

# LEADERSHIP PATHWAYS TO A BETTER CENTRAL TEXAS

INDIVIDUAL GROWTH BLOSSOMING INTO  
COLLECTIVE COMMUNITY IMPACT



# Our Shared Future

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Informed by a cross-section of community voices, the Leadership Austin Board of Directors on May 28, 2024, adopted the following new Strategic Vision and Direction. This strategic plan marks a pivotal step in charting a course for a more inclusive, equitable, and transformative future for Central Texas, in partnership with community.

## Vision

A future where all people and communities contribute to a better Central Texas.

## Mission

We connect and develop leaders to courageously engage and transform our communities.

## Values



### Relationships

We foster intersectional connections.



### Equity

We have a responsibility to create more just and equitable communities.



### Learning

We are dedicated to lifelong learning that leads to transformative action.

# Strategic Vision Overview

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In the ever-evolving landscape of Central Texas, Leadership Austin stands at a monumental juncture in its organizational journey. As the Austin metropolitan area continues to be one of the fastest-growing regions in the nation, the demands on leadership and community engagement have never been more critical. Amidst this backdrop of rapid expansion, complex regional challenges and a disappearing appreciation for nuance, Leadership Austin has recognized an unparalleled opportunity to elevate its impact, harness the brilliance of five decades of alumni, and simultaneously equip and learn from the next generation of leaders.

At the heart of our vision is the aspiration for a future where **every individual and community** contributes toward a better Central Texas. Leadership Austin envisions a society where diversity in thought, background, and action coalesces to foster vibrant and resilient communities. This vision is not just an ideal; it is a call to action for all who believe in the potential of our region. **It is an invitation to those who recognize the value of diverse points of view and candid conversation, even when that means sitting in discomfort to create courageous solutions to complex problems.**

Leadership Austin is guided by its core values that are indispensable to our identity and operations. We lead with **equity** and (re)commit to creating more just and equitable communities. We understand that real change comes from authentic, intersectional **relationships**. In our pursuit of transformative action, we are devoted to **lifelong learning**, acknowledging that growth and understanding are never complete and that every new insight brings us closer to the change we wish to see.

The mission of Leadership Austin—**to connect and develop leaders who courageously engage and transform our communities**—is more relevant today than ever. As we face the myriad challenges and opportunities presented by our region's growth—everything from attainable affordable housing, our community's history of systemic and structural racism, to water insecurity, our mission is our guidepost directing our efforts toward more meaningful community engagement and leadership development. This plan outlines three pathways:

## The Three Pathways



# Our Leadership Approach

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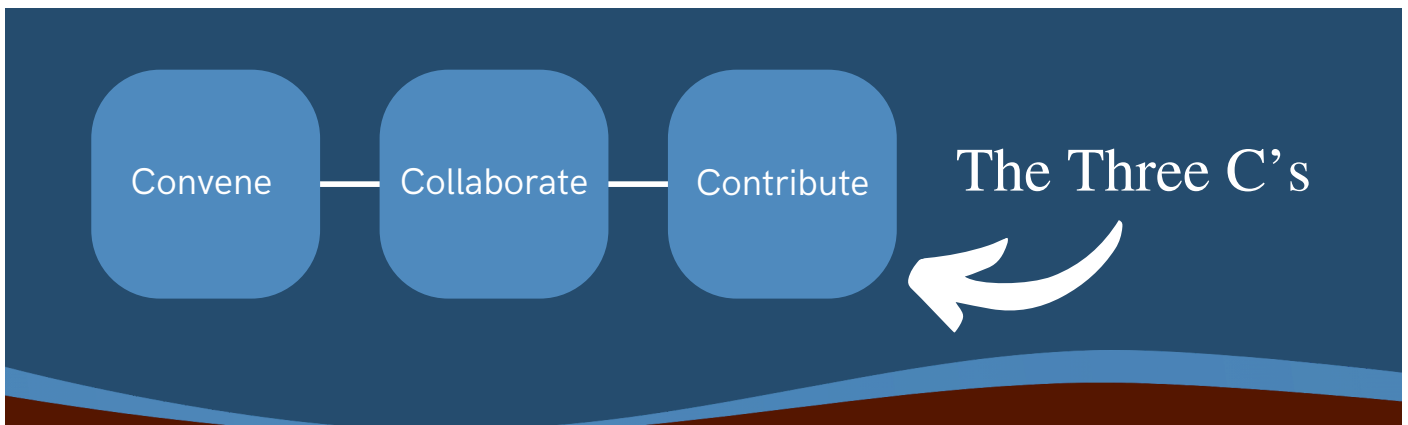
## *What is Courageous Leadership?*

**Courageous Leaders bring out the best in others, lead boldly through uncertainty, and prioritize a community-centered\* course of action, even if tough or unpopular.**

Courageous leadership shows up at work, at home, and in our neighborhoods and communities. Leading courageously looks like embracing an authentic leadership style unique to you, and:

- Using my influence and resources for the greater good
- Embracing empathy, curiosity, and listening to diverse viewpoints
- Practicing vulnerability and constructive dialogue across differences
- Taking calculated risks and transforming outdated practices
- Navigating changes quickly and addressing issues directly

*\*Community-centered means the leader is creating conditions for their communities to thrive.*



## *What does it mean to contribute?*

**Contribution is about taking tangible action** whether that be through donating time or resources to causes and organizations that make a difference. It involves volunteering in various capacities, giving financial gifts, mentoring others, advocating for important issues, and sharing one's talents and knowledge to uplift and support those around you.

Your contribution may look like serving on a nonprofit board or city commission, working on a community project and/or being more attentive to public issues, candidates, and elections. Overall, it means applying what one learns in Leadership Austin out into the world. Contributing calls for active listening and collaborating with others to co-create the community we want to see. **Leadership Austin imagines a future where every individual shares their time, talents, and treasures to enact positive change in their own unique ways.**

# The Time is Now

Leadership Austin adopted its last formal strategic plan in 2015 with strategic concepts developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, and with the advent of new leadership in 2023, it presents an opportune moment to build on Leadership Austin's strong foundation and prepare for the future with intention. Likewise, the world we live in needs leaders who are equipped to create strong pathways to understanding, strengthen the community by addressing important issues, and to foster a sense of belonging and inclusion in a way that is no longer aspirational, but the standard.

## Issues:

Leadership Austin programs integrate leadership skills, community issues, and relationships. While "hot topic" issues evolve over time, core issues include:



To achieve transformational change, Leadership Austin teaches leaders about courageous leadership, systems thinking, and levers for change, including but not limited to:

- **Civic Life** - democracy, policy, and legislation
- **Community Engagement** - nonprofit, faith, grassroots, and neighborhoods
- **Culture of Belonging** - diversity, inclusion and equity
- **Innovation and Entrepreneurship** - pursuing new endeavors with an uncertain outcome
- **Constructive Discourse** - media consumption, truth, and respectful dialogue
- **Philanthropy** - contributing resources for good causes
- **Tech and Emerging Trends** - leveraging and responding to the ever-changing landscape
- **Workplace Culture and Talent** - cultivating psychological safety and retention at work

# Our Value Proposition

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Leadership Austin is where you find your community, experience deeper learning, and join movers and shakers doing good in Central Texas; it is about individual growth blossoming into collective community impact. Leadership Austin's strength and demonstrated value proposition lies in **convening leaders** around those critical regional issues. In this strategic vision, we aim to extend our reach and deepen our impact in meaningful ways by including voices of more leaders across Central Texas. **We see growth as the expansion of our programs' relevance, exposure, and reach, integrating expertise and perspectives from across the five-county region.** This growth is not merely about scale; it is about enriching our curriculum and networks with diverse lived experiences to foster relationships that drive regional problem-solving. We believe these relationships can only be forged by the individuals who make up the very communities in which we live and work.

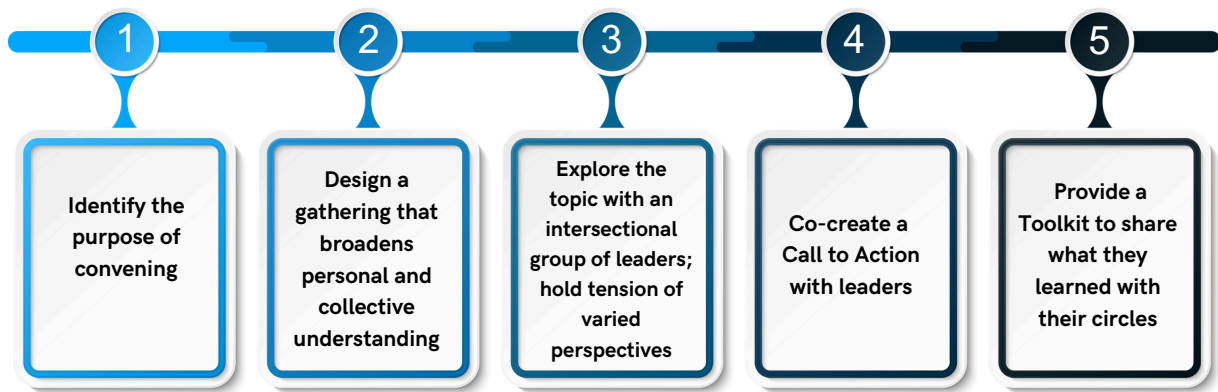


*"I went from being in one lane and broadened my view. I met people I would have never met. My blinders were off."*  
- Leadership Austin Alumnus

## *Framework for Intentional Convening*

So often meetings, conferences, and gatherings are directionless and a waste of time. Leaders spend countless hours both professionally and personally relinquishing precious time and leaving empty-handed when it comes to gaining something meaningful that creates exposure to new relationships, a deeper understanding of an issue, or a more introspective understanding of self.

Leadership Austin has occupied the space of convening well and leverages this model that can be a blueprint for all types of groups, organizations, and causes. There is a collective understanding that how you gather, matters. And, the ability to convene meaningfully and mindfully creates a ripple effect.



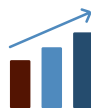
### At Leadership Austin we:

- **Convene** to learn, grow, and rejuvenate
- **Convene** to radically listen to perspectives
- **Convene** to acknowledge the need for change and transition
- **Convene** to test our assumptions and learn new ways of doing and being
- **Convene** to build relationships and nurture them
- **Convene** to dismantle and build new pathways
- **Convene** to say hello and goodbye
- **Convene** to explore issues and expose problems
- **Convene** to ignite individual strengths and collective action
- **Convene** to celebrate and recognize

## Our Desired Outcomes



Leadership Austin setting the standard among the nation's Community Leadership Organizations



Increased engagement metrics from alumni and the broader regional community



A healthy diversified revenue mix with growing earned revenue and cash reserves

# Pathway 1: Elevate Central Texas

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We believe in fostering relationships that serve as the foundation for regional prosperity. The issues facing our communities transcend geographic boundaries and jurisdictions. As a platform organization, Leadership Austin does not take on every issue itself; instead we enable leaders throughout the ecosystem to grow and become more effective as a whole community. We recognize we can achieve more in collaboration with leaders and leadership programs across Central Texas.

**Goal 1: Expand Leadership Austin’s relevance, exposure, and reach within our five-county region to foster relationships that facilitate regional problem-solving.**

## Objectives:

1. Build new relationships and a network of partners across Central Texas.
2. Enhance programs and curriculum to reflect broader regional perspectives, expertise, and lived experience.
3. Bolster regional relationships and problem-solving capacity.



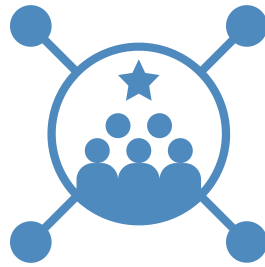
*"Change happens at the speed of trust within a community."*

*-Focus Group participant*



# Pathway 2: Go-To Leadership Community

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We believe in championing the inherent leader in all people. As demonstrated by our alumni, leadership is a journey of learning, growing, activating change, and lifting up future generations. Leadership Austin connects you to the issues and causes that you are passionate about, the power players in the space, and pathways to contribute to a better Central Texas.

**Goal 2: To be the premier source of leadership development that connects, supports, and activates Central Texans throughout their community leadership journey.**

## Objectives:

1. Leadership Austin is a trusted thought leader on next-level community leadership.
2. Engage leaders at all stages of leadership development, with entry points and pathways to learning and community connection beyond cohort participation.
3. Pilot revenue-generating programming that advances our mission and expands access for alumni, non-alumni, and leaders across Central Texas.
4. Refine Leadership Austin's new suite of offerings, grow the pipeline of interest, and effectively demonstrate program impact.

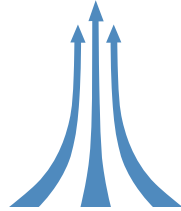


*"Keep bringing us together to get vulnerable and find solutions to problems our community faces. Help us connect so we can create the future we want to see."*

*-Leadership Austin Alumnus*

# Pathway 3: Sustainable Future

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We believe any aspiring leader should have equitable access to community leadership development. This is getting harder as expenses rise for anyone who calls the Greater Austin area home. A strong financial future for nonprofits like Leadership Austin has a ripple effect benefitting our communities for generations.

**Goal 3: Ensure equitable access to programming with a revenue model that achieves profitability, alumni ownership in Leadership Austin's success, and optimized resources for organizational sustainability.**

## Objectives:

1. Increase earned revenue through value-added programs for individuals and companies.
2. Alumni see themselves as part of the region's civic infrastructure and pay it forward with contributions back into Leadership Austin. (See "contribution" definition on page 3.)
3. Create absolute clarity on the stories of impact and equity resulting from donations.
4. Examine our long-term needs and opportunities for program and event space.
5. Invest in key staff, technology, and assets needed to implement our strategic plan.
6. Prioritize a workplace culture of belonging, resilience, and innovation.

# Appendix

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Addendum A: Summary Sheet: Goals & Objectives

Addendum B: Future Endowment Exploration

Addendum C: The Mindset

Addendum D: Listening Journey and Acknowledgements

# Addendum A: Summary of Goals & Objectives

## Pathway 1: Elevate Central Texas

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## Pathway 3: Sustainable Future

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## Addendum B: Future Endowment Exploration

Explore viability of endowment and planned giving

Leadership Austin is considering an innovative long-term strategy to secure the organization's long-term sustainability and supplement its current funding model. By contemplating the development of an endowment, Leadership Austin hopes to secure a more stable and prosperous future for the organization and its participants. Simultaneously, Leadership Austin will explore planned giving by legacy leaders.

To test viability will require an initial investment for expert guidance. We envision the initial phase, spanning years 1-4, involving comprehensive feasibility studies to assess the readiness, robustness and viability of the endowment, effective financial structures, and focus on cultivating internal support and establishing meaningful connections with potential donors and stakeholders. Following this exploratory work and assuming adequate financial reserves, should we proceed, the work would transition into its active phase in years 5-8, where we would begin the campaign soliciting endowment contributions. This strategic approach aims to provide Leadership Austin with a steady financial foundation, crucial for sustaining operations and expanding scholarship opportunities.

## Addendum C: The Mindset

Leadership Austin is one of the driving forces of creating mindset shifts in the lives of leaders across Central Texas. Recognizing that leadership requires a commitment to lifelong learning and self awareness, Leadership Austin facilitates moments for leaders to share different ideas, opinions and perspectives while finding co-conspirators to tackle critical community issues.

The idea of mindsets is expansive and can surface in a variety of ways. Instead of being afraid to tackle the blind spots that leaders may exhibit, or examine perspectives that have never been challenged, **Leadership Austin embraces those “opposing views” and creates a space for leaders to practice navigating contradiction while maintaining respectful relationships.**



Source: Benefit Mindset, by Ash Buchanan

Since 1979, Leadership Austin has centered the importance of building relationships that ultimately strengthen leaders who then transform communities.

With this in mind, the organization adopted a network mindset approach to the work. To do so means that programming, partnerships, and projects align and firmly embrace the idea that everything is connected. It is a way of looking at the world that dismantles the hierarchical mindset and shifts from a linear world view to a living equitable systems world view, the distancing of the top-down and directive leadership posture to a purposeful, collective, collaborative, distributed approach to leadership.

Out of this shift has emerged a new look at leadership – that is not only courageous but engaging, facilitative, shared, and holds the tension of looking inward while also holding space for outward shared meaning.

Hierarchical Mindset	Network Mindset
Mechanistic worldview	Living systems worldview
Systems seen as hierarchical pyramid	System seen as a web of interactions
Organization at the center of focus	Purpose at the center of focus
Top-down directive leadership	Distributed, servant leadership
Centralize decision-making	Collective decision-making
Impulse to command and control	Impulse to connect and collaborate
Information restricted	Information shared
Task-oriented	Relationship-oriented, people-centered
Bias toward deliberate strategy	Embrace of emergent strategy
Incremental continuous improvement	Exponential change

Leadership Austin has organically and consistently leveraged the idea of choosing courage over comfort as a model for creating community change. The courageous leadership model is aligned with the four principles of a network championed by Jane Wei-Skillern.

Leaders who have subscribed to choosing courage and a network mindset focus on the following:

- Scaling impact, not growing their organization or function
- Being part of an interconnected system, not the center of it
- Sharing leadership and credit with peers, not hoarding power or trying to be a hero
- Building trust-based relationships, not systems of control

It is with this background and framework in place that Leadership Austin will approach its work across three key pathways: Elevating Central Texas, Becoming the Go-To Leadership Community, and Creating a Sustainable Future.

## Addendum D: Listening Journey & Acknowledgements

Leadership Austin has gathered insights from a series of in-depth stakeholder engagements to shape this Strategic Plan. Activities included one-on-one staff interviews, bi-weekly strategy sessions, board retreats, and various focus groups involving alumni, donors, and regional leaders. This extensive feedback has been instrumental in shaping a strategic plan that reflects the community's diverse perspectives, needs, and aspirations.

- Full-day Board visioning retreat
- 6 Board meeting strategy sessions
- 1:1 Interviews with Leadership Austin staff
- Regular bi-weekly strategy sessions with Leadership Austin staff
- Review of 2023 Alumni Survey results (quantitative and qualitative data)
- Regional growth board sub-committee meetings
- Leadership journey board sub-committee meetings
- Finance and Engagement joint committee (3 strategy sessions)
- Alumni Committee
- Full day Leadership Austin Conference participant interviews
- Feedback from 2024 Essential Class
- Feedback from 2024 Emerge Class
- Essential alumni focus group
- Emerge alumni focus group
- Individual donors focus group
- Corporate donors focus group
- Regional leadership (non alumni) focus group
- Former Fellows survey
- Vision Council engagement and survey
- Past Leadership Austin program participants
- Alumni-only pre-conference session
- Former Board Members, former CEOs, Fellows, and Affiliate Alumni focus group



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