

2025-2028
Latin American Legal Defense and Education Fund
(LALDEF)

STRATEGIC PLAN
Guiding the Pathway to Citizenship

Prepared by
LALDEF STAFF AND BOARD

Adopted by the Board of Trustees on July 23, 2025



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LALDEF Board of Trustees at the 2025 Board Retreat.

From left to right, top to bottom:
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and Sasa Olessi Montaño.



Introduction

The Latin American Legal Defense and Education Fund (LALDEF) is dedicated to defending and advancing the rights of immigrants in Mercer County, NJ. By improving access to healthcare, education, and legal services, LALDEF seeks to foster integration, promote advocacy, and encourage intercultural communication to strengthen local communities. Its mission is built on advocacy, support, education, and justice.

This document outlines LALDEF's Strategic Plan, which details the organization's current state and future initiatives. The three primary goals for the organization are:

- Expanding legal services.
- Enhancing visibility through intentional community outreach.
- Navigating the challenges of a rapidly changing political landscape.

About LALDEF

For over two decades, LALDEF has been a key advocate for immigrants in Mercer County. Its work has helped immigrants understand and assert their rights, while earning the trust of local law enforcement, healthcare providers, and other professionals.

LALDEF was founded in Princeton, NJ, in response to the disproportionate challenges faced by undocumented residents following the 9/11 attacks. A group of local residents and scholars came together to address these issues, and by August 2004, LALDEF became a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit.

From its early days as the Latin American Task Force, LALDEF evolved into a resilient organization. Today, it serves thousands of low-income immigrants annually at its Trenton-based headquarters, Casa de Bienvenida, while also utilizing space in Princeton for some of its programs.

The demand for LALDEF's services is timeless, driven by the ongoing needs of those seeking American citizenship. As of the creation of this plan, the organization is experiencing a significant surge in inquiries, with the political landscape expected to present new challenges in the years ahead. LALDEF anticipates the need for its services will continue to grow and will update its strategic plan by 2028 to reflect lessons learned from this period.





The Development of this Strategic Plan

In 2019, LALDEF launched its first four-year strategic plan, aimed at challenging leadership to expand its reach. However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic forced the organization to shift focus from long-term strategy to immediate response. Now, in 2025, LALDEF is revisiting its strategic goals with the full involvement of its Board of Directors.

In February 2025, LALDEF hosted a retreat at Trenton Country Club, marking the beginning of this revised Strategic Plan. The Retreat setting was the same space where the Board came together with the community to mark the organization's 20th anniversary just seven months earlier. The group also celebrated the hiring of a full-time Director of Development and Communications — a key goal from the previous plan — aimed at increasing individual donations and promoting mission-driven programming.

At the retreat, board members shared their reflections on LALDEF's progress and core values:

- Unity strengthens our community.
- 20 years of perseverance have made a lasting impact.
- Partnerships break down barriers.
- Greater visibility shows solidarity.
- LALDEF is both an anchor and a pathway.
- A holistic approach fosters unity and understanding.
- LALDEF provides critical support to immigrant families in need.
- Advocacy thrives in the face of adversity.
- We must remain bold and joyful, even in challenging times.

These reflections served as inspiration as the group began the strategic planning process, reviewing the organization's programs and services, included here as Appendix A.



SWOT Analysis

The first exercise in developing this Strategic Plan was to address the changes brought on by a new federal administration following the 2024 U.S. Presidential election. The LALDEF Board conducted a comprehensive SWOT analysis to assess its 'Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats' considering rapidly evolving federal immigration policies. These developments included:

- Executive orders by President Donald Trump targeting mass deportations and declaring a national emergency at the southern border.
- Suspension of the refugee resettlement and asylum application systems.
- Attempts to withhold federal funding from non-cooperative communities, including universities.

Despite these challenges, LALDEF remained committed to its core message: knowledge is power, and knowing one's rights is the best defense. Volunteers and supporters continue to play a vital role, helping immigrants navigate everything from interviews to job training.

In the end, the Board agreed LALDEF needed to stay the course. Appendix C shows the thought process surrounding LALDEF's work. The organization's impact spans across families, from providing basic healthcare access to helping with language skills, job readiness, and childcare. In times of uncertainty, LALDEF's impact has been unwavering, providing support at every step—from the classroom to the courtroom. At its core, LALDEF is people helping people.

The Action Plan

LALDEF's key strategic priority is to grow its legal services team. A generous \$100,000 foundation grant will support this effort over the next three years, with funding allocated as follows:

\$40,000 in Year 1

\$35,000 in Year 2

\$25,000 in Year 3

Additionally, private fundraising efforts will be focused on staff sustainability. **THE SECOND PRIORITY** is visibility. The Board approved the use of \$75,000 from reserves to hire a new staff member dedicated to intentional community outreach. **THE THIRD PRIORITY** is to stay the course in a rapidly changing political landscape.

The timeline for 2025-2028 outlines LALDEF's continued commitment to serving the community. The goal is to reduce anxiety and fear by being a consistent, reliable presence—an organization that stands as a pillar of support in Mercer County. The Strategic Plan is designed to be adaptable, ensuring that LALDEF can respond to shifting political and social climates in real time. Appendix B outlines how this timeline will flow from a budgetary perspective.





Operations and Key Staffing

LALDEF operates out of its headquarters in Trenton, NJ, housed in a historic building—Casa de Bienvenida—that was purchased in 2018 after significant renovations. This space, formerly the “In and Out Social Club,” has long served as a gathering place for immigrants, and it continues to be a vital part of the community.

In addition to its core operations, LALDEF’s organizational structure has been updated to better reflect its mission priorities. A dedicated team supports advocacy, outreach, and program delivery, ensuring the organization remains effective in its work. Appendix D illustrates how positions promoting LALDEF’s mission connect with staffing that supports its operations and governance.

The heartbeat of LALDEF is its legal services. It is believed the investments outlined in this Strategic Plan will attract more supporters who will help LALDEF sustain these efforts. The Action Plan will bolster the core of this proven organization’s mission.

Conclusion

In closing, LALDEF is committed to leveraging its community trust and crisis response capabilities to navigate the challenges ahead. This Strategic Plan will be a living document, evolving to meet the changing needs of those seeking American citizenship. Regular Board Retreats, annual impact reports, and ongoing community engagement will ensure that LALDEF remains transparent, adaptable, and deeply connected to the communities it serves.



In a world where inequities persist — fueled by language and cultural differences — organizations like The Latin American Legal Defense and Education Fund stand for the power of advocacy, education and the community engagement needed to affect positive change!

Appendix A - Programs and Services

Undocumented immigrants in our local communities are eager to understand their rights and find a path to citizenship. However, they often face confusion, fear, and uncertainty, particularly with the constant shifts in U.S. immigration policies and procedures. When they turn to LALDEF, they bring their individual concerns and situations, trusting us to listen with compassion and offer guidance that helps them navigate these complexities with confidence

Legal Services

LALDEF provides legal services to low and moderate-income applicants, up to 250% of the federal poverty guidelines. LALDEF's bilingual, multicultural legal team offers low-cost assistance with:

- Filing of applications for naturalization & citizenship
- Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)
- Adjustment of status
- Renewals of green cards and work permits
- Temporary Protected Status (TPS)
- Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS)
- Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) provisions
- U Visas for victims of crime
- T Visas for human trafficking victims
- and more!

Advocacy and Outreach

With the support of partnering entities, generous donors and dedicated volunteers, LALDEF champions our immigrant neighbors and families. We actively strengthen their network of resources and help them understand their options and responsibilities. LALDEF provides:

- Client Advocacy
- Community outreach
- Notarizations
- Translations
- Referrals and information about other resources in Mercer County, as needed





Appendix A - Programs and Services (continued)

Education

LALDEF commits itself to helping clients to achieve and perfect the necessary abilities for self-sufficiency. We offer courses in Citizenship Prep, ESL, and High School Equivalency Prep.

Citizenship Preparation. LALDEF Adult Education collaborates with Legal Services to provide a comprehensive Citizenship Preparation Program. Clients interested in the program will be able to receive assistance with the Naturalization Application process while they also receive classes in Citizenship Instruction to prepare them for the USCIS Citizenship Exam. Clients will be guided through the entire process, whether they need help studying and preparing for the exam or navigating the difficult intricacies of the naturalization process.

LALDEF offers Citizenship Preparation classes for those students who possess an intermediate to advanced grasp of English. Citizenship Preparation classes meet on Tuesday and Thursday nights from 5:30pm to 7:30pm each week. Classes are offered year-round in the spring, summer, and fall/winter.

English as a Second Language. LALDEF's ESL program provides students with significant resources to improve their English skills and knowledge. Students will improve pronunciation and practice speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. The textbook we use prepares students for real-life scenarios where English will be needed and gives them a foundation for self-sufficiency for their lives in the United States.

LALDEF offers 4 levels of ESL: Level Intro, Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3. These courses range from beginning to intermediate. Courses are offered year-round in the spring, summer, and fall. Each semester lasts 13 weeks. Classes are held on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 5:30pm to 7:30pm. Classes meet once per week.

High School Equivalency Preparation. High School Equivalency can provide a new opportunity to adult students who did not complete high school due to barriers of systemic and personal nature. LALDEF provides High School Equivalency courses which prepare students to receive a High School Diploma. Its courses cover the five subjects of Reading, Writing, Math, Science, and Social Studies over 16-week course periods, twice per year. A student can expect to complete the program within three course sessions, or 1.5 years.

FUTURO. In 2008, in partnership with the Trenton Board of Education, LALDEF launched FUTURO, a youth mentoring program for twelve Trenton High School students in their senior year. FUTURO now serves juniors, and seniors each year in the greater Mercer County area. To date, the program has served nearly 500 first-generation immigrant teenagers and with few exceptions, all have completed college instruction.

Latinas Unidas. LALDEF's Latinas Unidas program is a support group for Latina women in the Mercer County community. Latinas Unidas members have the opportunity to share and learn about a number of topics relevant to women today, including healthcare, education, financial literacy, and more. In addition to hands-on workshops and educational opportunities, the Latinas Unidas program provides participants with a forum to share resources, goals, and dreams with a community of supportive, like-minded women.



Appendix B - Budgets and Fundraising

As this Strategic Plan evolves into a living document in the summer of 2025, the following figures highlight key components, including the addition of two new positions to enhance legal services and strengthen outreach efforts and strategic partnerships. The inaugural report from the newly hired Director of Development and Communications indicated that the organization's revenue shortfalls were expected, given the expiration of certain contracts and grants. However, transparent communication with supporters has led to a notable increase in both the number and size of individual donations, fueling renewed optimism.

INVESTMENTS AND PROJECTIONS

	<u>2024-2025</u>	<u>2025-2026</u>	<u>2026-2027</u>	<u>2027-2028</u>
BASE BUDGET	\$689,000			
COLA - ESTIMATED @ 3% PER SOCIAL SECURITY STANDARDS	\$18,000	\$21,500	\$25,000	
BRINGING SALARIES TO A PARITY		\$12,750	\$12,750	
LEGAL COORDINATOR	\$40,000	\$35,000	\$25,000	
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & STRATEGIC PLANNING	\$40,000	\$20,000	\$15,000	
BUILDING IMPROVEMENTS - DOOR	\$2,500			
SECURITY SYSTEM UPGRADE		\$2,500	\$2,500	
TOTAL INVESTMENT	\$100,500	\$91,750	\$80,250	
TOTAL NEW INVESTMENTS - \$272,500				



Appendix B - Budgets and Fundraising (continued)

SAMPLE GIFT TABLES - \$175,000 AND \$215,000

GIFT SIZE	# OF GIFTS	CUMULATIVE GIFTS	# OF PROSPECTS	RATIO	CUMULATIVE PROSPECTS	TOTAL	CUMULATIVE TOTAL	% OF GOAL
5000	5	5	25	5.00	15	\$25,000	\$25,000	14%
2500	9	14	36	4.00	51	\$22,500	\$47,500	13%
1000	20	34	80	4.00	131	\$20,000	\$67,500	11%
750	30	64	120	4.00	251	\$22,500	\$90,000	13%
500	40	104	160	4.00	411	\$20,000	\$110,000	11%
250	55	159	165	3.00	576	\$13,750	\$123,750	8%
100	300	459	900	3.00	1476	\$30,000	\$153,750	17%
-100	425	884	850	2.00	2326	\$21,250	\$175,000	12%

AVERAGE GIFT - \$50

GIFT SIZE	# OF GIFTS	CUMULATIVE GIFTS	# OF PROSPECTS	RATIO	CUMULATIVE PROSPECTS	TOTAL	CUMULATIVE TOTAL	% OF GOAL
5000	6	6	30	5.00	15	\$30,000	\$30,000	14%
2500	10	16	40	4.00	55	\$25,000	\$55,000	12%
1000	25	41	100	4.00	155	\$25,000	\$80,000	12%
750	45	86	180	4.00	335	\$33,750	\$113,750	16%
500	40	126	160	4.00	495	\$20,000	\$133,750	9%
250	90	216	270	3.00	765	\$22,500	\$156,250	10%
100	325	541	975	3.00	1740	\$32,500	\$188,750	15%
-100	525	1066	1050	2.00	2790	\$26,250	\$215,000	12%

AVERAGE GIFT - \$50



Appendix C - SWOT Analysis

In 2025, the Board of Directors conducted a comprehensive SWOT analysis, which will be revisited regularly through LALDEF's "Two-By-Two" approach. In this model, each Board member partners with another to meet informally and consistently, ensuring that the SWOT analysis remains a focal point. This approach is designed to strengthen both the Board and staff. Committing to a clear course of action is not only a sign of determination, but also a reflection of hope, maturity, and mindfulness. Achieving this requires collaboration in an environment rooted in understanding, patience, and perseverance.

Strengths:

- History of overcoming in the past and the unifying power of the current moment
- Proven track record in the community; have gained the trust of the clients we serve
- "Know Your Rights" presentations and education
- Information and points of contact

Weaknesses:

- Take too much on at once, try to be everything to everyone
- Need more visible staff
- Need heightened visibility to individual donors
- Need resources for building and security enhancements
- We need greater visibility to immigrant population beyond just the Latin American community

Opportunities:

- Active leadership and new partnerships
- Can partner with the local business community, as many are currently facing the consequences of ongoing threats from the new administration
- Can connect with local churches to expand our network
- Leverage the emotions of engaged potential donors to drive interest in supporting LALDEF
- Communicating and marketing programmatic priorities
- Need to update and refresh outreach resources for LALDEF's programs and services
- Want to hire a staff member who is solely devoted to public outreach and education, especially to local businesses organizations
- Want to leverage social media

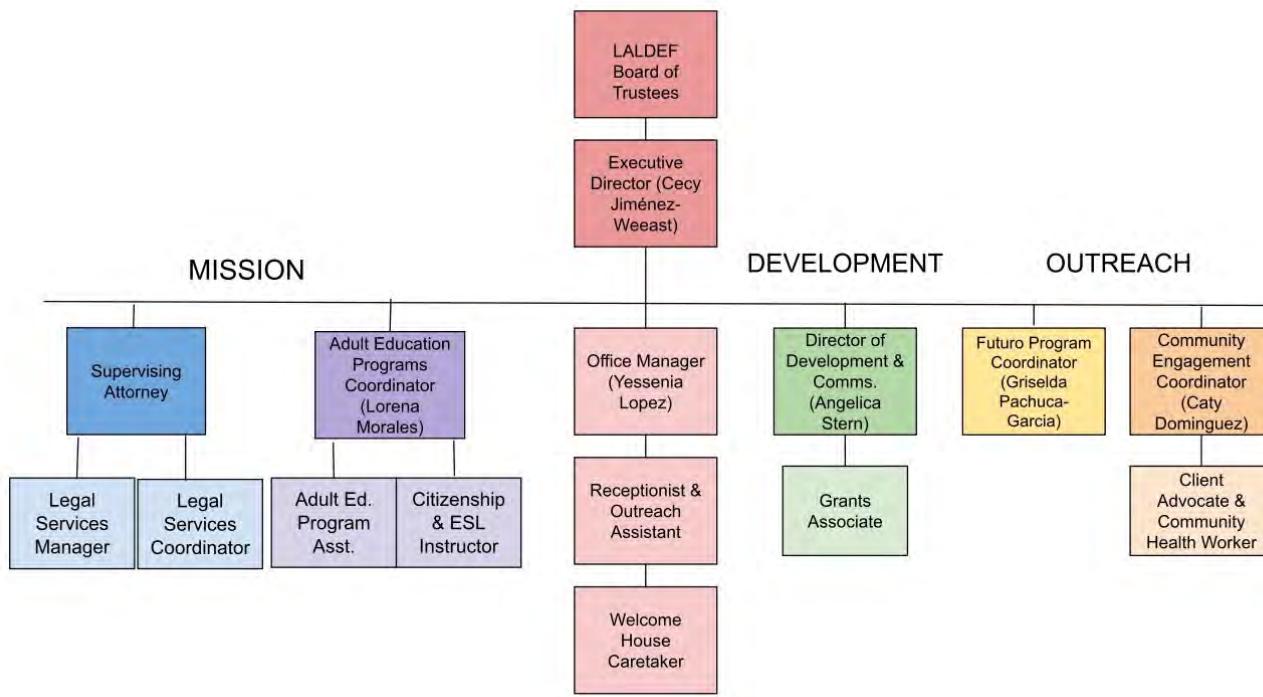
Threats:

- New Government that emphasizes punitive measures
- Increasing hostilities towards the immigrant community
- Misinformation, disinformation, and bias
- Increasingly harsh immigration policies



Appendix D - Organizational Staffing Chart

The 2024 revision of the Organizational Chart more clearly aligns with key mission initiatives, supported by dedicated administration and outreach teams.



Established in 2004, the Latin American Legal Defense and Education Fund (LALDEF) promotes the rights of all immigrants (with a focus on the Latin American community in the Mercer County area); facilitates access to health care, education and legal representation; advocates for the integration of immigrants; and fosters inter-cultural communication to strengthen our communities.