



# Our Focus, Our Future

First 5 Association/California Children & Families Foundation  
Strategic Plan: 2022-24

**FIRST**  **5**  
ASSOCIATION OF CALIFORNIA

CALIFORNIA  
**CHILDREN & FAMILIES**  
FOUNDATION

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Background</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The Current Context</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Strategic Plan</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>I. Assert Policy Leadership and Drive Systems Change</b>	<b>5</b>
• Policy and Systems Change Priorities	6
<b>II. Facilitate Member Engagement, Learning &amp; Support</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>III. Center Race, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion in All We Do</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>IV. Build Strategic Capacity and Expertise to Meet Strategic Goals</b>	<b>11</b>



# Background

The First 5 Association/California Children & Families Foundation plays a critical role in building, advancing and protecting the early childhood systems and supports needed to ensure California's young children are safe, healthy, and ready to succeed in school and life. Our vision is that one day, California's success will be measured by the well-being of its youngest children.

We fulfill that vision by:

- Catalyzing best and emerging promising practices exchange, networking and mentoring among First 5 members to advance the development and proliferation of programs, services and systems that support young children 0-5 and their families;
- Serving as a policy organization advocating for whole child and whole family policies and systems specifically focused on California's young children 0-5 and their families;
- Harnessing the collective First 5 experience and community knowledge to influence state policy in support of children and families;
- Working in partnership with other organizations, advocates and coalitions around shared policy and systems goals;
- Providing deeper learning opportunities for members to advance their collective systems change goals, and;
- Charting a course to support our members in building, expanding and protecting services and systems to care for young children 0-5 and their families.

Strategic planning is a critical tool in the organization's ability to fulfill its mission and address the most important needs of California's young children and their families. This strategic plan is the product of an extensive process that included a thorough document review, Executive Committee and external stakeholder interviews, several member input sessions, facilitated planning sessions with the Executive Committee and Association leadership, and refinement of the proposed plan based on member and staff feedback. The outcome of this process is a set of three overarching goals and related strategies that will focus our efforts and sharpen our future impact.

Enclosed here is a 3-year strategic plan encompassing the work of the First 5 Association and the California Children & Families Foundation—including the First 5 Center for Children's Policy, which is housed in the Foundation. Work and strategies across these organizational entities will be integrated and aligned to advance and achieve the priorities and objectives outlined in this strategic plan.



## The Current Context

A successful plan involves an accurate appraisal of our strengths, challenges, and factors shaping the external environment, including policy, systems functioning and service delivery, and the needs and experiences of children ages 0-5 and their families. As an essential step in the strategic planning process, the Association candidly examined the external environment and our organizational position to inform development of a thoughtful and informed strategic plan. This included extensive input and guidance from our members and external field and policy leaders. Several themes emerged from this examination:

- A fundamental strength of First 5 is our local presence and ability to lift the voices of families in all 58 California counties. External feedback and recent events highlighted that while the commitment of local First 5s is clear, we have opportunities to more effectively reflect, represent, serve and lift the voices and power of the diverse families and communities we serve. This includes an authentic and central commitment to race, equity, diversity and inclusion principles in all aspects of our work, this includes strengthening of the role and influence of parents and families in all we do.
- Child and family needs and the policy environment have been drastically reshaped by the Covid-19 crisis and turbulent economic and social disruptions over the past two years. Our current policy environment is shaped by deepened recognition of economic and racial disparities and commitment to future equity, the impact of trauma and the social determinants of health on children and families, interconnection between parent and child well-being, enhanced interest in child and family-focused policies, and re-affirmation of the value of integrated, whole child and whole family policy solutions.

- Policymakers, advocates and field leaders highly value First 5's unique orientation and leadership around developing integrated, whole child and whole family systems of care in California. Policy and field leaders further view local First 5s as "laboratories for innovation" that can test, evaluate and highlight locally developed solutions for sustainability and scale. While stakeholders describe a proven track record of local systems change leadership delivery system innovation, they see opportunities for local First 5s to translate this shared vision of a whole child and family framework into tangible solutions at the statewide level.
- Members and external stakeholders noted opportunities for First 5s to collectively deepen statewide policy leadership and influence by articulating and advancing focused policy priorities, "telling the story" about collective First 5 impact and value, and aligning policy priorities with those issues and opportunities reflective of child/family needs and state policy direction.
- Preserving and growing investments in early childhood services and systems, including local First 5 commissions, requires a deliberate, sustained and multi-pronged strategy that encompasses a systematic commitment to developing statewide policy leadership and presence, demonstration and commitment of First 5 role and value, strategic advancement of direct funding opportunities, and local support and technical assistance.
- Members highly value the role of the First 5 Association in facilitating networking and best practices exchange across counties, strategically coordinating in-depth member learning on targeted topics, and most importantly, facilitating support and development of new and existing local First 5 leaders.
- In order to strengthen member cohesion, promote transparency and optimize our collective impact, members and Association staff are committed to re-examining and, where appropriate, refining Association governance and committee structures/practices, and ensuring that organizational expertise and resources are shaped and sized to effectively advance our collective strategic priorities.

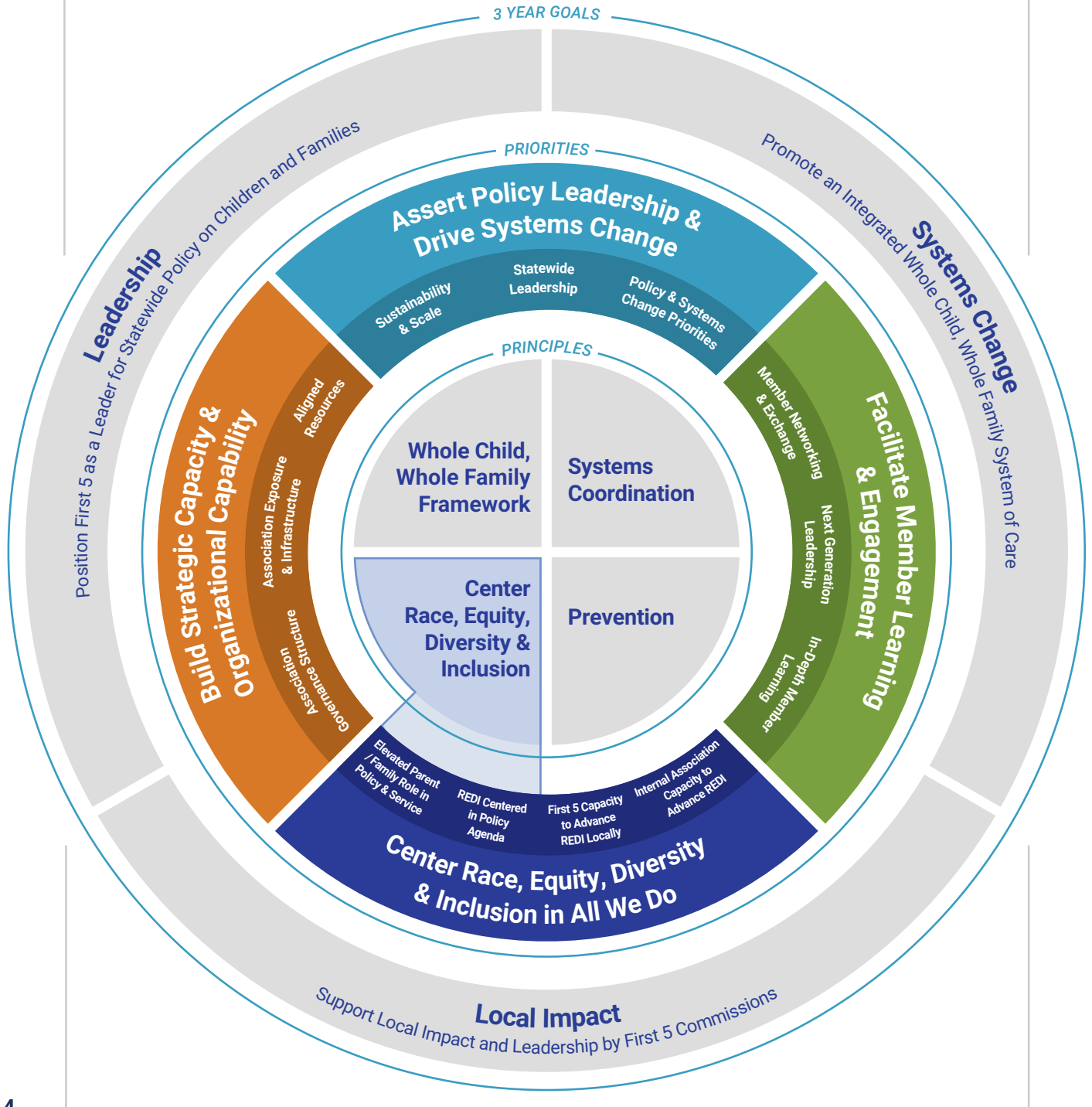
# 2022 – 2024 Strategic Plan

## Our Vision

California's success will be measured by the well-being of its youngest children.

## Our Mission

Advance the building of early childhood systems and supports needed to ensure all of California's young children are safe, healthy and ready to learn so they can succeed in school and life.



# Assert Policy Leadership and Drive Systems Change

## Overview

The First 5 Association is committed to advancing statewide policies that promote an integrated, whole child and family system of care, and ensuring a continued focus on the well-being of young children and their families. In order to deliver meaningful policy impact and sustained leadership in the statewide environment, the Association will invest deliberately and deeply in cultivating sustained statewide presence, influence and policy leadership; building a thoughtful case and partner support for sustained investment in early childhood systems and services; and generating policy results on targeted policy and systems change priorities selected by membership. Efforts and leadership by our First 5 Center for Children's Policy are integral to advancing the objectives outlined in this Priority.

Association policy priorities, strategic communication and member support will reflect our commitment to acknowledging and facilitating equitable outcomes for California families, and advancing the principles of Race, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (REDI), including elevating the role and influence of family voices and power.

### OBJECTIVE 1

**Policy and Systems Change Priorities.** Advance Policies to Improve Outcomes for Young Children and Promote Integrated Systems

- a. **Advance Policy Priorities.** Provide sustained *leadership* and deliver substantive policy change on three targeted policy and systems change priorities while continuing to *support* policy advancement in other areas.
- b. **Align Policy Priorities with Equity Goals.** Ensure that policy priorities encompass and advance equity for young children and their families using a targeted universalism approach.
- c. **Strengthen Local Advocacy Capacity.** Provide technical assistance and tools to support local First 5s in building their policy, advocacy, and communication capacity.

### OBJECTIVE 2

**Statewide Leadership.** Grow the First 5 Association Role and Influence in Statewide Policy

- a. **Deepen Statewide Relationships and Policy Leadership Presence.** Cultivate key strategic relationships with organizations, advocates, state agencies and legislative champions, including working in deep partnership on shared goals with First 5 California. Bring combination of local First 5 experience and expertise, policy and field research and expertise, and partnership and coalition development to establish strong policy voice and ensure active ongoing presence in key policy forums/discussions.
- b. **Document and Communicate Collective First 5 Impact.** Document and communicate the collective impact and unique value of local First 5s in California.
- c. **Enhance Strategic Communications.** Implement strategic communications activities that support Association policy and systems change priorities, and reinforce First 5 leadership role in promoting integrated, equitable, whole child and family systems.

### OBJECTIVE 3

**Sustainability and Scale.** Make the Case to Sustain and Scale Critical Early Childhood Systems

- a. **Lay the Strategic Groundwork for Sustainability.** Initiate sustained strategic positioning and communications plans that enable the Association to make a case for sustained statewide investment in early childhood systems and services, including the essential role of local First 5 commissions in improving early childhood systems and outcomes.
- b. **Advance Direct Funding Opportunities.** Support state policy and fiscal frameworks that embed funding for effective services and systems in ongoing state/federal systems and funding sources, and pursue direct funding for local First 5 systems.
- c. **Build Member Capacity to Access Local Funding.** Provide strategic support and facilitate peer exchange that strengthens the ability of local First 5s to identify and access local funding opportunities.

# First 5 Association: 2022 – 2024 Policy and Systems Change Priorities

## *Our Framework and Leadership Commitment*

First 5 believes that all of California’s youngest children deserve to be healthy, safe, and ready to succeed in school and life. Grounded in a **whole child / whole family framework** that advances **equity, prevention strategies** and **systems coordination**, First 5 seeks to build comprehensive and integrated early childhood systems of care, with an intentional focus on **prenatal to age 3** as a critical stage of child development. First 5 policy efforts focus on systems change, particularly across sectors, with an intention to shift the conditions that hold problems in place, in order to achieve meaningful and lasting social change.

The organization’s policy and systems change work will have two core components:

- **Lead on Priorities:** Provide sustained leadership and deliver substantive policy change on three targeted policy and systems change priorities.
- **Work in Partnership and Support the Leadership of Others:** Support policy advancement and the leadership of our partners through participation in coalition efforts, responsive advocacy on legislative and budget proposals, ongoing engagement and work with partners, and member advocacy engagement, on a holistic early childhood policy platform.





## Our Policy and Systems Change Priorities

Based on an analysis of the policy landscape, First 5s' unique voice and expertise, and structural barriers faced by California's families, the First 5 Association has selected three policy and systems change priorities. First 5 Association will proactively develop and lead advancement on these priorities with the goal of effecting tangible policy change in each area:

### 1. Universal Home Visiting and Family Strengthening

**The years between conception and age three are uniquely important** for the positive development of the child and family; and they are the most likely time frame for a child to enter the child welfare system. Home visiting is a critical lever during that window to build buffering supports and connect families to a holistic range of systems and services, including the social safety net, public health, and family strengthening, to improve outcomes for families and children down the road. Now is a moment to build California's home visiting infrastructure as a systems approach, when families are experiencing high levels of stress, current programs are not being maximized, and the field of home visiting is changing as a result of the pandemic. We envision a **California comprehensive home visiting strategy** to ensure families – particularly those who are subject to structural racism, toxic stress and generational poverty – have access to appropriate and effective family strengthening services, while maximizing cross-sector connections and available funding streams, including pursuing a home visiting Medi-Cal benefit.

### 2. Early Childhood Mental Health

**Social-emotional development and wellness are fundamental** in the earliest years of childhood for long-term health and well-being. The pandemic was a powerful, lasting disruptor of family mental health, adding on to long-term stressors such as Adverse Childhood Experiences including systemic racism and poverty. We envision **whole child/whole family systemic approaches to mental health**, including shifting the societal conditions that create toxic stress and triggering events, as well as holistic services in all of the settings most comfortable to families, including (but not limited to): dyadic care models in pediatric clinics, particularly for families enrolled in Medi-Cal; early childhood mental health consultation and related services in subsidized child care programs; and attachment and maternal mental health supports through home visiting.

### 3. Early Identification and Intervention Systems Development

**Siloed systems of care prevent children and families from accessing the care, supports, and services** they are eligible to receive, particularly for children with developmental delays and concerns. A child's early development is tied to their lifelong outcomes and should be nurtured in the community and across systems, and at all levels of ability. We envision **cross-sector system integration** that results in early identification of developmental delays, culturally-appropriate and responsive care coordination, and timely, effective services.

## Policy Platform Overview:

First 5 Association will continue to support a broad, holistic early childhood policy platform through participation in coalition efforts, responsive advocacy on legislative and budget proposals, ongoing engagement with partners, and member advocacy engagement related to a holistic range of early childhood policy issues. These will include a strengthened system of quality early learning and child care, family resilience and economic supports, comprehensive health and development, and overall sustainability and scale of comprehensive, integrated services for children and families. We particularly support and advocate for cross-sector systems integration across these issue areas to build and embed a whole child, whole family approach across public and community-based systems for young children and their families.

### First 5 Association supports:

#### Resilient Families

Strengthen families through:

- Family-centered, community-based, culturally and linguistically responsive, trauma-informed approaches and buffering supports.
- Improving economic security.
- Integrated system approaches resulting in more accessible and responsive services, including to basic needs.
- Ensure access to services regardless of immigration status

#### Comprehensive Health & Development

- Improve the health, mental health, and wellbeing of young children.
- Strengthen the systems of early identification and referral.
- Address racial inequities in maternal and infant health.
- Reduce and mitigate exposure to trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences.

#### Quality Early Learning

- Increase access to early learning programs across the mixed delivery system.
- Support the early care and education workforce.
- Stabilize, strengthen and scale early learning systems accessible and affordable for all families.
- Promote equitable access to and participation in quality improvement systems and supports.

#### Sustainability & Scale

- Explore and advance additional revenue sources for ensuring comprehensive, integrated systems and services to children and families.
- Ensure that local First 5 commissions can continue to provide foundational infrastructure, leadership and partnership in communities throughout California to realize improved opportunity and outcomes for our youngest children and their families.
- Support regulation of tobacco products to prevent and reduce tobacco use and promote smoking prevention and cessation.
- Improve and integrate data systems to track and evaluate children's outcomes.

## PRIORITY II

# Facilitate Member Engagement, Learning and Support

### Overview

Over the next three years, the First 5 Association will support the strengthening of local First 5 systems by investing in the development of a diverse cadre of current and new local First 5 leaders, establishing tools and platforms that enable effective peer-exchange and learning, and promote deeper member learning in areas that align with our REDI, family voice and policy and systems change priorities.

#### OBJECTIVE 1

##### **Next Generation Leadership.** Develop the Next Generation of Diverse First 5 Leaders

- a. **Support New Executive Directors.** Facilitate development of programs and resources to provide orientation, peer-support and resources for new First 5 executive directors.
- b. **Restart Leadership Cohorts.** Pursue external funding to support leadership development cohorts of existing and emerging local First 5 leaders to build a diverse next generation of equity centered leaders.

#### OBJECTIVE 2

##### **Member Networking and Exchange.** Facilitate Member Networking and Best Practices Exchange

- a. **Build and Manage a Knowledge Management Platform.** Develop, implement and effectively curate a knowledge management platform that facilitates peer exchange of best-practices, resources and information among Association membership.

#### OBJECTIVE 3

##### **In-Depth Member Learning.** Coordinate Member In-Depth Learning that Aligns with Strategic Priorities

- a. **Coordinate Race, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) Learning and Action Experiences.** Coordinate REDI training, tools and resources that build local understanding, infrastructure and practice among First 5 member agencies.
- b. **Facilitate Local Efforts to Elevate Parent and Family Leadership.** Support local First 5s in assessing and developing more effective ways to engage parents' and families' voices locally in influencing advocacy, service and system priorities.
- c. **Opportunistically Advance Strategically-Aligned Learning Programs.** Pursue external funding and support for in-depth learning programs that align with member needs and Association policy and systems change priorities.

## PRIORITY III

# Center Race, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion in All We Do

### Overview

The Association and its members recognize that reflecting and advancing the interests and perspectives of the diverse communities we serve is central to our effectiveness and legitimacy as advocates and systems leaders. The Association will take deliberate steps to build local member and internal Association capacity to authentically center our statewide policy and local practice around the principles of race, equity, diversity and inclusion, including elevating the role of parents and families as leaders and drivers of change. While REDI is integrated into every section of this plan, it also merits focused attention, as displayed by the objectives in this section.

#### OBJECTIVE 1

##### **Policy Alignment.** Center Race, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Our Policy Agenda

- a. **Align Policy Priorities with Equity Goals.** Ensure that policy priorities encompass and advance equity for young children and their families using a targeted universalism approach.
- b. **Center Race and Equity in Strategic Communication.** Ensure that the principles of race and equity are authentically addressed and communicated in Association policy messaging and communication to stakeholders.

#### OBJECTIVE 2

##### **Build Local First 5 Capacity to Advance REDI Locally.** Facilitate Member Training / Support to Advance REDI Goals Locally

- a. **Coordinate Local Race, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) Training.** Coordinate REDI training, tools and resources that build local understanding, infrastructure and practice, including targeted universalism, among First 5 membership agencies.

#### OBJECTIVE 3

##### **Family Voice and Leadership.** Elevate the Role and Influence of Family Voices in Advocacy & Service

- a. **Facilitate Local Efforts to Elevate Parent and Family Leadership.** Support local First 5s in assessing and developing more effective ways to engage parent and family voices locally in influencing advocacy, service and system priorities.

#### OBJECTIVE 4

##### **Internal Capacity to Advance REDI.** Ensure Internal Association Capacity to Advance REDI including Family Voice Goals

- a. **Embed REDI Principles and Practice into Association Culture.** Commit the Association to embedding REDI principles into organizational culture and practice, including building staffing, organizational practices and skill sets, governance structures and organizational awareness to effectively and authentically advance equity-aligned policy goals and facilitate REDI member learning. Includes applying REDI assessment, measurement and training to the Association to facilitate strengthened organizational culture, practices and accountability.

## PRIORITY IV

# Build Strategic Capacity and Expertise to Meet Strategic Goals

### Overview

To advance collective strategic priorities, the Association will assess current capacity and structure, develop new organizational skill sets and expertise to meet strategic goals, and adapt organizational governance structures and practices to reinforce collective identity and advance shared strategic goals.

#### OBJECTIVE 1

##### **Association Capacity.** Build and Adapt Association Expertise and Infrastructure

- a. **Align Organizational Expertise/Skill Sets with Strategic Goals.** Develop staffing and consultant expertise to deliver on strategic goals, including state and federal policy, strategic communications, demonstration of impact and REDI.
- b. **Develop Internal Systems.** Strengthen internal systems to manage core organizational functions (e.g. fiscal, contract management, HR/performance management) and build new infrastructure to facilitate strategic goals (e.g. knowledge management platform).

#### OBJECTIVE 2

##### **Resources.** Secure and Align Resources with Strategic Priorities

- a. **Engage in Targeted Fund Development.** Pursue external funding to advance targeted Association priorities, including REDI, leadership cohorts, in-depth member learning, sustainability, and research and policy development on current and emerging policy and systems change priorities.
- b. **Align Member Financial Support to Association with Strategic Plan.** Build member financial support for collective strategic priorities in ways that are efficient, responsive and transparent.

#### OBJECTIVE 3

##### **Governance Structure.** Evolve Governance Structure

- a. **Refine Association Governance Structures and Processes.** Review and, where appropriate, evolve Association governance structures to reinforce collective identity and advance mission-driven collective goals. This encompasses structures and practices related to organizational status and configuration, role, function and nominating of governing body and related committees, centering REDI in governance and strategy, regional engagement, strengthening capacity to develop and advance strategic goals, transparent decision-making and other areas of governance.