



SUMMARY: STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2026

INTRODUCTION

Freedom of speech and access to government information — bedrock principles of democratic self-government — are being tested as never before.

- In San Francisco, police took a sledgehammer to the entrance to a freelance journalist's home in search of a confidential source.
- Courthouses in California, citing the coronavirus, have closed courtrooms, denying the public even phone or video access to proceedings that the First Amendment requires to be open.
- News organizations, hobbled by financial pressures, are hard-pressed to fulfill their traditional watchdog roles, as local councils, boards and agencies conduct the public's business in private.
- Through delays and outright refusals, agencies at all levels of government forestall access to important public documents.
- Meanwhile, social media, assaulted from both right and left, face difficult questions about restrictions on the content they disseminate; intolerance of dissenting speech is widespread; and the credibility of trustworthy journalists and news organizations is routinely undermined.

All in all, free, full, and constructive public discourse has been gravely threatened.

Against this alarming backdrop, the First Amendment Coalition, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization based in Northern California, has developed a Strategic Plan to pursue its mission to protect free speech, free press, open government and public participation in civic affairs. The Plan calls for expanding FAC's programs, serving new and diverse constituencies, strengthening its governance and establishing a firm financial footing for the future.

In order to more effectively pursue its mission, FAC must reach and include as broad a range of voices as possible to inform its policies, priorities and programs. FAC also understands that such efforts must be sustained over the long term if they are to have significant impact. Inequities rooted in, among other things, race, gender and socioeconomic class require FAC to take the initiative in seeking out and embracing a diversity of perspectives, backgrounds and life experiences. FAC will forthrightly address unconscious biases within our organization. And externally, we will address institutional biases through our programs, services and other work. FAC aims to

hardwire lasting, systemic change by establishing tangible, actionable and measurable steps to that end.

The Plan, which will guide FAC for the next three to five years, addresses FAC's four key program areas: strategic litigation; free legal hotline; education, training and advocacy; and legislative oversight. It builds on efforts that began with FAC's founding in 1988. In 2017, FAC began expanding its work by increasing the staff and enlarging its programs to meet growing economic, political and legal threats to free speech, free press, and public access to government information at all levels.

There is more to be done, and the need is urgent. Amid partisan tensions, economic challenges and a racial justice reckoning, FAC's work – to enhance government transparency, accountability, and the First Amendment rights that enable greater civic engagement – has never been more important.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

FAC has identified the following six strategic priorities:

Increase Diversity and Inclusion

FAC is nonpartisan and non-ideological and it is committed to public discussion of diverse ideas. FAC will increase racial, ethnic, gender, age and geographic diversity in its programs and its board and staff to better reflect and serve a more diverse constituency. To this end, FAC will build relationships with organizations in underserved communities. Diversity and inclusion will be a primary objective in all the Strategic Priorities.

Expand Geographic Reach

In order to bring FAC's services to a larger and more diverse constituency, FAC will expand its geographic reach in California by increasing services (1) in locations outside major metropolitan areas and (2) in metropolitan areas in Southern California. While FAC will continue to engage in the national arena, focusing on litigation and education initiatives, California will remain the primary focus of FAC's work.

Expand Programs

FAC will expand (1) its strategic litigation addressing open meetings, open records and other First Amendment free speech and free press issues; (2) its education and training programs for journalists, First Amendment lawyers, and the public, with an emphasis on underserved communities; and (3) to a lesser extent, its legislative and policy work. FAC will undertake new initiatives that build on its existing litigation, advocacy, education and training programs.

Increase Visibility and Audience

To increase its impact, FAC will use both social and traditional media to heighten public awareness of FAC, its work and the principles for which it fights. FAC will also broaden and enlarge its audience by working with community-based organizations, especially those in underserved communities, to present programs that meet the needs of those communities.

Increase and Diversify Funding

FAC will remain financially stable and viable. To fund expansions of FAC's programs, geographic reach and visibility, FAC will (1) increase fundraising from foundations and individual donors and (2) develop new revenue streams.

Strengthen Governance

To ensure organizational strength as FAC grows, FAC will adapt its governance practices to maximize efficient operations and board engagement.

Strategic Plan adopted by the Board of Directors September 2020, revised June 2023

