



STRATEGIC PLAN

2020–2025

INTRODUCTION

Since 1998, Identity has listened and responded to the hopes, worries and aspirations of Latino youth and their families. We began by conducting the very first assessment of the needs of Latino youth in Montgomery County and partnering with Gaithersburg High School to serve its small but growing population of Latino students. Today, we work in 20 public schools and two community-based centers serving thousands of young people and their families every year.

In 2019, we celebrated our first 20 years by focusing on the future, as we have always done, which included a revisioning of our *Strategic Plan*. Together with staff, Identity's Board designed an inclusive strategic planning process, investing most of our energy learning together, and focusing on what Identity needs to prioritize over the next few years in order to make the greatest difference toward advancing our mission. The result, *Strategic Plan 2020-2025*, was adopted in February 2020 and updated in September 2021 to reflect changed conditions and priorities.

Our plan provides strategic direction for Identity to execute its mission, but does not anticipate a radical shift in emphasis or strategy. After school, in the community and on playing fields, we will continue to help youth improve social-emotional skills, achieve academic success and prepare for work through direct services. We will continue to support families as they navigate the educational system and strive to support their children's wellbeing. And we will continue to advocate for systems changes that address disparities in opportunities and outcomes for Latino and other historically underserved youth. To this end, we reaffirmed Identity's founding vision, updated our core values and program hallmarks and refined our mission, which reasserts our focus on the Latino community while asserting our broader inclusiveness and welcoming approach with all youth from communities disadvantaged by inequities.

At the same time, circumstances beyond our imaginations and control (a fire that devastated our administrative headquarters, an unprecedented pandemic and the anticipated arrival of a large number of immigrant and asylum-seeking children, youth and families) necessitated and accelerated a transformative expansion of Identity's staff and services to meet community needs, especially for case management and emotional support. The near doubling of Identity's annual budget and workforce between FY2019 and FY2021 in order to serve four times as many clients suggests that the transformation is well underway.

The *Strategic Plan* includes goals and strategies to support growth and defines key priorities that the Executive Director and the staff leadership team will implement. Over the next several years, we will focus on becoming a model trauma-informed organization; expanding case management and non-clinical community mental health services; increasing opportunities to help close chronic gaps in academic achievement; scaling and expanding access to sustainable employment; further developing Identity's capacity for advocacy and community organizing; and better supporting talented staff and Board members for success. Of course, all of this work requires strategic expansion of staff and infrastructure.

While this is a five-year plan, we are already working to achieve our goals, especially those made more urgent by the pandemic. Moreover, we anticipate that some goals will evolve and others will emerge over time and may extend beyond five years.

Above all else, we are inspired by our clients' personal perseverance and ability to push successfully beyond obstacles related to trauma, poverty, language isolation, acculturation, educational disadvantages, fear and, most recently, a public health crisis.

Thank you to all who were involved in creating this plan, and who will help fulfill the priorities outlined within.

-Identity's Strategic Planning Committee

-Identity's Board of Directors

-Identity's Staff



WHAT WE DO

Identity was co-founded in 1998 by Candace Kattar and Diego Uriburu to create opportunities for Latino youth to reach their highest potential. We are honored to have supported the successful growth and development of tens of thousands of young people over more than 20 years, assisting students and disconnected youth living in high-poverty areas of Montgomery County, Maryland who are most at risk for poor social-emotional, academic and work-life outcomes. Working with thousands of youth and their families annually, Identity supports their successful transition into adulthood after school, in the community and on playing fields with bilingual and trauma-informed programs. Like an extended family, we teach and model for young people, ages 7–25, the social-emotional, academic and workforce skills they need to thrive in the modern world. Like family, we celebrate their victories and offer help when something extra is needed.

Identity's rigorously evaluated culturally competent and trauma-informed programs are grounded in the Positive Youth Development model that reduces risk factors, increases protective factors, and strengthens social-emotional, academic and workforce skills and development. Identity's parent education and leadership training helps parents get involved in their children's schools and use their voices to promote equitable opportunities for all young people. Wraparound services that are available to clients include emergency case management, comprehensive family case management, mental health and substance abuse counseling, and non-clinical emotional support and family strengthening support for those who have experienced trauma and family separation. We also work to empower parents to engage in their children's educations and be champions for their success and the success of the community. Programs and services are planned, and often carried out, with the full and direct participation of members of the community. "Nothing about us without us."

Identity youth report real improvements in their ability to resolve conflict, speak up for themselves, avoid substance abuse and delinquent behavior, and connect to school, work and the community. Identity youth show improved school attendance and achievement, and their families report improved communication, increased capacity to manage stress, and more involvement in their children's lives after participating in our programs.

At the same time, because helping one child at a time, one school at a time is simply not enough, we increasingly focus on bringing about systemic changes to disrupt patterns of underachievement, unemployment or underemployment as well as lost hope and disconnection.

In partnership with collaborating organizations and members of the community, Identity champions equitable access to sufficient resources, supports and opportunities for all youth to succeed.

PLANNING PROCESS

Identity engaged Engel Associates, an organization development and management consulting firm, to facilitate the development of our new strategic plan. A Board-appointed Strategic Planning Committee developed the plan in consultation with all members of the Board and staff. The process, which began in April 2019, included:

- An in-depth review of key documents such as recent needs assessments, proposals, evaluation reports, and news coverage.
- Almost 120 confidential interviews of clients, parents and program alumni, funders, elected officials, field experts, key influencers, staff and Board members, and other stakeholders.
- Several in-person meetings with the full Board and with small groups of staff.
- Five Strategic Planning Committee sessions.

Engel Associates produced three documents which, taken together, informed this document, *Identity's Strategic Plan 2020-2025*:

1. A Context and Recommendations Report for use internally that describes Identity's image, strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and obstacles.
2. A Post-Context Report for use internally that summarizes new thinking and new questions as a result of debate and discussion of the Context and Recommendations Report.
3. And, with the Strategic Planning Committee, a Strategic Planning Guide also for use internally that unites the mission, new priorities, key achievement benchmarks and accountability.

In March 2021, the Board appointed a Strategic Planning Committee 2.0 to update *Identity's Strategic Plan 2020-2025*. This additional step was in keeping with our intent to use the *Strategic Plan* as a living guide and basis for creating detailed plans for program, evaluation, fundraising, communications and finance as well as staff and Board development; and for tracking progress against our priorities and helping the staff and Board make decisions about whether to modify or take on different work to better advance our mission.

CONTEXT

We developed this plan in the context of heated xenophobic and divisive rhetoric across the country and alarming data about the emotional, educational and employment vulnerabilities of Montgomery County's community of Latino youth and their families. We updated the plan against a backdrop of additional challenges. In January 2020, Identity's administrative headquarters, the beloved "Pink House," suffered a devastating fire. Shortly thereafter, Covid-19 reached Montgomery County and devastated our client community, as disproportionate numbers of parents and caregivers lost jobs and became ill or both. And many students, who were already challenged, struggled to succeed with remote schooling and ultimately fell even further behind.

The Promise of Latino Youth in Montgomery County, (research released in October 2018 by the University of Maryland School of Public Health) confirmed a stark contrast between the hope and motivation of Identity youth and the reality unfolding for them. Latino youth in Montgomery County report high academic motivation, high academic expectations and a positive outlook for the future, which diminish markedly as they get older and/or face significant challenges. In actuality, they face barriers to success in their studies, work, and life—starting school unprepared for kindergarten, reading below grade level throughout elementary school, experiencing the school system's highest dropout rates, struggling to earn a post-secondary credential, and experiencing high rates of adversity and psychological distress.

While previous Identity needs assessments had already exposed extreme and disproportionate rates of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) among Identity youth and parents, emerging data on immigration specific ACES for just the second half of 2019 is shocking: 87% of immigrant youth and 74% of parents who migrated to the United States at 18 years of age or younger reported immigration specific ACES such as being afraid of dying, being lost, lacking food and water during their journey to the United States, and having to leave their home country because of gang or political violence. One third of all Identity middle and high school youth surveyed worried about a family member or close friend being deported. Nearly 10% of these youth had seen someone beaten or killed by gang members, soldiers and/or police. And, Identity's *2019 Early Care and Education Needs Assessment for Latino Families in Montgomery County* confirmed intergenerational impacts of



trauma. More than 78% of surveyed parents reported having experienced their own childhood traumas (36% of those traumas were related to physical or sexual abuse), informing the lack of trust that was their most significant barrier to attempting to enroll their young children in an early care and education program.

Additionally, Education Resource Strategies studies commissioned in 2019 by Montgomery County Public Schools found systemic patterns of inequity that prevent primarily Black, Brown and low-income students from attaining their full academic potential. These studies confirmed what students and families have been saying for decades and accelerated the creation of the Black and Brown Coalition for Educational Equity and Excellence by Identity and the NAACP Parents' Council.

Then, beginning in mid-March 2020 as Covid-19 spread, Identity began a sustained and unprecedented response not only to keep young people engaged in their education, older youth engaged in their work skills development and parents equipped to help them—but also to deliver lifesaving safety-net support and caring human connections to stave off hunger, homelessness, illness and despair in vulnerable families. Where Identity had already been recognized as a critical asset, trusted for its unwavering commitment to client and community empowerment, the pandemic amplified Identity's essential role in the fabric of Montgomery County. Identity was called upon to assume an larger role in guiding, advising and shaping the county's response to needs of the Latino community. As a result, all front-line Identity staff were cross trained in case management and non-clinical community mental health support techniques to help growing numbers of youth and families manage the unrelenting pandemic-related pressure that exacerbated existing stressors. In addition, community members were trained as youth Safety Ambassadors or as parent Promotoras to engage and connect their community to health and safety net resources, such as emergency food and COVID testing and vaccines. Some Promotoras were trained to recruit and co-facilitate non-clinical emotional support groups. Young people and parents demonstrated their unique ability to connect with peers living in low-income, isolated pockets of Montgomery County, especially at a time of critical need.

The pandemic and the necessary response to it have likewise profoundly impacted Identity's workforce and workplace. All staff—including those in direct service, administrative and operations—have faced much greater demands and assumed heavier workloads. While the community stakes have grown higher and the deadlines shorter, many staff are simultaneously managing uncertainty and stress in their personal lives. Moreover, hiring and maintaining adequate staff is challenging, as competition increases for culturally competent, bi-lingual, well-trained workers such as those employed by Identity.

Finally, as the county expects to receive thousands of immigrant and asylum-seeking children, youth and families, Identity is gearing up, in close coordination with Montgomery County government and Montgomery County Public Schools, to provide support including helping youth enroll in school and training programs; providing both emergency and intensive case management; and providing non-clinical emotional support programs, especially to (re)unifying families.

These realities underscore Identity's place as an essential lifeline and crucial partner within Montgomery County and have heightened the urgency of focusing on a set of priorities that we believe will make the greatest difference toward advancing our mission.

2020 VISION, MISSION, VALUES, HALLMARKS

We reaffirmed Identity's vision.

We envision a just and equitable society that nurtures all youth and is enriched by their contributions.

We modified Identity's **mission** statement to both reaffirm our focus on the Latino community and assert our inclusive and welcoming approach to all youth from communities disadvantaged by inequities. This approach does not mean that all youth receive the same services. It does mean that Identity is more intentionally inclusive and welcoming in all aspects of our work including our communications, relationships, and partnerships. In order to advance our mission, Identity recommitted to ensuring that youth have equitable supports and opportunities to thrive socially and emotionally, to achieve academically, and to succeed in the workplace.

In pursuit of a just, equitable and inclusive society, Identity creates opportunities for Latino and other historically underserved youth to realize their highest potential and thrive.

We updated the organization's values:

- Young people come first.
- All youth have great potential.
- Youth deserve more than one chance.
- Society is enhanced by cultural diversity.
- Community members are full and direct partners.
- To serve others is a privilege and requires excellence.

We reaffirmed our quality-driven hallmarks:

- Research-based programming.
- Holistic and integrated service delivery.
- Rigorous evaluation.
- Bi-lingual, bi-cultural and trauma-informed staff.
- Flexibility and responsiveness.

OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- ▶ **Become a model trauma-informed organization**
- ▶ **Increase strategies to help eliminate chronic gaps in academic achievement**
- ▶ **Scale and expand Workforce Development**
- ▶ **Develop our capacity for community organizing and advocacy**
- ▶ **Support talented staff and Board for success**

Our holistic approach has proven itself time and again to be effective and crucial to the success of our youth. We will continue to help youth improve social-emotional skills, achieve academic success and prepare for work with a range of culturally sensitive, trauma-informed and inclusive direct services and advocacy for systemic changes that address disparities in opportunities. We will also continue to evaluate and pursue promising initiatives that have the potential to increase the number and/or improve the outcomes of young people served.



EQUITABLE SUPPORTS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO THRIVE SOCIALLY AND EMOTIONALLY

To advance Identity's goal of ensuring that Identity youth have access to equitable supports and opportunities to thrive socially and emotionally, we will:

- **Become a model trauma-informed organization**
- **Expand Case Management and Non-clinical Community Mental Health Services**

Desired Outcomes	Strategies
<p>Reduce the effects of traumatic experiences among clients and reduce the effects of secondary trauma among staff.</p> <p>Position Identity to support other organizations in becoming trauma-informed and meeting the trauma-related needs of their communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Adopt a culturally competent organizational framework based on research-based best practices related to trauma and healing. ■ Develop staff and Promotora knowledge and skills to identify and respond to client trauma. ■ Ensure staff have the supports necessary to lessen compassion fatigue and turnover. ■ Increase the availability of non-clinical, culturally appropriate, trauma-informed emotional support programming in order to manage stress, anxiety, grief, loss and other impacts of trauma. ■ Ensure staff have the tools to assist other organizations in becoming trauma informed.
<p>Reflect culturally competent best practices of trauma-informed care and our increased understanding of community needs related to traumatic experiences in all core social-emotional curricula.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Review and update core social-emotional curricula.
<p>Stabilize clients' wellbeing by addressing their immediate needs.</p> <p>Promote program participants' social and emotional wellbeing and their ability to self-advocate and access services and resources necessary to meet their needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Maintain expanded availability of emergency case management services to address clients' basic needs. ■ Expand availability of comprehensive case management services for youth and families enrolled in Identity programs including screening, assessing, planning, and coordinating.
<p>Improve the sustainability and impacts of recreation programming as a key to healing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identify and secure additional resources to adequately staff the recreation programming. ■ Develop and implement an expanded range of offerings to advance desired outcomes related to trauma.

EQUITABLE SUPPORTS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO ACHIEVE ACADEMICALLY

To advance Identity's goal of ensuring that Identity youth have access to equitable supports and opportunities to achieve academically, we will:

- **Expand summer programming**
- **Pursue opportunities to improve elementary school outcomes**
- **Introduce a STEM component**

Desired Outcomes	Strategies
Decrease summer slide and improve student preparedness to persist and navigate major academic transition years.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increase availability of programs and activities that maintain and/or improve academic skills, including expanded approaches to summer programming. ■ Increase availability of programs and activities that improve social-emotional skills linked to academic success including persevering at key academic transition points.
Sustain and scale our successful elementary school literacy program to advance on-level reading by 3rd grade and thereby improve likelihood for high school completion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Qualify for ESSA program validation. ■ Increase the number of elementary school students served in Title 1 and Focus Schools.
Decide what, if any, additional role(s) to play in increasing quality early care and education and other kindergarten readiness approaches.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Test the feasibility of a partnership to increase high-quality, culturally competent, accessible early care and education slots in early care and education "deserts."
Increase awareness of and enthusiasm for science and technology-based 21st century skills and careers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Add a science and/or technology complement to the elementary school literacy program. ■ Increase opportunities for hands-on experiences and exposure to science and technology enrichment activities and opportunities across the organization.

EQUITABLE SUPPORTS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO SUCCEED IN THE WORKPLACE

To advance Identity's goal of ensuring that Identity's clients have access to equitable supports and opportunities to succeed in the workplace, we will:

■ Scale and expand Workforce Development

Desired Outcomes	Strategies
Expand access to sustainable career pathways.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increase and diversify the available types of training, internships and apprenticeships. ■ Increase the number of clients who successfully obtain industry valued credentials and progress towards living wage employment. ■ Strengthen our partnerships with Montgomery County Public Schools, Montgomery College and Universities at Shady Grove.
Expand eligibility for Identity's Workforce Development programming beyond youth enrolled in the Youth Opportunity Centers with particular attention to serving parents in order to promote a two-generation career readiness strategy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Add and/or adapt programming for youth who are not enrolled in a Youth Opportunity Center as well as for parents of Identity youth. ■ Strengthen the connection and collaboration of other Identity programs with Workforce Development.
Develop a model for employer driven and sponsored career pathways.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Pilot, evaluate and modify an employer driven and sponsored career pathway model. ■ Increase partnerships with potential employers. Position Identity as a source of talent.

JUST, EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

In order to advance Identity's goal of advancing our commitment to a just, equitable and inclusive society, we will:

■ Further develop our capacity for successful community organizing and advocacy

Desired Outcomes	Strategies
<p>Lead, partner and/or follow opportunities to advance our mission.</p> <p>Provide Identity's constituent community with accessible and actionable information and opportunities that are critical to their wellbeing, education and economic stability.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure the necessary resources to strengthen our capacity for high-level and continuous community organizing and advocacy work. Secure the necessary resources to develop a messaging capacity to share time-sensitive and actionable information with our constituents.
<p>Collaborate with impacted communities in order to advance goals articulated in The Promise Challenge and by the Black and Brown Coalition for Educational Equity and Excellence.</p> <p>The Promise Challenge calls for radically bending the trajectory of five trend lines in order to close the gap and harness the potential of Latino youth: social-emotional wellbeing; kindergarten readiness; on-level reading by 3rd grade; high school graduation; and work readiness. The Black and Brown Coalition calls for eradicating systemic and institutionalized patterns of resource inequity so that all students, and particularly Black and Brown students, have access to effective and diverse teachers and leaders and access to the resources, opportunities and supports they need to graduate high school and to be successful in college, career and life.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Band together with communities who suffer similar injustices and partners who believe every child has potential and deserves equitable resources, supports and opportunities to thrive. Train and support groups of young people and parents to speak up and get involved in addressing disparities in social-emotional, academic and workforce outcomes. Train and support emerging youth and parent leaders to assume leadership roles in efforts to eliminate disparities and improve outcomes in social-emotional wellbeing, academic achievement, and workforce development.
<p>Hold ourselves and others publicly accountable for progress against our advocacy goals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document, share, and publicize measurable progress in altering institutional inequities as a result of advocacy with transparency about gains and challenges.

STAFF AND BOARD DEVELOPMENT

To advance Identity's goal of engaging staff and Board members who share our core values and are well equipped and supported to fulfill the demands of their current and future position, we will:

■ Support staff and Board members for success

■ Ensure long term financial sustainability

Desired Outcomes	Strategies
<p>Reduce staff turnover and increase retention of high potential/high performing staff.</p> <p>Implement an organizational structure that supports growth and innovation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Improve staff recruitment, hiring and on-boarding processes. ■ Increase opportunities for in-house professional growth, leadership development and advancement. ■ Increase participation in external opportunities for professional development. ■ Increase compensation to better reflect the market. ■ Evaluate organizational structure options to better support our current work as well as the scaling of existing work and our capacity to embrace new initiatives.
<p>Implement newly adopted Board development goals.</p> <p>Increase Board's success in fundraising</p> <p>Access resources that support growth and sustainability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increase the size and skillsets of the Board to include more business, fundraising and governance expertise. ■ Ensure significant constituent representation and participation on the Board. ■ Implement standing committees. ■ Enhance Board's ability to act as ambassadors and advocates. Continue to diversify sources of revenue. ■ Lead a transformational fundraising campaign to support Identity's recent and future growth; meet physical and infrastructure needs; and ensure viability through unforeseen crises.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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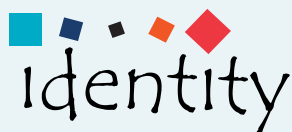
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