rights, public transit, tenant rights, health equity, voting rights, and environmental justice. In 2013, the two organizations joined forces, creating a regional organization for social, economic and environmental justice.







## OUR PREVIOUS STRATEGIC PLAN

After CAUSE and PUEBLO merged in 2013, it brought our organization to a new regional scale, with community organizing and policy advocacy capacity stronger than ever before. We completed a strategic plan in 2014, with a clarified organizing model, leadership development pipeline, and voter mobilization infrastructure. We set a bold vision for immigrant rights, worker power, civic engagement, and progressive tax reform. Our organizing for healthy communities grew into successful campaigns for affordable housing, public transit, healthy food and green space access, environmental justice and investing in youth of color.



## 2014

- Formation of Central Coast Immigrant Rights Coalition
- California reinstates drivers licenses for undocumented residents after many years of statewide immigrant rights advocacy
- CAUSE mobilizes thousands to fight ICE facility being built in Santa Maria and works to bring accountability to city council by advocating for district elections
- CAUSE helps to pass Prop 47 to invest in education and rehabilitation by reducing prison sentences for low-level offenders
- CAUSE begins campaign to stop Puente power plant from being built in Oxnard
- CAUSE engages students, parents and teachers in school district decisionmaking on spending new statewide funds from Prop 30 to restore budget cuts
- CAUSE wins expansion of Sunday bus service from Guadalupe to Santa Maria, and the creation of a direct bus line from Oxnard to Camarillo



## 2015

- CAUSE helps to win fixed-route bus service in Santa Paula and Fillmore
- CAUSE develops district elections map for City of Santa Barbara, enhancing representation for working-class, immigrant, and renter neighborhoods
- CAUSE helps win redevelopment and expansion of Westview affordable housing in Ventura's Westside
- CAUSE wins reform of nutrition services in Oxnard Union High School District, bringing healthier quality food to thousands of students
- CAUSE wins recycling program in Santa Maria city parks
- CAUSE conducts survey of 600 farmworkers to release Raising Up Farmworkers report



# 2016

- CAUSE, alongside MICOP and Lideres Campesinas, launches Farmworker Bill of Rights campaign
- CAUSE supports statewide effort led by United Farm Workers to win equal right to overtime pay for California farmworkers
- Groundbreaking of Kellogg Park on Ventura's Westside and rebuilding of Piedras Park in Santa Paula thanks to CAUSE organizing
- CAUSE engages over 30,000 voters to help pass Props 55, 56, and 57 to bring resources for education, healthcare, and restorative justice in our communities
- CAUSE leads largest-ever voter registration drive of over 1,000 people in Santa Maria and passes voter registration policies in Oxnard and Santa Maria high school districts resulting in thousands of new youth registrations
- CAUSE contributes to statewide effort to win buffer zones for pesticide use near schools



# 2017

- CAUSE works with 7 school districts across the region and the city of Oxnard to declare themselves "Safe Zones" from immigration enforcement, refusing cooperation with federal immigration enforcement
- CAUSE launches rapid response alert system reaching thousands of immigrant families to provide accurate, timely information about immigration enforcement
- CAUSE supports statewide effort to pass SB 54, the sanctuary state bill limiting police cooperation with ICE
- CAUSE works with partners MICOP and FLA to distribute 15,000 N95 masks during the Thomas Fire to bring national attention to farmworkers working in the fields in heavy wildfire smoke
- Puente Power Plant defeated after four year organizing battle led by CAUSE Oxnard chapter, seen as statewide turning point for clean energy
- CAUSE alongside partners MICOP and Lideres Campesinas win first-of-its-kind Farmworker Resource Program in Ventura County to assist workers in addressing labor violations in the fields
- CAUSE Santa Paula chapter saves Cal-SAFE support program for pregnant and parenting teens from school district budget cuts
- CAUSE wins transition to district elections in Ventura and Santa Maria to increase Latino representation







## 2018

- CAUSE wins creation of drop-in teen center in Santa Paula after pushing for diversion of sales tax funds from policing to youth services
- SoCal Edison plans for clean energy and battery storage to replace Puente Power Plant
- CAUSE, FLA, and MICOP raise over \$2 million for immigrant families excluded from disaster aid through the 805 Undocufund
- CAUSE fiscally sponsors and helps launch the Immigrant Legal Defense Center in Santa Barbara County
- CAUSE map approved for transition of city of Oxnard to district elections
- CAUSE helps to win first year-round homeless shelter in City of Ventura



## 2019

- CAUSE supports statewide effort to pass AB 1482, banning rent gouging and no-cause evictions
- CAUSE passes eviction freeze in City of Ventura as evictions rise before statewide tenant protections come into effect
- CAUSE releases Housing Crisis 805 report based on surveys of hundreds of Central Coast renters
- CAUSE works to create free youth bus pass pilot program in Santa Maria
- Ventura County Farmworker Resource Program opens!
- CAUSE helps to pass first-ever statewide worker protections for outdoor workers exposed to wildfire smoke
- CAUSE and coalition partners win agreement from Port of Hueneme to conduct Environmental Impact Report on 34 acre GLOVIS expansion project
- CAUSE works with Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson to co-author SB 160, requiring cultural competency in local disaster planning
- CAUSE supports statewide efforts to ban harmful pesticide chlorpyrifos
- CAUSE youth win ban on glyphosate at Santa Barbara Unified School District
- CAUSE youth win voter registration policies in Santa Paula and Ventura Unified School Districts

## 2020

- CAUSE helps pass local eviction moratoriums in Santa Maria, Santa Barbara, Oxnard, Ventura, and Santa Paula
- CAUSE helps create the Safety Net for All coalition to end exclusion of undocumented workers from unemployment benefits, winning the first direct financial relief for undocumented immigrants in California history
- CAUSE supports the strike of workers at Rancho Laguna Farms, a Driscoll's supplier in Santa Maria, which resulted in better wages and working conditions for 600 workers
- CAUSE digital communications about COVID-19 pandemic rights and resources reach over 100,000 people
- CAUSE engages over 4,000 residents in conversations about the 2020 Census
- CAUSE helps to pass statewide clean truck regulations
- CAUSE wins COVID-19 safety protections at H-2A guestworker housing in Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties
- CAUSE Santa Barbara chapter wins Just Cause eviction ordinance after five year battle



## 2021

- CAUSE works with Santa Barbara County Public Health Department to create farmworker hotline
- CAUSE Ventura youth win investment in mental health counselors in schools
- CAUSE redistricting advocacy wins first-ever majority people of color state assembly district in Ventura County
- CAUSE leads coalitions to win two Latino majority voter supervisor districts in Ventura County and one super-majority Latino voter district in Santa Barbara County
- CAUSE stops 3,600 bed Donati project, which would have been the largest H-2A labor camp in California, from being built in Santa Maria
- CAUSE helps start Farm to School program for school nutrition in Santa Maria
- CAUSE works with County of Ventura and Ventura County Air Pollution Control District to start wildfire smoke alert system for farmworkers
- CAUSE fiscally sponsors the new Lulapin Chumash Foundation







## 2022

- CAUSE supports statewide Health4All victory of access to Medi-Cal for all ages regardless of immigration status
- CAUSE wins commitment from Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors to begin process for Santa Maria River Trail
- CAUSE passes rent control and just cause eviction ordinance in Oxnard, giving the city the strongest tenant protections of any community between the Bay Area and Los Angeles
- CAUSE works with partners to organize tenants facing mass eviction in Ventura's Westside, passing strengthened relocation assistance for future evictions
- CAUSE co-founds Ventura County Housing Coalition

## THE CENTRAL COAST

California's Central Coast is a six-county region stretching between the Bay Area and Los Angeles marked by stark racial, economic, and environmental inequity. The region's population is majority people of color, with Latino residents making up over 40% of the population. CAUSE's base is concentrated in the two most populous southernmost counties, Ventura and Santa Barbara, particularly the cities of Oxnard and Santa Maria with over 80% people of color population. Our economy is driven by agriculture and hospitality, industries that depend on essential low-wage immigrant workers who have endured the COVID-19 pandemic and are organizing for dignity and justice. As real estate speculators drive gentrification and displacement, working-class families are carrying forward tenant-led solutions to the spiraling cost of housing. As climate disasters wreak havoc, pollution-impacted communities envision a just transition for a Central Coast whose economy has long been tied to a powerful oil and gas industry, a major deepwater port, and chemical-intensive agribusiness.





# STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS & APPROACH

## ASSESSMENT & ENGAGEMENT

We listened to and learned from more than 50 stakeholders, including staff, youth and adults, and key partners to elicit their input and ideas on CAUSE's impact, successes, priorities, and strategic opportunities.

### **This engagement process included:**

- Engagement of a Strategic Planning Committee that included CAUSE board and staff members to inform the stakeholder engagement process, the planning retreats, and the strategic plan goals and objectives
- A web-based staff survey
- 18 virtual interviews with community leaders, elected officials, funders, and organizational partners
- 4 virtual listening sessions with members of the Board of Directors, staff, and youth and adult community leaders

In December 2021, CAUSE began a strategic planning process to evaluate its strategic priorities and create a roadmap for the future. This plan was developed and implemented over a 10-month period, the process grounded in the organization's deeply held values of inclusivity, access, transparency, and participatory processes.

### **The strategic planning process included three distinct phases:**

- 1** Assessment & Engagement
- 2** Strategy Design & Development
- 3** Final Plan Development

With the support of Laura Valles & Associates, Inc., the strategic planning process focused on the following priorities:

- To confirm CAUSE's Vision, Mission, and Theory of Change
- To engage and reflect Board, staff and community voice in the plan
- To assess and determine organizational structure, decision making and leadership development
- To identify and evaluate CAUSE's core issue areas and strategic priorities



# STRATEGY DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

CAUSE engaged in a collaborative process over a series of four virtual and in-person retreats attended by CAUSE board and staff members. At the retreats, CAUSE reflected on the feedback from its stakeholders and held strategic discussions around organizational and operational issues. Overall, CAUSE accomplished the following:

- Crafted a new vision statement
- Affirmed the mission statement
- Refreshed the Theory of Change
- Prioritized CAUSE's issue areas
- Developed long-term goals & objectives for the 3 core issue areas
- Crafted internal objectives and strategies

In addition, the team worked together to:

- Identify strategies related to CAUSE's professional development and leadership ladder
- Think strategically about CAUSE's adult and youth organizing model
- Set parameters & limitations for coalition involvement
- Identify ideal staffing structure and operating needs, and
- Develop 5-year fundraising goals & project-based grant criteria.

“

*CAUSE brings dignity and respect to workers - mainly workers and farm workers, since it's the central coast, and in general low income families and people of color.”*

- community stakeholder

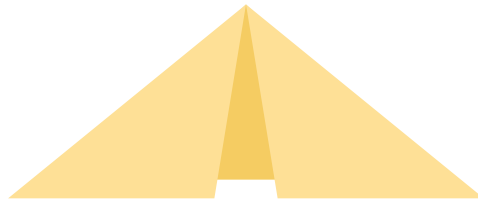
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*How they partner with people. How they change people from the inside out. They are changing belief systems.”*

- philanthropic partner



# THEORY OF CHANGE



01

## Outcomes to be achieved by the Theory of Change

- Build tenant power to win safe and affordable housing for all
- Create intergenerational leadership for a healthy environment and resilient community
- Organize workers for living wages, fair working conditions, and dignity

02

## Pathway for Change

The actions we will take to address these social and systemic conditions include:

- Organize at the neighborhood level to build power and win immediate impacts in the lives of our communities
- Civically engage our communities to win electoral power and accountability from elected officials
- Develop the leadership skills, confidence and political education of our grass-roots base
- Build diverse coalitions to achieve large-scale policy changes and build a broader movement
- Conduct policy research and communicate a social justice frame on policy issues to shift the public debate
- Advocate for equitable public policies to make systemic long-term change

03

## Social and Systemic Conditions Addressed by Our Theory of Change

- Corporate power drives an exploitative profit-driven economic system
- Structural racism creates exclusionary policies and ideology
- Individualism disinvests resources from public services and community needs





# STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

## FOCUSING OUR ISSUES

CAUSE has long faced the challenge of operating in a rural community with a smaller ecosystem of social justice organizations, leading us to be seen as a go-to regional hub to lead organizing and advocacy on a wide array of social, economic, and environmental justice issues. This has benefited our organization in many ways, such as allowing us to be accountable to a grassroots base with multi-issue lived experiences, and developing an intersectional analysis and approach to our work. However, it has also challenged us by stretching our resources, straining organizational capacity, and limiting time for planning and implementation as we pursue a broad scope of different campaigns. From 2023-2027, CAUSE will focus our organizing of immigrant families and youth of color around three issue areas: 1) Affordable Housing and Tenant Rights, 2) Immigrant Worker Power, and 3) Climate and Environmental Justice.

# AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND TENANTS RIGHTS

While housing and homelessness are priority issues across California, California's Central Coast region ranks as one of the most unaffordable places to live in the nation. CAUSE's organizing campaigns for rent stabilization and other tenant protections in Central Coast cities are creating waves throughout the region, mobilizing a groundswell of grassroots leadership, and altering the landscape of political possibilities. Meanwhile, new coalitions are emerging between tenant advocates and affordable housing providers to fund and support affordable housing construction throughout the region at an unprecedented scale. Over the next five years, CAUSE will:

- Strengthen tenants rights through rent stabilization, eviction protections, and legal aid for renters
- Win the expansion of public resources for affordable and social housing throughout the Central Coast
- Shift the narrative on affordable housing in our region to counter legacies of racist rhetoric



## IMMIGRANT WORKER POWER

Across the nation, workers are organizing a resurgent labor movement. Farmworkers have long been among the most marginalized workers, rooted in a historic legacy of slavery and exclusion. Yet since the COVID-19 pandemic, hundreds of farmworkers in the Central Coast have begun courageously striking in the fields for fair pay and working conditions. Due to risk of retaliation, language barriers, and exclusion from the safety net, immigrant workers have long been underpaid and undervalued, while performing the most dangerous but often most essential work in our communities. CAUSE is committed to building the power of immigrant workers, particularly farmworkers, to win dignity and justice. Over the next five years, CAUSE will:

- Organize farmworkers and build broad-based coalitions to win livable wages in the agricultural sector
- Strengthen safety nets, particularly for immigrant workers, to empower and protect workers facing retaliation and job loss
- Draw investment from state and local government agencies to support farmworkers in exercising their rights and reporting labor violations



# CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

As we enter the pivotal decade to tackle the mounting climate emergency, our community is already feeling the effects of extreme heat, wildfire and other climate disasters. The environmental justice movement organized by communities of color most impacted by pollution and extractive industry, once pushed to the margins of the environmental movement, has now built growing political power and recognition. Working-class immigrant communities in the Central Coast have long borne the brunt of pollution from oil and gas extraction, diesel trucking and shipping, agricultural pesticides and fertilizers, and other industrial pollution. Yet our region has the potential to lead the way towards a massive expansion of clean energy to replace fossil fuel industries, zero-emissions in the booming logistics industry, and regenerative approaches to agriculture, while investing in nature-based resilience and equitable access to green space. Over the next five years, CAUSE will:

- Win firm commitments to zero-emissions from the Port of Hueneme and replace polluting power plants in Oxnard with clean wind and solar power
- Create healthy, culturally relevant green spaces accessible to communities of color throughout the region
- Advance community-led climate resilience in our agriculture, our coast, and our communities





## GROWING OUR REACH

CAUSE currently has chapters with grassroots committees, offices, and staff in five cities: Oxnard, Santa Maria, Ventura, Santa Barbara, and Santa Paula. Over the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan, we will explore the opportunity to develop a new chapter in the city of Lompoc. Throughout our current geographic region stretching from Northern Santa Barbara County to Western Ventura County, Lompoc has the largest number of people of color residents with no current CAUSE chapter. Lompoc has a diverse population due to the federal prison, military presence, and agricultural industry, is a destination for families displaced by gentrification from Southern Santa Barbara County, and is in many ways the political center of the county.

### Lompoc at a Glance:

**25,000+**

Latino residents (57%  
of total population)

**30,000+**

Residents of color (70%  
of total population)

**55%**

Renters

**22%**

Immigrants

**27%**

Youth



# INVESTING IN OUR TEAM

As CAUSE has rapidly grown in recent years, we face the pressing need to develop leadership to support and train our expanded staff. CAUSE has a long history of investing in our people by developing leadership from within whenever possible. This has allowed us to make successful leadership transitions and grow our impact. In the years ahead, we plan to increase our efforts towards professional development for our team and strengthen pathways for staff to build long and sustainable careers in organizing and advocacy. We will:

- Build the next generation of CAUSE leadership through increased training, coaching, and career development
- Provide increased support for CAUSE staff in onboarding and supervision
- Reduce and better manage CAUSE staff workload through a more focused and efficient program







## STRENGTHENING OUR ORGANIZING

Base-building is at the heart of CAUSE's mission and theory of change. CAUSE has a powerful intergenerational base of hundreds of residents throughout our region. Our house meeting model of organizing immigrant adults is rooted in the legacy of the United Farm Workers, while our youth of color organizing is built through classroom presentations in high schools across the region. Our youth and adult committees meet biweekly in each of our city-based chapters to choose and lead our organizing campaigns. In the years ahead, we will

- Seek to be a more base-led organization by increasing formal leadership roles and decisionmaking processes for grassroots leaders
- Bring a culture of organizing to all aspects of our organization, including our policy team and our participation in statewide coalitions
- Re-imagine the organizational leadership roles of young adults from our grassroots base



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The CAUSE Board of Directors has always participated throughout the strategic planning process. I want to thank each CAUSE board member: Jeremy Meyer, President; Maria Thayer, Treasurer; Jamshid Damooei, Secretary; Yesenia DeCausas, Gabe Escobedo, Scott Fina, Michelle Hasendonckx, Alejandra Mahoney, David Pollock and Mireille Vargas for your stewardship of CAUSE.

Of particular importance and appreciation is the participation of CAUSE grassroots leaders actively involved in our community organizing work that is the vision, heart and power of CAUSE. Thank you to the following CAUSE grassroots leaders that took part in the strategic planning process: Amalia Ochoa, Mayerling Villaroel, Kelly Morales, Yoselynn Vicente-Sixto, Blanca Antonio-Aquino, Yesenia Gonzalez, Emmanuel De La Torre, Luz Hernandez, Flor Yazmin Alvarado, Marbely Cruz, Daniela Aguirre, Rachel Ramirez, Jorge Ruiz, Petra Flores.

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A special thank you to Laura Valles & Associates, Inc. for co-designing, planning, facilitating, and bringing this strategic plan together from concept to printing, with care and joy throughout the process.