

# STRATEGIC PLAN

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## 2026-2028

EDITION

BUILDING THE FUTURE WE BELIEVE  
IN – ONE SCHOLAR AT A TIME.

### Lets Connect!

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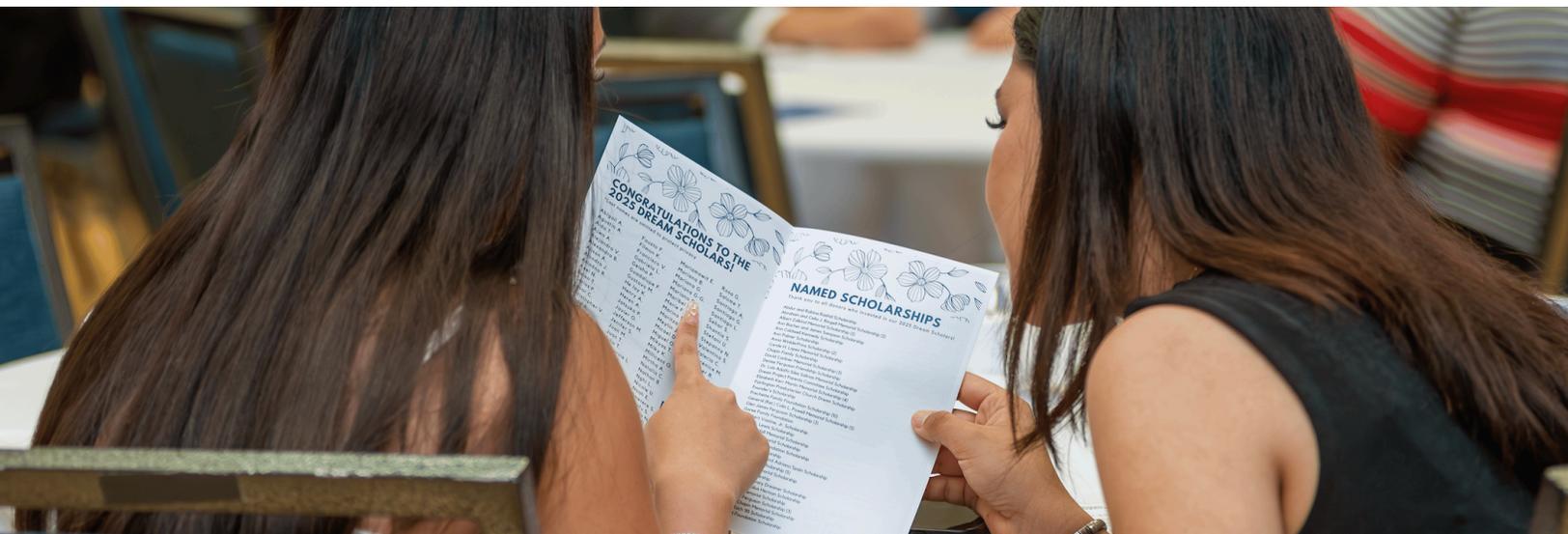
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# STRATEGIC DIRECTION FOR 2026-2028

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## Practical Vision

- The Dream Project is approaching its 20th year of operation in 2030. In light of this organizational milestone, the Dream Project is looking to expand its impact and adapt to meet the changing educational landscape that its students are facing. By the 20th anniversary, the Dream Project plans to annually provide 200 full tuition, renewable scholarships that cover the equivalent cost of one year at a community college. This financial goal will be coupled with ongoing holistic support the Dream Project is known for; focused on empowering students to succeed throughout their college careers.
- This bold vision for the organization will require major change as detailed in our 2026 - 2028 Strategic Plan. This change will require our team to more rigorously align activities with priorities and assessed outcomes while striving to achieve a broader scope of financial support. Internally, this means transforming into a more efficient staff-led organization that works in tandem with more effective board governance that prioritizes organizational financial stability and growth.

The Dream Project's strategic direction for 2026 - 2028 is centered on the preparation needed to elevate the organization to the next level of operation in time for its 20th anniversary. We are embracing change in the name of increasing our impact and expanding our partnerships to better serve our students and families. Throughout this strategic plan you will notice the themes of refinement and sustainability, two major efforts that will allow us to enter this next era with confidence that our programs, systems, and staff are equipped to handle emerging challenges. Our hope is that the work we do now will prepare us for a more cohesive and sustainable future.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This strategic plan is focused on ensuring long-term sustainability, effectiveness, and mission alignment. Key elements of the plan include enhancing Board leadership, transitioning operations fully to staff, building staff effectiveness, streamlining organizational structure, and increasing fundraising efforts – all while ensuring alignment with our purpose, mission, vision, and values. Our plan is supported by the four pillars of Governance, Fundraising, Programs, and Operations. These pillars will guide our work, enabling our scholars to fulfill their potential.

# HISTORY AND THE CONTINUING CHALLENGES

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Founded on community solidarity and family determination, the Dream Project is one of the few programs in Virginia that offers scholarships and mentoring to undocumented students. The Dream Project was established in 2010, when a small group of high school students, their parents, and community members came together to discuss how to support undocumented students who faced significant rising barriers to higher education. Determined to make a difference, the founding parents organized events and fundraisers to provide scholarships for their children and others in similar situations.

What began with four \$1,000 scholarships has since grown into a robust, multifaceted organization that supports hundreds of students and families across the Commonwealth of Virginia. In May 2025, the Dream Project awarded 107 renewable scholarships of \$4,000 each—supporting students for up to six years. But the impact extends far beyond financial aid. Dream Project scholars now benefit from holistic support services: academic coaching, wellness and mental health support, case management, and emergency financial assistance for legal emergencies. High school seniors receive personalized mentorship.

Thanks to the dedication of its founders and supporters, the Dream Project remains a grassroots force rooted in love, resilience, and action.

## Present Challenges

In an era of contentious immigration policy, the Dream Project's mission extends beyond education—it champions diversity, equity, and inclusion by empowering young immigrant voices to advocate for systemic change. These students are not just pursuing their dreams; they are helping shape the future of our nation.

Young people with uncertain immigration status face changing legal landscapes, restrictions and limitations that are overwhelming, and a political environment that has impacts beyond that of higher education. As always, the Dream Project's central mission is to empower and educate our scholars to enable them to navigate these changes particularly in times of uncertainty.

It is during these unprecedented times that the core functions of the Dream Project become most important: scholarship, mentorship, and engagement. In line with our strategic direction for 2026 – 2028, we are committed to evaluating and improving our existing programs to ensure they align with the current educational and political environment. The Dream Project is also dedicated to working internally with our staff and Board of Directors to identify ways we can become more adaptable and sustainable amidst emerging priorities. Most of all, we are prioritizing engaging with our scholars to better understand how we can best serve them as an organization and support them as a whole individual.

The Dream Project believes that education is the key for all students to pursue their dreams and achieve their full potential. The Dream Project walks this journey with each scholar as a partner and as a supporter.



education  
is a dream that  
cannot be  
deferred

EVERYONE SHOULD HAVE ACCESS  
TO AN AFFORDABLE EDUCATION.

WE OFFER MENTORING, SCHOLARSHIPS, AND  
RESOURCES TO STUDENTS WITH UNDOCUMENTED  
STATUS, DACA AND TPS RECIPIENTS, AND ASYLUM  
SEEKERS THROUGHOUT VIRGINIA.

[dream-project.org](https://dream-project.org)



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## PURPOSE

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Educational equity, opportunity, and inclusion create a world where all students can pursue their dreams and achieve their full potential.

## MISSION

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The Dream Project empowers students from Virginia's immigrant community to succeed in college or vocational training through scholarships, mentoring, family engagement, and holistic support throughout their education.

## VALUES

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Our work is informed by and infused with our core values of respect for human dignity, belief in individual potential, and the conviction that excellence can be achieved by all. Both internally and externally, we are guided by our commitment to transparency, honesty, and accountability; community and compassion; and innovation and creativity.

# STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

The Dream Project's strategic planning process began with a series of brainstorming sessions facilitated by Kevin Coray, a strategic planning consultant and trusted advisor with thirty-five years of experience. Using the Appreciative Inquiry model, Kevin guided both individual and group work to help the organization navigate change and build sustained impact. A Strategic Planning Task Force—composed of five Board members and the Executive Director—was then formed to translate insights from these sessions into high-level goals aligned with the Dream Project's core pillars. To further support the development of the plan, CG Strategy, a local women-owned consulting firm with deep expertise in organizational development, was engaged to assist leadership in drafting and finalizing the Strategic Plan.

## THANK YOU TO THE BOARD AND STAFF WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN:

### 2024-2025 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Ninfa Amador-Hernandez  
 Monica Burgos  
 Dawn Cutler-Tran  
 Dayana Hudson  
 Ann A. Kennedy, Ph.D.  
 Ron Pillay Kulathuran  
 Tim Lawler  
 Jeff Miles  
 Nancy McEldowney

Melanie Nezer  
 Marie Price, Ph.D.  
 Robert Remes, Esq.  
 David Rothwell, Esq.  
 Giancarla Rojas  
 Julius D. "JD" Spain, Sr  
 Meg Tuccillo  
 Bryan Viera  
 Julie Zalkind, Ph.D.

### 2024-2025 STAFF

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Karen Vallejos Corrales, J.D. – *Executive Director*  
 Cecilia Morales – *Director of Operations*  
 Michele Connelly – *Director of Development*  
 Iman Mekonen – *Communications & Advocacy Coordinator*  
 Katherine Fernandez – *Program Assistant*  
 Paola Montaña Vargas – *Bookkeeper*  
 Monica Castillo – *Development Assistant*  
 Belinda Passafaro, M.S., M.Div. – *Case Manager*  
 Patricia Sanguinetti – *Mentoring Coordinator*

# GOVERNANCE

- **Objectives**

- During the course of the strategic planning period, the Dream Project will prioritize transitioning the Board from operations towards a primary focus on the overall direction, health, and sustainability of the Dream Project. The first step in this process is to review and amend the bylaws to align Board operations to mission needs. Additionally, modifying the Board's size and committee structure will enable the Board to more efficiently support the Dream Project's needs as it navigates these challenges. The result of this transformation will equip the Board to better monitor and evaluate our direction, health, and sustainability while achieving greater transparency and accountability.

- **Modify the Way the Board Operates**

- To ensure the Board is well-positioned to guide the Dream Project's future, we will identify and intentionally fill board gaps in skills, expertise, and representation. The Board will be more deeply engaged in policy-level decision-making to support the staff's operational work. To achieve this, the following goals have been set.
  - The Dream Project will amend the bylaws to ensure the healthy evolution of the Board and ensure alignment with changing needs.
  - The Governance Committee will establish improved processes for identifying and nominating new Board members, grounded in the policies outlined in the bylaws. These processes will ensure that Board recruitment is strategically aligned with the Dream Project's needs in terms of competencies, expertise, resources, lived experience, and demographics.
  - The Board will assess its performance to identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement.
  - The Board will continue to build and nurture a positive, engaging, and inclusive culture.

- **Modify and Refine the Board's Committee Structure**

- The Dream Project will streamline and strengthen its committee structure to better align with organizational needs. The work of program-related committees (Mentoring, Scholarships, and Scholar/Alumni Support) will be transitioned to staff, with Board members continuing in advisory and volunteer roles. An Ad Hoc Committee will be established to guide this transition.
- For non-program committees, the responsibilities of the Communications and Advocacy Committee will be reassigned to appropriate staff and the Fundraising Committee.
- The Governance Committee will lead the development of written charters for all standing committees to clearly define their roles and responsibilities.
- In collaboration with the Executive Director and staff, the Board will oversee the implementation of a dashboard to better monitor and evaluate the Dream Project's overall performance.



# FUNDRAISING

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- **Objectives**

- During the course of the strategic planning period, the Dream Project aims to increase its annual fundraising revenue by 15% each year, starting in FY26. We will build a strong organizational infrastructure to support fundraising operations by drawing from a broader base of financial support facilitated by our Board of Directors and stewarding our existing donors.

- **Engage Board in Fundraising Plan**

- The Dream Project will engage the Board of Directors in the organization's fundraising plan through:
  - Presenting the fundraising plan to the entire Board of Directors for input and feedback.
  - Engaging the Board of Directors in meeting revenue goals with 100% participation at meaningful levels.

- **Expand Donor Base**

- The Dream Project will endeavor to expand its current donor base by:
  - Tailoring fundraising activities and events to attract individual and corporate donors.

- **Steward Existing Donors**

- The Dream Project will focus efforts on stewarding the existing donor base through enhanced communications, outreach and support.



# PROGRAMS

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- **Objectives**

- During the course of the strategic planning period, the Dream Project will prioritize more rigorously aligning current programs with organizational priorities by regularly assessing program effectiveness. The first step in this process will include fully transitioning program management from the Board of Directors to staff. The Mentoring Program, Scholarship, and Scholar Support initiatives will undergo refinement in order to ensure the services align with Dream Project's mission and scope while remaining adaptable and sustainable. Additionally, attention will be given to understanding and outlining what it means to meaningfully engage Dream Project alumni and families as part of the larger organizational network.

- **By June 30, 2026, transition programs to be fully managed by staff**

- The Dream Project will finalize the transition of program management to staff through:
  - Engaging the Board of Directors and staff in designing a formal transition plan by January 31, 2026 that will include:
    - Creating written policies and procedures for all programs, including definitions of program scope and accompanied by a process and metrics for regular review of each program's efficiency and impact.
  - Implementing the transition plan by the end of June 30, 2026.
  - Hiring additional experienced staff incrementally as needed to effectively operate the Dream Project's programs.
  - Monitoring program metrics and evaluating the ongoing performance of staff and processes by:
    - Making annual continuous improvements to evaluation metrics, systems and processes.

- **Mentoring Program: Revamp the structure and curriculum for services offered through the mentoring program.**

- The Dream Project will establish the formal infrastructure and curriculum for mentoring programs.

- **Scholarship**

- The Dream Project will continue to provide 100 annual renewable college scholarships awarded to immigrant students demonstrating academic achievement, leadership, community involvement, and perseverance in the face of adversity and will strengthen this support by increasing four-year scholarship amounts to \$5,500 by FY 2028.
- The Dream Project will monitor and adapt the CTE scholarship program by meeting identified needs and cost of certification programs.

# PROGRAMS (CONTINUED)

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- **Scholar Support & Engagement: Define scope of support for scholars and align ongoing services**
  - The Dream Project will refine what it means to provide scholar support and engagement through:
    - Defining the scope and setting goals for support programs designed for Dream Project scholars and CTE scholars.
    - Tracking progress for Dream Project scholars and CTE scholars to support program completion.
    - Reporting on, assessing, and adjusting resources used to support Dream Project scholars and CTE scholars (i.e. costs and time required).
- **Alumni Support & Engagement: Define scope of support for alumni services and continued engagement with the Dream Project**
  - The Dream Project will refine what it means to provide alumni support and engagement by:
    - Defining the scope of alumni programs.
    - Fostering continued engagement with Dream Project alumni.
    - Reporting on, assessing, and adjusting resources used to support alumni.
- **Family Engagement: Engage parents to help them support mentees and scholars**
  - The Parents' Committee — made up of both founding and newer families — has historically driven fundraising efforts, built networks of mutual support, and led outreach to immigrant communities, schools, churches, elected officials, and advocacy organizations. During the next three years the Parents' Committee will be incorporated into the bylaws of the organization as an ad hoc committee and will work to continue to support the growth and success of the Dream Project and its initiatives.



# OPERATIONS

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- **Objectives**

- Throughout the strategic planning period, the Dream Project will work to become a more efficient and staff-led organization. Historically, the Dream Project has depended heavily on the Board of Directors to support daily operations and programmatic success. In order to build staff capacity, the Dream Project will focus on bolstering workplace culture and infrastructure that attracts and retains mission-driven staff. Additionally, the Executive Director will institute systems and technology that increase financial, programmatic and operational efficiency and sustainability.
- Build a workplace culture and structure that attracts and retains staff
- Put in place the systems and processes that support an annual independent financial audit
- Use technology to increase efficiency and security, reduce staff workload and support decision making



