

To Our Future

2026-2028 STRATEGIC PLAN



STUDENT PRESS
spl
LAW CENTER



2026–2028 Strategic Plan

CONTENTS

SECTION 1.

Opening Letter 3

SECTION 2.

Executive Summary 5

SECTION 3.

Key Context 6

SECTION 4.

A Vision for the Future 8

SECTION 5.

Organizational Foundations 9

SECTION 6.

Focus Areas of the Plan 10

SECTION 7.

In Closing 12

Section 1.

OPENING LETTER

March 2026

Dear Friends,

It is with great pride that we introduce the Student Press Law Center's new strategic plan, designed to set the foundation for our future and further our commitment to student journalists nationwide.

We entered this planning process at a time when student journalists are doing increasingly vital work and facing greater challenges than ever. Since 1974, the Student Press Law Center has helped student journalists navigate the law, publish influential journalism and stand up for student press freedom. It's clear that 50 years in, our mission to support the free press rights of student journalists remains deeply important.

For the Student Press Law Center and for student journalism, the next three years are mission-critical. The landscape for student journalists is rapidly shifting, shaped by forces both familiar and new:

- Political threats to the free press and First Amendment are at a fever pitch.
- New technologies like AI are reshaping how journalism is created and consumed.
- Evolving models of journalism are changing what the definition of a student journalist is and who needs to be served by our work.
- The local news crisis has positioned student journalists as increasingly essential contributors in informing their communities.

This moment calls for evolution and focus.

We must extend our reach, strengthen our partnerships and position ourselves to lead boldly into the future. Over the course of developing this plan, we examined several key questions to help guide our future:

- How will we adapt to meet the challenges of our time?
- How can we further strengthen our financial position to carry our mission forward?
- And how do we ensure we remain relevant and essential for the next generation of student journalists?

The answers are reflected in the following pages, and are most notably seen in our plan's North Star focus:

For the next three years, we will continue to defend and advance the rights of student journalists, empowering them as full and essential members of a free press. We will equip more students, educators and advisers with proactive education and resources, scale our impact to meet the rising demands in the field, support the acceleration of student reporting programs, and lead with clarity and conviction in service of student journalism.

Student journalists are courageous in their pursuit of truth and transparency. They hold power to account. They inform their communities when no one else can or will. It is a tremendous honor to provide them with the legal support and guidance they need to carry out this essential work.

We must do everything we can to protect their voices, their rights and their journalism.

This plan reflects the wisdom and dedication of many voices — our staff, our board, our partners and the student journalists, advisers and educators we serve. Thank you for your commitment to this work.



Gary Green
Executive Director



Steve Holmes
Board Chair

Photo: Andrew Benson

STUDENT PRESS LAW CENTER



Section 2.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Everything we do at the Student Press Law Center is in service of student journalism. **As the only legal organization exclusively dedicated to defending and advancing the rights of student journalists** — along with the advisers and educators who support them — we are uniquely positioned to serve students and lead the field.

This plan is the result of thoughtful collaboration among the Student Press Law Center's staff and Board and close listening to our community. Our team utilized this period of strategic reflection to review, refine and reaffirm our mission, vision and values. We considered how to provide the greatest benefit to student journalists and how to scale our impact strategically and sustainably. We sought input and feedback from key members of our community, including student journalists, advisers, educators, partners and funders, to ensure our efforts provide the greatest benefit and service to students and the field.

The result is a bold, focused three-year strategic plan that will hone and solidify our role as a proactive leader across our work: in our offerings and services to student journalists, educators and advisers; as a strategic collaborator and convener; and through our communications and storytelling centering on the legal rights, challenges and essential role of student journalism.

Within the pages of this plan, you will find our commitment to strengthening the foundation that has sustained our organization for five decades while evolving for the future — expanding our services, deepening partnerships, building the financial resilience necessary to sustain and grow our work, clarifying our brand proposition and elevating the stories and voices of student journalists to demonstrate their indispensable work and the challenges they face. This is our roadmap for the next three years and our promise to the students we serve.

This is Our North Star

The North Star of our 2026–2028 Strategic Plan is as follows:

For the next three years, we will continue to defend and advance the rights of student journalists, educating and empowering them as full and essential members of a well-functioning and free press.

To achieve this, we will:



Equip student journalists, advisers and educators to navigate challenges.



Scale our impact to meet rising demand.



Support the acceleration of student reporting programs.



Lead in service of student journalism.

Section 3.

KEY CONTEXT

At the time of this plan's release, our organization and the student journalists we serve are facing real challenges.

For the Student Press Law Center, competition for funding and attention is growing as new partnerships and models emerge. Our organization is in a period of financial stability, but we cannot take financial stability for granted. We must increase and diversify our revenue to meet the growing demand for services — demand that reflects both the threats student journalists face and the vital role they serve.

Student journalists are doing vital work in a political climate marked by mounting attacks on free speech and growing censorship pressures. At the same time, the rise of news influencers, podcasters and new storytelling models is reshaping who is considered a student journalist. And in communities nationwide, students are taking on more prominent roles to fill critical local news gaps as new models of student reporting evolve.

To keep pace with these shifts, we must evolve our support and ensure student journalists have the resources they need to navigate an ever more complex landscape.

What We've Become Known For

In conversations with our network, we solicited feedback about the Student Press Law Center's role and value. Here's what we heard:



A first responder for press freedom.

Our Legal Hotline and legal team are who student journalists, their advisers and educators turn to when they're in crisis or facing censorship.



A resource for high school and college journalists.

As the only legal organization exclusively dedicated to defending and advancing the rights of student journalists, the Student Press Law Center serves as an important source of education and training in schools.



A trusted partner.

We are a respected voice and valued collaborator within a network of organizations stewarding student media and journalism.



Our Impact In this Environment

In recent years, demand for the Student Press Law Center’s support has grown, along with our impact.

In the 2024–2025 academic year, we:



Answered **1,067** hotline inquiries from **48** states & D.C.



*Hotline requests increased by **42%** in two years*



Trained **5,779** students & educators in 30 states



*Workshop & event attendees increased **53%** in two years*



Supported advocates across the country as we marked the **10th anniversary** of the modern New Voices movement



*Today, **18** states have New Voices laws, and legislation was filed in **8–10** states in each of the past few years*



Top photo: Kyle Gustafson
Bottom photo: James Robinson

Section 4.

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

A critical part of strategic planning is the ability to see beyond the horizon; to imagine where we're going and plan how best to get there. In developing this strategic plan, drawing on projections from the Board and staff, we envision a future organization that is more visible, adaptable, stable and unwavering in its mission.

Broad visibility and reach

We will grow our reputation and impact through thoughtful collaborations and focused initiatives so that student journalists, educators, advisers and journalism school deans across the country recognize our value.

Thoughtful evolution amidst industry change

We will harness technology and enhance our resources and trainings to guide students to navigate a transforming media landscape.

We
envision:



Permanent financial stability

By focusing on our highest-impact work, expanding visibility and cultivating strategic partnerships, we will secure diversified funding to sustain and grow our mission.

An unwavering commitment

Despite strong headwinds, we continue to show up as advocates for all student journalists so they can fully participate in a free press.

Photo: Ryan Murphy

STUDENT PRESS LAW CENTER



Section 5.

ORGANIZATIONAL FOUNDATIONS

As part of this process, the Student Press Law Center revisited, clarified and re-committed to our mission, vision and values to ensure they remained clear, aligned and true to our identity. Our amended organizational commitments are as follows:

Our Mission

The Student Press Law Center defends and advances the First Amendment and newsgathering rights of student journalists, their advisers and educators, emboldening their participation in a free press.

Our Vision

The Student Press Law Center envisions a world where all student journalists are protected by law, can exercise their rights freely and are valued as essential members of the free press, contributing fully to a well-informed, democratic society.

Our Values

- **Empowerment.** We equip student members of the news media and their advisers with the confidence, tools and agency to assert their First Amendment rights responsibly.
- **Protection.** In everything we do, and every decision we make, we reinforce that we are committed to safeguarding student journalism in all its forms.
- **Courage.** We operate as an independent, nonpartisan organization that consistently stands up for students, the free press and First Amendment rights in the face of risks or consequences.
- **Collaboration.** This work is complex and requires many hearts and hands to support student journalists effectively. We maintain a steadfast commitment to work together toward our shared purpose.



Photo: Unsplash, William Bayreuther

Section 6.

FOCUS AREAS OF THE PLAN

At the center of this strategic plan are student journalists and the advisers and educators who support them. The four strategic focus areas below reflect what we have heard from the field and where we believe our work can make the greatest difference in protecting and strengthening student journalism.

1. Equip

Equip Student Journalists, Advisers and Educators to Navigate Challenges

We will increase our proactive programming, outreach and engagement with student journalists, advisers and educators. By expanding our resources and training, we will close knowledge gaps, better equipping and empowering students and their advisers to navigate challenges as they arise.

We will ensure visibility of these efforts through targeted and widespread outreach, significantly growing the number of student journalists, editors-in-chief, advisers, journalism educators and journalism school deans who know our name and recognize our value.

2. Scale

Scale Impact To Meet Rising Demand

We will evolve forward with technology and new approaches to scale our impact. Our hotline will remain an essential resource for student journalists and their advisers, and we will lead the field in exploring responsible uses of AI to scale this service and meet increasing demand.

To further expand our capacity and ensure our long-term sustainability, the Student Press Law Center will also grow its attorney bench and explore partnerships with law schools, firms and other organizations, building a wider network of attorneys trained in “the SPLC way” to support increasing legal demands.



3. Support

Support The Acceleration of Student Reporting Programs

The Student Press Law Center will play an essential role in the success and growth of evolving models of student reporting programs — serving as critical legal infrastructure. SPLC will be a key convener in this growing development in journalism and deepen its strategic partnerships.

While our core remains on defending and advancing student-led journalism, this expansion of our work, to support the acceleration of other types of student reporting programs, can increase the impact of our work and student journalism across the country.

4. Lead

Lead In Service of Student Journalism

We will launch targeted and sustained communications to deepen understanding about the challenges student journalists face and the legal protections they deserve. In doing so, we will demonstrate the value of student journalism across the entire spectrum of scholastic, college, community college and university — including emerging student reporting programs — and increase awareness and investment in our work.

Through expanded efforts to champion New Voices laws and programming, enhanced storytelling and thought leadership, we will also build a deeper understanding of SPLC as an advocate for student press freedom, clarifying SPLC's brand and value proposition.

In collaboration with key partners, we will set the groundwork for a public campaign that will further the work and value of student-led journalism.

Photo: Journalism
Education Association

STUDENT PRESS LAW CENTER



Section 7.

IN CLOSING

This strategic plan reflects the Student Press Law Center’s continued commitment to defend and advance the rights of student journalists. Anchored by our North Star, the plan sets a clear direction for how we will equip and empower student journalists to tell powerful, courageous stories, strengthening student journalism now and into the future.

Over the next three years, the Student Press Law Center will advance this work through four strategic priorities: equipping student journalists, advisers and educators to navigate challenges, scaling our impact to meet rising demand, supporting the acceleration of student reporting programs, and leading in service of student journalism.

This plan serves as both a roadmap and an invitation—to student journalists, advisers and educators, peers, and collaborators—to work alongside us in championing student journalism and defending press freedom across the country.

Strategic Planning Committee

This plan is the result of numerous thoughtful conversations spanning several months with student journalists, advisers and educators, our Board, staff and partners. The strategic planning process was commissioned and led by the Student Press Law Center, with leadership from a Board and staff strategic planning committee and significant input from students, advisers, funders and other supporters. Mission Partners, a Certified B Corporation™ strategic communications firm, facilitated the development of this strategic plan.

Strategic Planning Committee Members

- Angela Buonocore, Board Vice Chair
- Elizabeth Dickson, Development Director
- Kelly Furnas, Board Member
- Gary Green, Executive Director
- Mike Hiestand, Senior Legal Counsel
- Steven Holmes, Board Chair
- Mira Lowe, Board Communications Chair
- Josh Moore, Assistant Director



Photo: Andrew Benson