



ELLA BAKER  
CENTER for  
HUMAN RIGHTS

# Powering people, powering change.

*our strategic framework for safer communities*

2021, Version 1.0

# We envision safe communities for all.

We believe all communities deserve true safety—dignity, prosperity, and deep democracy. These are the building blocks of our new vision of safety.

Community safety comes from a material shift in resources—out of the prison industrial complex and into community-led solutions—emphasizing the communities most impacted by decades of racist policy schemes, from “tough on crime” policing to redlining and gentrification.

Our strategic framework honors Ella Baker’s legacy by building grassroots power to win transformational change.

*She led. So can you.*

Cover photo:  
Poet Venus Jones performs at the  
*We Keep Us Safe* book launch  
event in February 2020 at Restore  
Oakland.

Above photo: Ella Baker at  
Democratic National Convention  
rally, Atlantic City, NJ, 1964

# The Landscape

For 25 years, Ella Baker Center for Human Rights has been fighting to close the gap between the world we have and the world we deserve.

## **Democracy Is on the Line**

The United States stands in a state of crisis that is without precedent in modern history: fallout from a global pandemic, rising authoritarianism, widespread police violence, extensive voter suppression, economic devastation, and more. At the same time, an equally unprecedented coalition—multiracial, multigenerational, multigender, cross-class, and geographically diverse—is rising up across the nation to meet these challenges.

## **Public Health Solutions**

For decades the “healthcare not handcuffs” refrain has served alongside “books not bars” and “jobs not jails” to emphasize Ella Baker Center’s long standing demand to defund police and prisons and invest in institutions that strengthen communities. We believe in public health solutions to public health problems—this extends to the economic and social health of a neighborhood or community.

## **Defunding Police and Prisons**







Concepts like defunding the police, abolishing prisons, restorative justice, and community-led safety solutions are being discussed and seriously considered by a wider audience than ever before. Ella Baker Center has the experience and credibility to provide models for successful divest and invest campaigns.

Ella Baker Center is uniquely prepared for this opportunity to turn previously impossible ideas into political realities. We bring policy solutions based on decades of work to shift resources away from police and prisons, coupled with real, replicable models for shifting communities away from fear-based relationships and toward a culture of care at the local level.

This strategic framework represents one small step on the pathway to collective liberation. A safer world is possible—and we will reach it together.

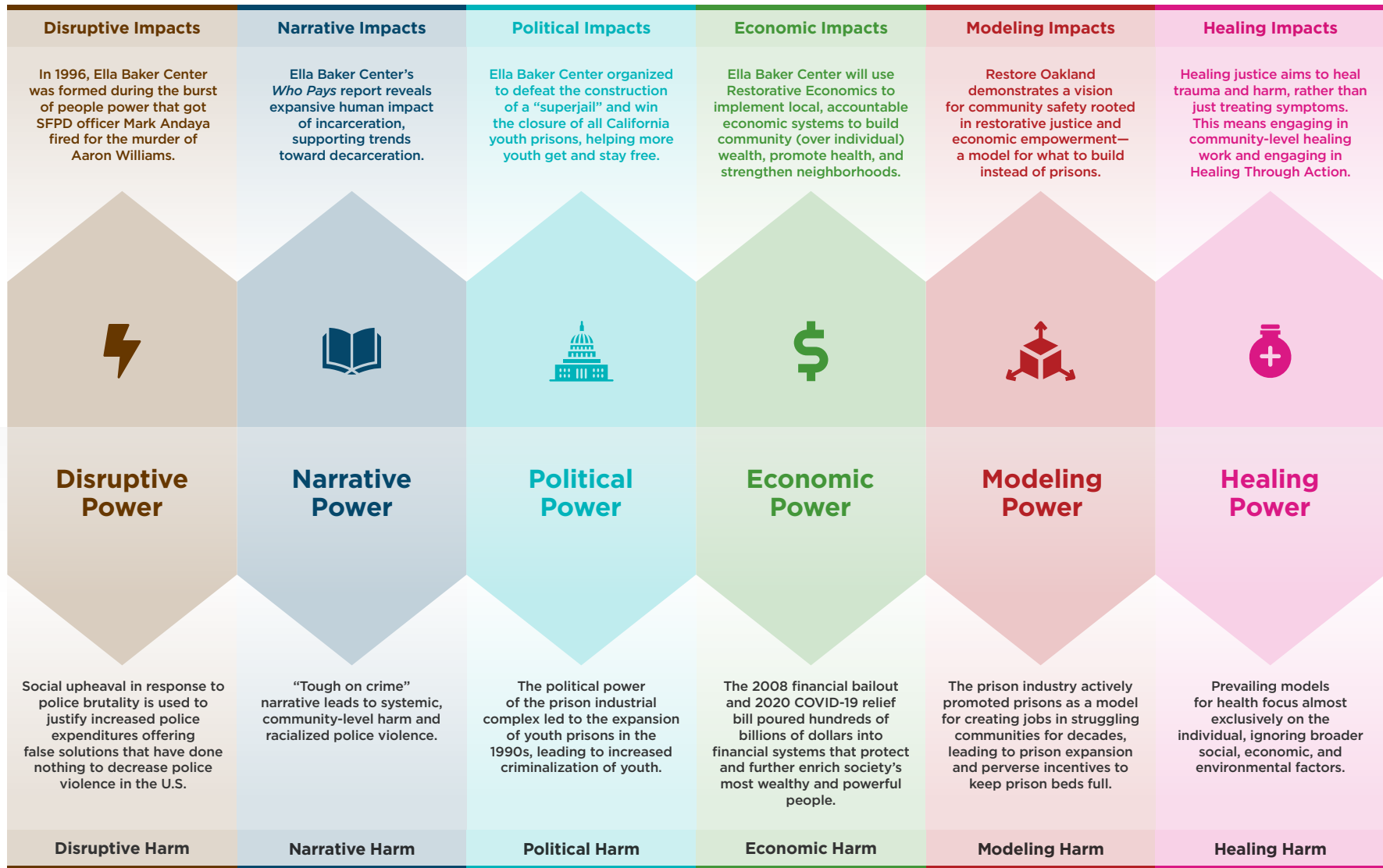
# Understanding Power

The Ella Baker Center’s understanding of power is inspired by the legendary activist Ai-jen Poo’s community power framework. We build and exercise power in six distinct arenas, shown below, to advance a new vision of safety and secure transformational social change.

|  |  |  |   |  |   |
|--|--|--|---|--|---|
| <br><b>Disruptive Power</b>   | <br><b>Narrative Power</b>  | <br><b>Political Power</b>  | <br><b>Economic Power</b>  | <br><b>Modeling Power</b>   | <br><b>Healing Power</b>                   |
| The ability to disrupt the status quo, challenge business as usual, and dramatize what’s wrong with current conditions.                                      | The ability to tell the story of what’s happening in the world and why, capture the imagination of growing numbers of people, and change mass consciousness and culture. | The ability to mobilize voters, elect movement-aligned and responsive representatives in government, and influence legislative agendas at local, state, and national levels. | The ability to redirect resources at the system level—from local to state to national—away from unfavorable policies, programs, or institutions and toward movement-aligned alternatives. | The ability to build, demonstrate, and promote alternatives to existing institutions, systems, and practices.  | The ability to alleviate and repair harm at the level of the individual, community, or society.                               |
| —<br><b>1997: Justice for Aaron Williams</b><br>Ella Baker Center wins our campaign to fire a San Francisco police officer for the murder of Aaron Williams. | —<br><b>2004: Books not Bars</b><br>Ella Baker Center launches Books not Bars campaign, closing five of eight youth prisons in CA within a few years.                    | —<br><b>2008: Defeating Prop 6</b><br>Statewide coalition defeats proposition that would have expanded prisons.  | —<br><b>2015: 50% for Jobs not Jails</b><br>Campaign wins millions of dollars annually for community-based reentry services.  | —<br><b>2019: Restore Oakland</b><br>Grand opening highlights Restore Oakland as a model for community safety. | —<br><b>2021: Healing through Action Fellowship</b><br>Provides system-impacted families with tools for healing and advocacy. |

# Power Model

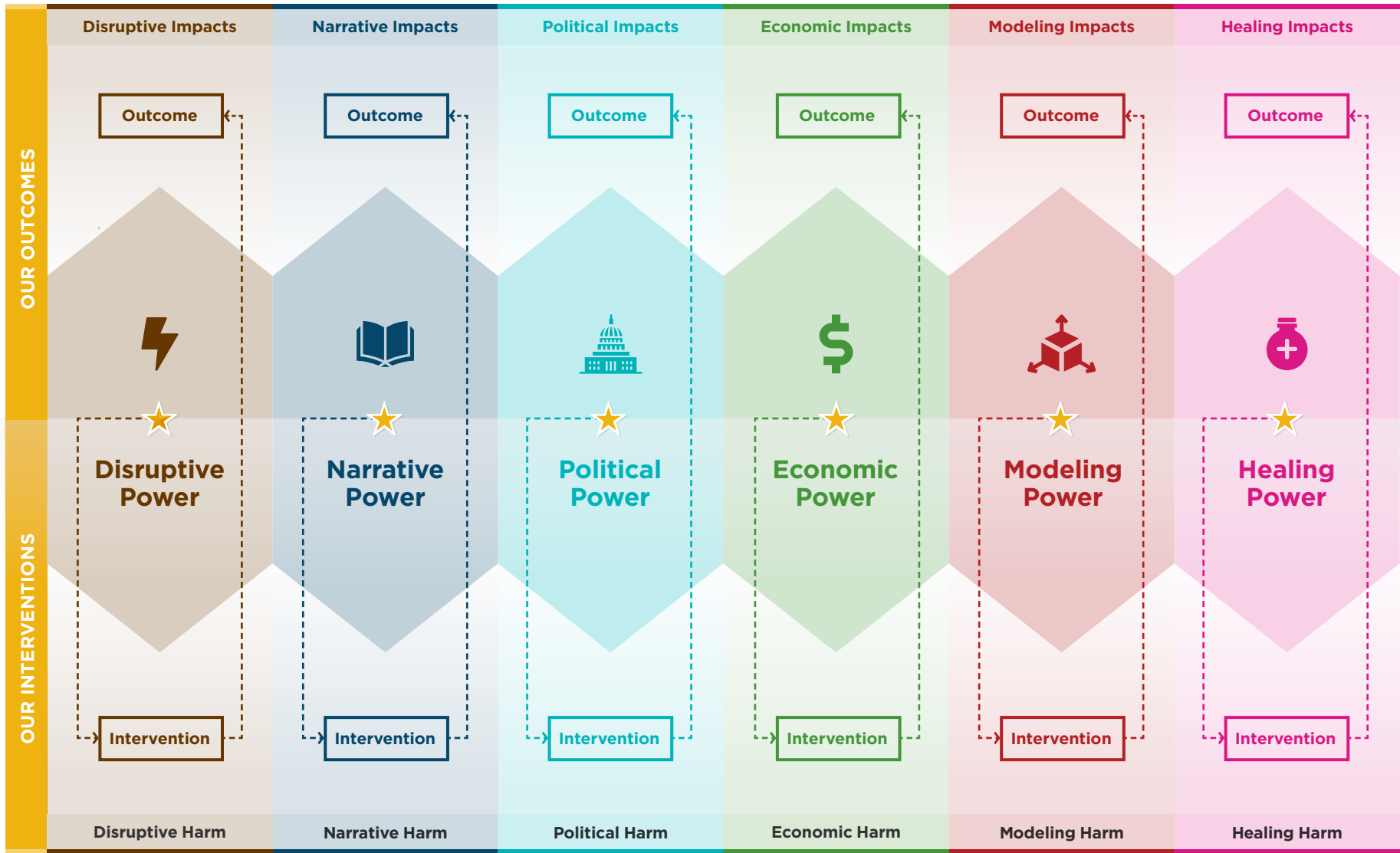
Through the Ella Baker Center’s power model, we analyze the harm caused by current systems—police and prisons, state and local governments, media narratives, and more. We develop visionary solutions to intervene, transform the harm caused by the status quo, and reclaim power for our communities.



# Theory of Change

The Ella Baker Center intervenes by exercising disruptive, narrative, political, economic, modeling, and healing power to transform harm and build lasting power for our communities.

**“Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.”** —Frederick Douglass



# Campaign Screening: 6M Criteria

The Ella Baker Center’s campaign screening tool illustrates our commitment to focusing on smart, high-impact, and forward-thinking work. Prior to adopting a new campaign or project, staff with a role in the proposed initiative collectively assess whether it meets all six of the following criteria.

| Meaningful   | Moveable   | Manageable  | Maintainable  | Mission-Focused  | Momentum-Oriented   |
|--|--|---|---|--|---|
| <p>A <i>meaningful</i> campaign meets the moment—it aligns with our organizational values, achieves real-world impacts for the communities we serve, and addresses the urgent needs of system-impacted individuals, families, and communities. In a <i>meaningful</i> campaign, staff and members are moved and activated by the work.</p> | <p>A <i>moveable</i> campaign has a goal that is politically possible with the people power, resources, and influence available to Ella Baker Center and our coalition partners. In <i>moveable</i> campaigns or projects, Ella Baker Center participation brings added value and increases the likelihood of success.</p> | <p>In a <i>manageable</i> campaign, Ella Baker Center has enough resources, capacity, and influence to guide the direction of the work and successfully intervene—either through course correction or by shutting down the campaign—if the campaign unexpectedly goes in a harmful direction.</p> | <p>In a <i>maintainable</i> campaign, Ella Baker Center has, or is able to manifest, the staff capacity and resources to effectively deliver on our role for the full duration of the campaign or project. If our role in a campaign or project is limited, <i>maintainable</i> means that we can effectively deliver on that role for the intended duration.</p> | <p>A <i>mission-focused</i> campaign advances a truth and reinvestment agenda by shifting resources and public support away from police and prisons and toward community-led work that advances a culture of care. Successful completion of a <i>mission-focused</i> campaign means decreased funding and support for the criminal legal system—fewer officers, fewer prisons, fewer people in prison, and less funding.</p> | <p>A <i>momentum-oriented</i> campaign builds Ella Baker Center’s capacity, strength, and influence, putting us in a better position to advance other campaigns or projects and achieve future victories. <i>Momentum-oriented</i> campaigns build grassroots capacity by transferring power to system-impacted people and families, and democratizing access to power for people and communities that have been harmed by the criminal legal system.</p> |
| <p><b>PRIORITY LEVELS</b></p>  |  |   |   |  |   |
| <p><b>Tier I:</b> Ella Baker Center leads, co-leads, or anchors a Tier I campaign or project. Requires organization-wide participation and is our highest priority.</p>  |  | <p><b>Tier II:</b> One Ella Baker Center team anchors and provides primary staffing for a Tier II campaign, with some support from other teams. Ella Baker Center may be leading the Tier II campaign or we may be supporting a partner organization.</p>   |   | <p><b>Tier III:</b> One Ella Baker Center team staffs the work for a Tier III campaign. Little to no support is required from other teams.</p>   |   |



OUR  
**Interventions**





## Disruptive Power

When disruptive power is in the wrong hands, genuine social, political, and economic harm is exploited to further entrench existing power structures—frequently at the expense of vulnerable populations.

Ella Baker Center was born from a grassroots movement fueled by disruptive power. In 1996, when SFPD officer Mark Andaya murdered Aaron Williams, activists led a movement to hold SFPD accountable and demand justice. Ella Baker Center was formed during this burst of people power that ultimately got Mark Andaya fired.

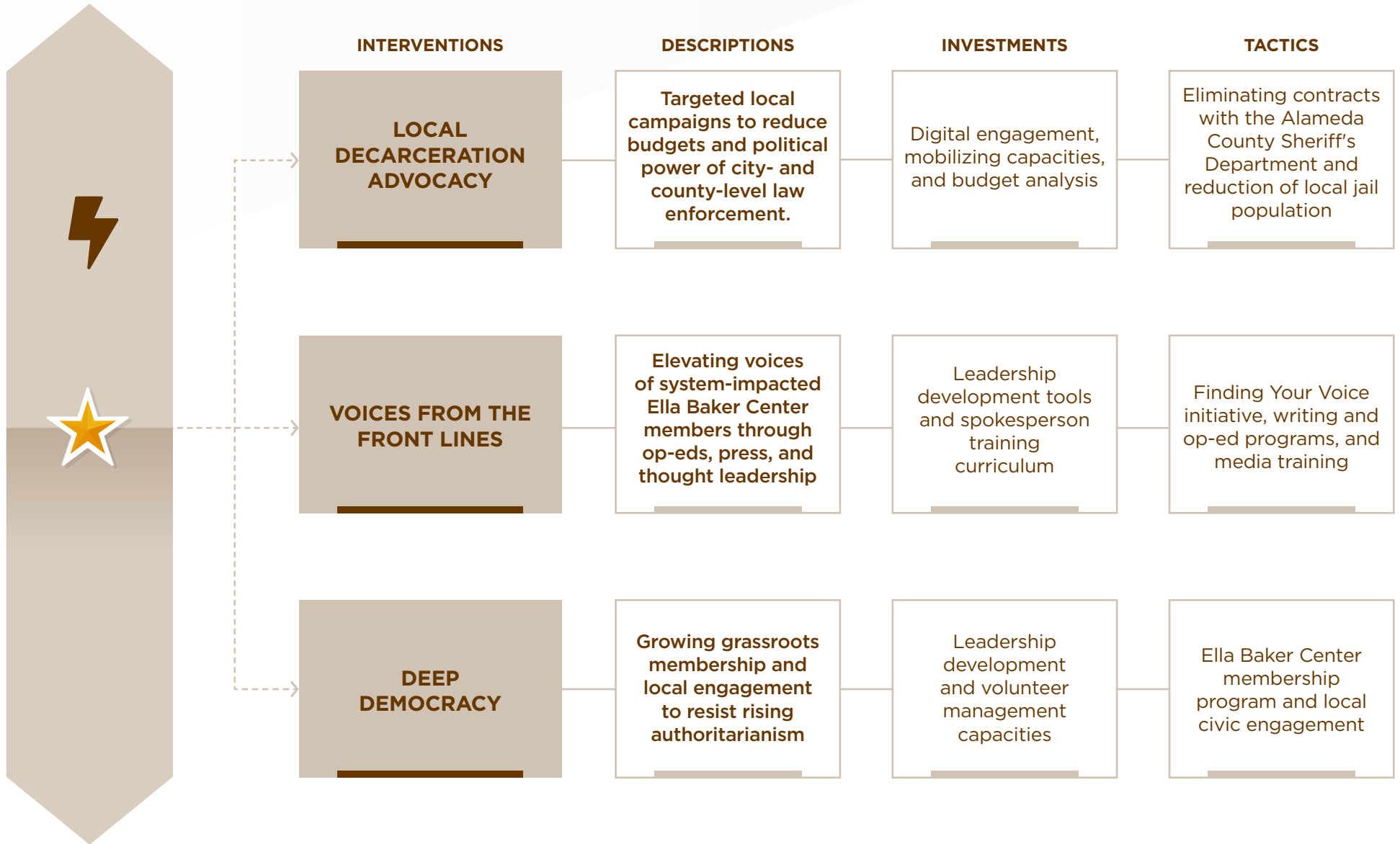
At Ella Baker Center, we exercise disruptive power effectively to win transformative outcomes by combining disruption with strategic messaging, grassroots organizing, and visionary policy solutions.

As we look at the movements emerging from the aftermath of the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and so many others, we need leaders and institutions that have been fighting to disrupt police-centric ideas, end impunity for killer cops, and abandon the “tough on crime” ideology that brought on the crisis of mass incarceration and militarized police violence. Ella Baker Center has been doing just that for 25 years.

*A protester demands justice for Raymond Reyes, who was killed by the Alameda County Sheriff's department in 2019 at Santa Rita Jail.*

# Disruptive Power

*The ability to disrupt the status quo, challenge business as usual, and dramatize what's wrong with current conditions.*





# Narrative Power

Over the last half-century, we have seen the dominance of a narrative that encourages punishment and imprisonment. This narrative dehumanizes marginalized people and communities to exert control and hoard resources. Its consequences compound harm individually, collectively, and intergenerationally.

In 2015, Ella Baker Center published a groundbreaking report, *Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families*, which revealed that the cost of incarceration is shared by families and communities, and particularly by women of color. This report has become influential in shaping policy decisions on justice since its release.

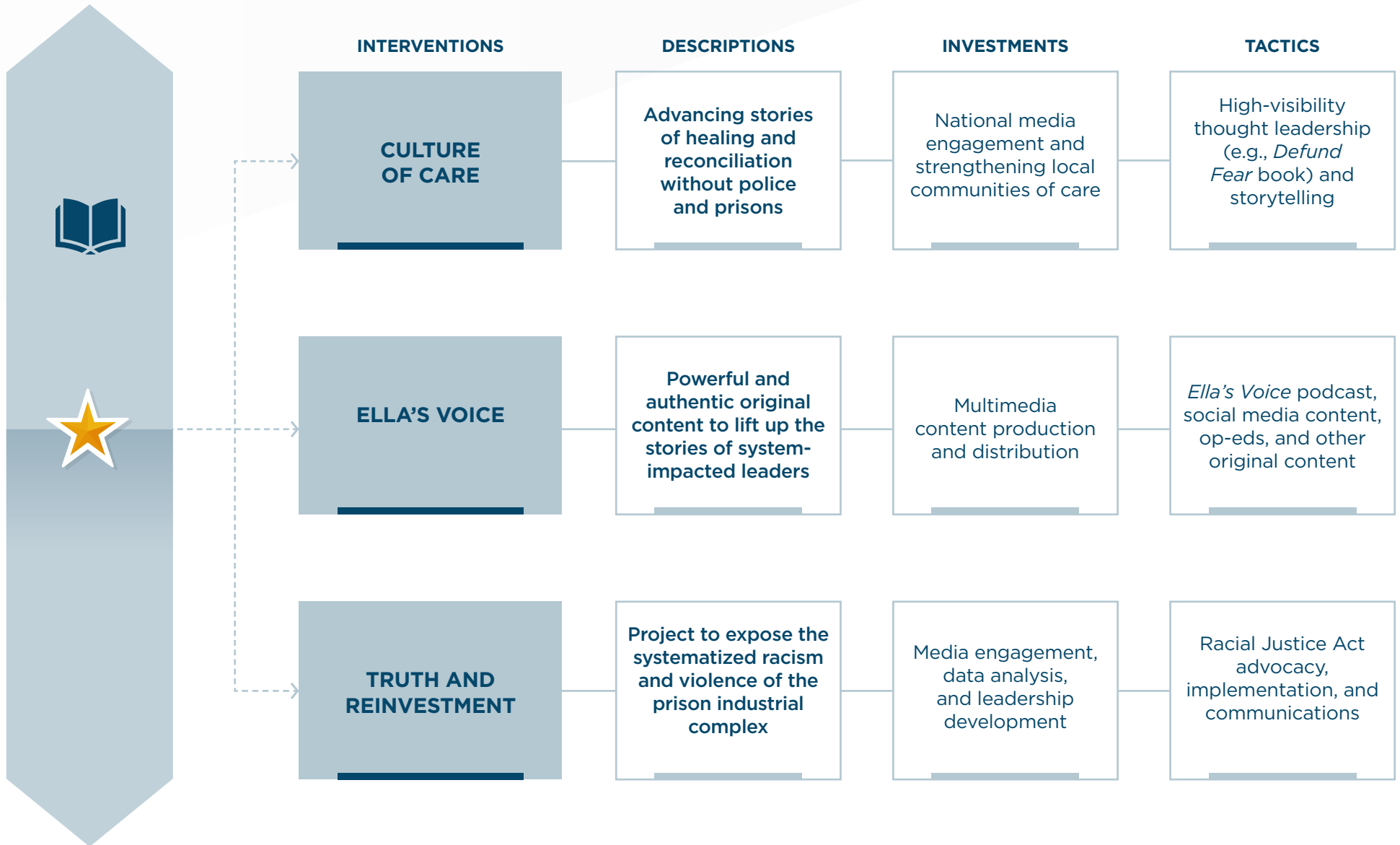
Ella Baker Center’s Executive Director Zach Norris’s book *We Keep Us Safe* (now known as *Defund Fear*) published in 2019 outlines a visionary culture of care and advocates for completely different narratives to address a broken system. *Defund Fear* was ahead of the curve in anticipating—and presenting solutions for—the watershed moments that brought tens of millions out onto the streets during the 2020 uprisings after the murder of George Floyd.

We realized in our earliest days that changing the political narrative is a critical foundation for the success of our vision. Without narrative power, any investments in organizing and mobilization will always be fighting an uphill battle.

*Community members and Ella Baker Center staff demand a Truth and Reinvestment agenda at the Alameda County Board of Supervisors, shifting the narrative (and county dollars) away from the Sheriff and into community care.*

# Narrative Power

*The ability to tell the story of what's happening in the world and why, capture the imagination of growing numbers of people, and change mass consciousness and culture.*





*Ella Baker Center Policy Associate Derick Morgan speaks at a press conference announcing the California Racial Justice Act in March 2020 at the State Capitol. Photo by Courtney Hanson.*

## Political Power

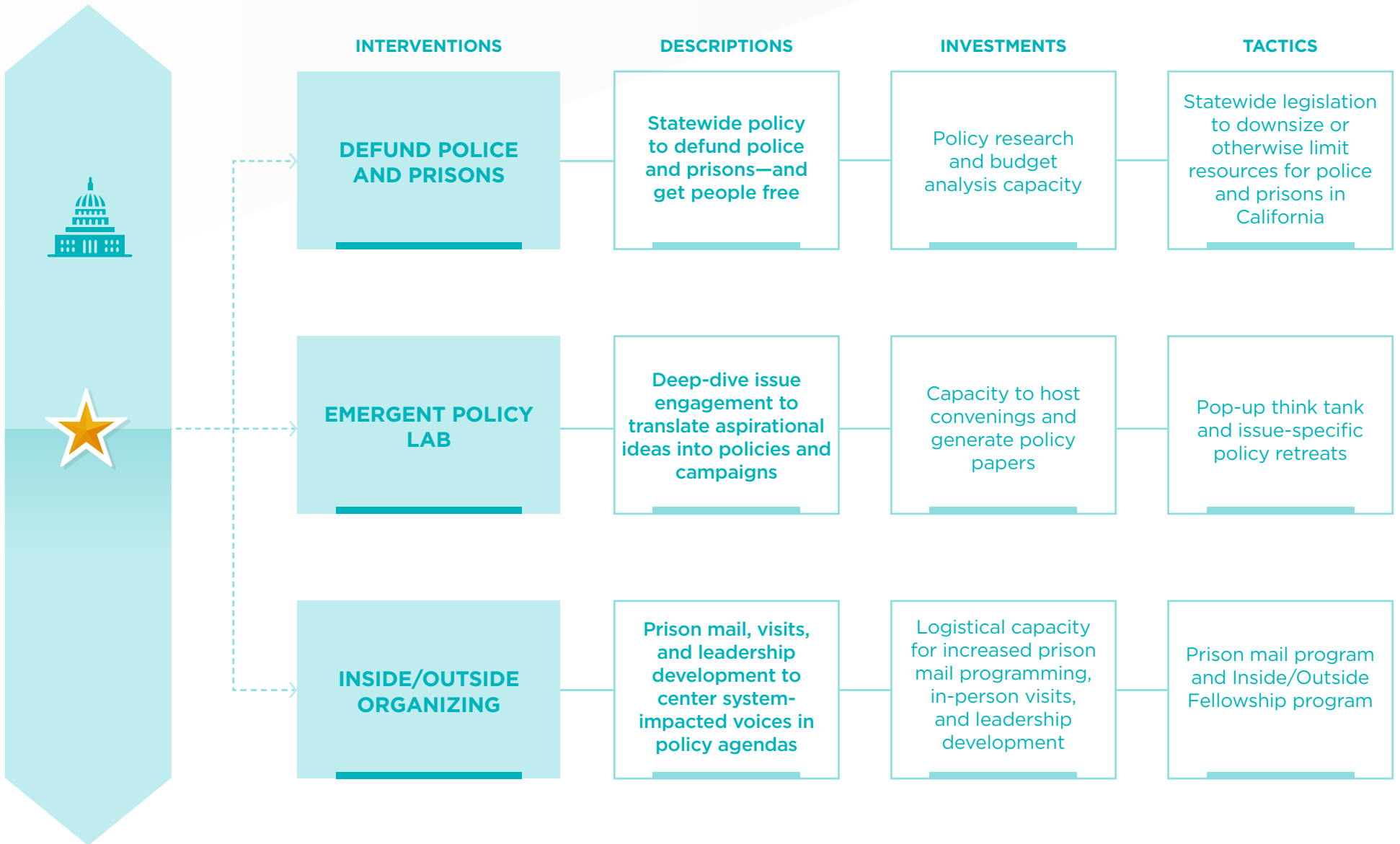
The prison-industrial complex is a manifestation of the way political power is exerted to maintain control over bodies, and life-or-death outcomes are left in the hands of politicians. With political power in the wrong hands, we expect increased surveillance, immigration enforcement, detention, sentences for people deemed “irredeemable,” criminalization of political dissent, and technology weaponized to incarcerate people in new ways and reinforce marginalization.

Ella Baker Center is well positioned to generate policy outcomes from our grassroots strategies. Our role is essential in transforming political power—from news media to actions in the streets—into systemic change. As the most codified version of power, written policy and democratic leadership are critical in establishing intentions and orchestrating change in our communities.

We envision using political power to amplify community needs, shift power into community hands, increase democratic participation, and uplift Black and Brown communities. We organize with community members and elected representatives to advance movement-aligned policy priorities.

# Political Power

*The ability to mobilize voters, elect movement-aligned and responsive representatives in government, and influence legislative agendas at local, state, and national levels.*





## Economic Power

When economic power is in the wrong hands, we see a catastrophic misallocation of public funds and political power that fails to meet the needs of the most vulnerable populations—often deepening, rather than alleviating, the already egregious disparities in access to resources.

Ella Baker Center has reallocated tens of millions of dollars in public funds away from police and prisons and toward local job training and economic empowerment programs. At a moment when so many communities are rightfully calling for defunding the police, Ella Baker Center’s experience with successfully redirecting resources to community-serving programs provides a valuable blueprint for local activists.

In our decades of work, we have seen firsthand how systems of economic harm work together with the criminal legal system to target, displace, and imprison populations deemed “undesirable” by real estate developers. Community reinvestment is critical as we work to move beyond the prison industrial complex.

*Our groundbreaking 50% for Jobs Not Jails campaign reallocated millions of dollars away from police and toward community-based reentry services.*

# Economic Power

*The ability to redirect resources at the system level—from local to state to national—away from unfavorable policies, programs, or institutions and toward movement-aligned alternatives.*







## Modeling Power

For decades, society has internalized the narrative that punishment and criminalization are the keys to our collective safety. In fact, models of police and prisons are actually making us *less* safe. The United States has the highest number of murders by the police per capita. The prison system is a constant drain of state resources. Prioritizing prisons and policing also means money is being redirected from education, health, and other community resources that ensure our wellbeing. It is harmful and expensive across the board.

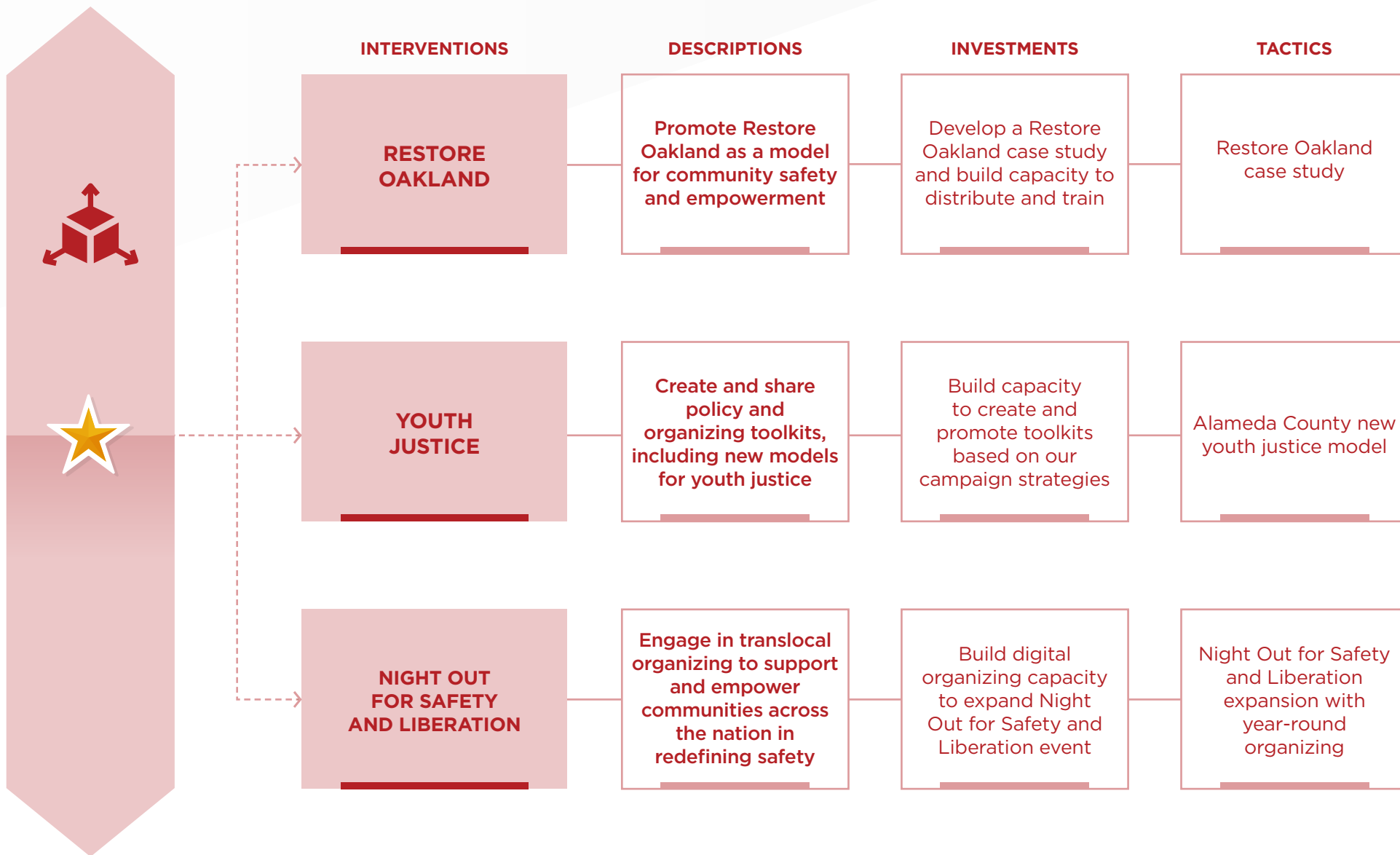
In 2019, Ella Baker Center opened Restore Oakland. Restore Oakland is the first space in the U.S. designed specifically for restorative justice. This first-of-its-kind community safety center offers dedicated spaces to practice restorative justice and healing. Restore Oakland also offers access to a range of resources such as jobs, housing, and re-entry support that serve specific needs articulated by the local community.

Now, with increasing awareness of the harm caused by the police and the questioning of the validity of these systems of power, Ella Baker Center is ready with a solution, putting into place a vibrant community-centered alternative. By creating these alternatives, we expand public imagination of what's possible.

*The grand opening of Restore Oakland in 2019 brought Ella Baker Center's vision of community safety to life.*

# Modeling Power

*The ability to build, demonstrate, and promote alternatives to existing institutions, systems, and practices.*





*Poet and community member Leo Mercer performs during Night Out for Safety and Liberation in August 2019 in Oakland.*

## Healing Power

The status quo makes healing hyper-individualized—disconnecting the health of an individual or community from the surrounding social and economic conditions. For communities that have been targeted by the criminal legal system for generations, the need for collective healing extends far beyond what the current paradigm prescribes.

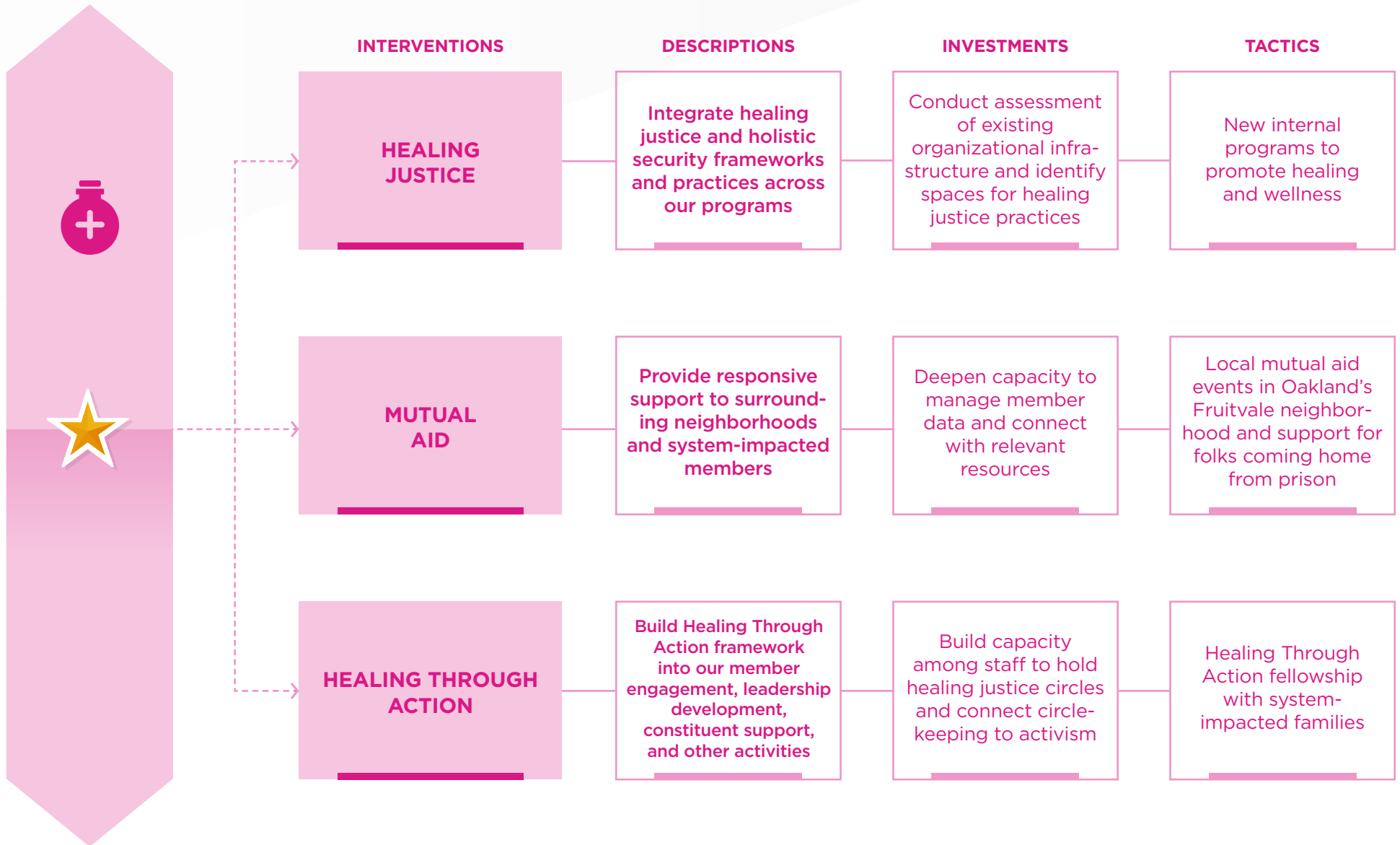
At Ella Baker Center, we understand that community healing means taking collective action to transform shared conditions—this is our vision for healing power.

Through our work in restorative justice, we know that accountability for harm caused is an essential part of any reconciliation or healing process. But what happens when the harm was caused by cops, who receive overwhelming state protections and near complete impunity—even when their unconscionable acts of violence are captured on video?

We have learned that confronting the criminal legal system (and sometimes even a specific law enforcement official) can be an essential part of the healing process for those who have lost loved ones to police and prisons—and we have seen the transformative effect that our “healing through action” approach has on the lives and communities of those impacted.

# Healing Power

*The ability to alleviate and repair harm at the level of the individual, community, or society.*



# Acknowledgements

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## 2021 Board of Directors

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James King  
Nolan Pack, *Project Manager*

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Ashley Chambers  
Zachary Norris  
Theresa Gonzalez

## Program Priorities

### Working Group

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Emily Harris  
James King  
Phil Sanders

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#### Working Group

Diana Frappier  
Terence Long  
Jeremy Monton  
Derick Morgan

## Restore Oakland Working Group

Monifa Akousa  
Becky Bob-Waksberg  
Ash Lynette  
Tash Nguyen

## Internal Systems Working Group

Debbie Leggio  
Candace Chavez Wilson  
Norma Orozco  
Angelo Sandoval  
Marlene Sanchez  
Jack Horgan  
Lovisa Brown

# Our Mission

Founded in 1996, Ella Baker Center for Human Rights is named after a brilliant Black woman and hero of the civil rights Freedom Movement. **Today, we build on her legacy.**

Based in Oakland, California, Ella Baker Center for Human Rights advances racial, economic, and gender justice to ensure dignity and opportunity for low-income people and people of color.

***Ella Baker Center's history has prepared us for this moment. With your support, we can realize safer communities for all.***



1419 34th Ave  
Suite 202  
Oakland, CA 94601

510.428.3939  
strategy@ellabakercenter.org

*She led.  
So can you.*

Donate and volunteer at  
[ellabakercenter.org](http://ellabakercenter.org)

*Community members and staff  
attend the Ella Baker Center 2017  
Lobby Day at the State Capitol.*



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