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*Equity Research Institute*

# LOOKING AROUND THE CORNER

(RE)IMAGINING POWER FOR A HEALTHY  
AND JUST CALIFORNIA

A Report Prepared for The California Endowment  
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A photograph of a protest or demonstration. In the foreground, the back of a person with long, wavy blonde hair is visible on the left. To their right, a person with short, curly reddish-brown hair is seen from the back, wearing a dark tank top. In the background, a crowd of people is gathered, some holding up white signs. One prominent sign on the right has the words "TIME FOR" and "CHANGE" written in red, hand-painted capital letters. The scene is set outdoors with large, leafy trees in the background. The overall lighting is somewhat dim, suggesting an overcast day or late afternoon. The text "TABLE OF CONTENTS" is overlaid in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the center of the image.

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TIME FOR  
CHANGE



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

California is at a crossroads. The multiple crises that exploded in 2020 — the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic shocks that it induced, and the national reckoning with structural racism triggered by the murder of George Floyd — have shed light on long-standing systemic inequalities and social vulnerabilities. These events shook our world and led to denial, fear, and backlash in many parts of the nation — as evidenced by a rise in white supremacist violence, a choice to ignore public health advice, and a willingness to reject democratic norms. Meanwhile, the Golden State has taken a decidedly different tack.

Indeed, while California's approach in the last several years certainly has room for improvement, its firm embrace of the science on both COVID-19 and the climate, its willingness to extend many forms of aid to all Californians regardless of immigration status, and its conscious attempts to use equity as a lens for both economic relief and future investments offer hope to a nation needing to look forward. If we are to maintain momentum — to move beyond small but important steps and achieve a truly healthy and just Golden State — we must look at what has driven us in this direction so far and what will be necessary to make further progress.



We suggest in this report that the secret sauce for the change we need is community power. After all, it is civic organizing that forced the state to pay attention to the health inequities both wrought and revealed by COVID-19. It is environmental justice advocacy that helped fuel the political will to go beyond oil and strive for a carbon-neutral future. It is immigrant and racial justice activists who pushed the state to be more welcoming and more inclusive. And it is those allies who understood the importance of community power — and were willing to make bold investments in organizing and civic capacity — who are both part of this history and laying the foundation for our future.

One philanthropic partner on that collective journey has been The California Endowment (TCE), a foundation that over a decade ago adopted a strategy initially focused on smaller-scale neighborhood improvement — and then shifted to a full-throated commitment to scaling community power as the driving factor for achieving health equity. At its own crossroads, TCE is now trying to move from experimentation to institutionalization, from seeing community power as instrumental to understanding it as fundamental, from investing in effective organizations to contributing to a power building ecosystem. Drawing a clear picture of what is going on in that ecosystem will be helpful to both TCE and the field — and that is what this report seeks to offer.

## WHAT'S LEARNED

This, of course, is not the first turning point moment to confront the state or TCE. In 2010, when TCE launched its 10-year Building Healthy Communities Initiative (BHC), the economy had been in the throes of the Great Recession; the State of California was reeling from a structural deficit; and the mid-term elections had dashed the hopes for inclusive change in national politics. TCE's BHC initiative had pre-defined goals, outcomes, and processes — and like many best-laid plans, it came under stress as it hit the ground, particularly from community actors who wanted to take the foundation at its word that it was seeking true neighborhood transformation.

In response, the leadership of TCE did something remarkable: they listened and adjusted. As we documented in an earlier report, *There's Something Happening Here*, BHC's focus on policy and systems change had given a permission slip for local, often marginalized residents to directly confront those in power, generally stretching well beyond the initial "theory of change" articulated in grant proposals. As it turns out, letting people lead achieved remarkable, often unexpected results in terms of policy and systems change. Learning from the success, the foundation made three key pivots: (1) from directing the process to trusting the people; (2) from stressing civic engagement to emphasizing community power building; and (3) from seeing their work as part of a time-limited initiative to thinking through what it would take to create lasting infrastructure.

These shifts emerged from three key lessons. The first was that power building was not just a vehicle for achieving policy wins but was a goal in and of itself. An engaged and active community is more likely to work together to keep harmful activities out of their neighborhood, like a polluting business or too many liquor stores, and advocate for beneficial services, like a safe park and good schools. But it's like going to the gym on the daily: exercise makes your muscles stronger. Community members who see themselves as efficacious on one issue will be able to move on to another, confronting whatever might come their way, as they work toward making their shared vision a reality.



The second lesson was that organizing was central to power building. It is not enough to have residents play a performative role by “testifying” as oppressed victims while professional advocates carry forward their case and make deals at a state level and in key policy circles. Those closest to the problems will often be the closest to the solution — and should be at the table where decisions are made. This does not mean that organizing is the only activity: key to TCE’s new model is the concept of a “power flower” in which base-building is at the heart of it all, and the petals of advocacy, policy development, research, communication, and other key activities playing a supportive and accountable role.

The third lesson was that tackling structural racism is critical. It is, after all, what leads to persistent differential outcomes in education, economic opportunity, and environmental health. Racism also works to divide communities and impede alliances for a better world. Finally, it creates trauma and feeds into deeply ingrained, unconscious beliefs about oneself and one’s community that can make community organizing difficult. To rebuild and remake California, we cannot avoid talking about the hurt and the healing, the wreckage and the repair, the pain and the possibilities. And we cannot hope to build common ground by skirting past tough conversations about racism; as with any good public health approach, we must not ignore the virus but inoculate against it.

One indicator that TCE has fully embraced these lessons is that its next ten-year, \$2 billion commitment will focus on three grantee-informed big ideas: power building, reimaging systems, and health for all. And in 2021, the TCE Board approved a \$300 million social bond to invest in the infrastructure for power building; as an act of trust-based philanthropy, it has partnered with leaders in the field to develop a full proposal about the mission, purpose, programming, structure, and budget for that infrastructure. Running through all these activities has been a deep commitment to centering racial equity into both policies and practices, setting the stage to make progress toward a state of belonging.

## WHAT'S NEXT

So, what's next for the state? And how should that influence the approach of TCE, of other philanthropic investors, and of the field of organizing and movement-building itself? We offer ten key directions that we think are worthy of consideration going forward. However, we want to stress that while there are three authors attached to this report, these directions for the road ahead are really an attempt to distill the wisdom of the field: they emerge from interviews with organizational leaders about their assessment of the current state of the power building ecosystem, their insights on top priorities over the next five to ten years, their thoughts on the most useful philanthropic investments, and their concerns about the challenges facing those fighting for a healthy and just California.

The first key direction: **set the North Star as governing power**. Governing power is the ability to set, win, and protect an agenda. This means narrative work to garner support and policy victories to secure change and it also means paying attention to the details of implementation that determine whether a minimum wage increase improves lives or is derailed by unregulated wage theft. This will be particularly important in coming years as a wave of federal funds come to the state, the state's own budget surplus gets debated and deployed, and efforts to shift funds from incarceration and policing to community services and support gain ground. Getting in the weeds of how money is spent will require a different set of skills — not ones that are beyond community members and community organizations but ones that will require investments in new capacities.

This includes recruiting, preparing, and landing community leaders in key decision-making positions — and providing the staffing and support needed to be successful in those roles. We also need to make government worthy of our trust, partly through new strategies like participatory budgeting and equity metrics, an issue we take up later. In the words of an interviewee, “what we're trying to prioritize moving into the next decade is being able to prioritize what it means for the state to be an extension of us. What does it mean for a state to care for its people instead of agitating against us all the time? If we're always thinking that the state is always going to be the enemy and we are always organizing against it, then what does a state look like that actually cares for its people and how do we build that?”



The second key direction: **stress economic justice as key to health equity**. There has been a long-time reluctance on the part of some funders, including TCE, to wade too deeply into the waters of economic inequality. Whether this is because it's such a big and complicated issue — a fact we fully acknowledge — or whether it's because it highlights the contradictions of philanthropy trying to mend the damage inflicted by a system that gives them the resources to do the repair, this reluctance is still a bit surprising. After all, the research suggests the overriding importance of economic security to health equity and family well-being.

Just as important, in the field, organizers and residents are constantly talking about economic distress as the key impediment to achieving their objectives. California's social movements are also trying to tackle the issue directly and we all need to respect their judgment of what is salient and vital. They are insisting that we need to go beyond the current model where the state's tilted economic playing field generates wealth for billionaires which then leads to tax revenues to soothe social tensions; instead, the state should work to ensure that outcomes are fairer and processes more inclusive from the get-go. Investing in a new economic narrative and fighting for more equitable workforce and development policies will go a long way to making sure all Californians achieve health for themselves and their communities.

The third key direction: **promote multiracial democracy and center Black and Indigenous voices**. A critical task for our state and nation's future is to do something we are not accustomed to: holding two ideas in our head at the same time. The first is to understand that one of the central dilemmas of our time is whether we will be able to achieve the promise of a multiracial democracy. This means respecting multiple voices, seeking common ground, and establishing a shared sense of ourselves, one that will help our nation resist the entreaties of "replacement theory" even as we go through an unprecedented shift in the nation's demography.

California can lead on this having become majority people-of-color about twenty-five years ago. But the second thing the state's experience can affirm is that getting past the temptation of racial division requires acknowledging decades of disadvantage and centering those who have too often been marginalized. This "both/and" approach to building multicultural spaces, campaigns, and movements is becoming more prominent in the field, with organizers stressing the need to prioritize anti-Black racism and anti-Indigeneity even as they honor other racialized experiences, such as anti-Asian hate and the xenophobia that terrorizes immigrants. A truly multicultural democracy can handle tough conversations — and a commitment to mutuality should not be about erasure but revelation.



The fourth key direction: **use stories to shift beliefs and norms.** The Grassroots Power Project stresses that narratives, norms, and shared identities help to shape people's deeply held and often unconscious worldviews. If advocates are contesting over messages and solutions that are based on the opposition's definitions of problems and values — like that one's worth is determined by one's work and wages or that we should celebrate people who beat the odds rather than those who change the odds — then they have ceded the very terrain on which ideas and agendas are contested. Rewiring mental maps to a new common sense is crucial and this work constitutes another form of building and wielding power.

The challenge of shifting worldviews is often misidentified as a problem of messaging and then handed over to large communications firms to “fix” — but that is a recipe for sound bites and not transformative solidarity. Instead, we need to bring narratives closer to the ground, recognizing how grassroots community organizing helps us foster new norms, new connections, and new possibilities. Indeed, the old stories are meant to disempower and derail such collective action — you are an individual whose circumstance is due to your own assets or defects, and banding together with those similarly situated is likely to drag you down. An iterative process of story-telling, identity-building, and campaign-development can help us see the power of turning to rather than away from each other and instill a belief in the abilities of our communities to meet our biggest challenges.

A fifth key direction: **invest in power building infrastructure and inter-structure.** Infrastructure is the “commons” of power building ecosystems. It is the capacities that are enduring in nature, needed by all (or at least by a critical mass), and beyond the reach of any single organization to develop alone. But another need is highlighted by the term “inter-structure,” drawing on the Latin root meaning between. A power building “inter-structure” is about the common needs in the work and spaces *between* organizations and organized groups of people working towards a shared goal.

To be sure that we achieve that “inter-structure,” we need to be attentive to a geographic lens, being sure to shore up areas where needs are greatest without “exporting” models that work best in other terrains. With a population lens, we can be sure to both resource organizations rooted in vulnerable populations and address anti-Blackness in all communities. Through a leadership lens, we must be sure to promote a diversity of approaches and pathways to cover the broad spectrum of ways to develop and deploy governing power. Most important, all this infrastructure must be networked to assure that the sum adds up to more than the parts, and that we have secured the foundations for a broad intersectional movement for health equity.



A sixth key direction: **embrace healing justice *and* external impact.** There is a strain of work emerging sometimes called healing justice that is taking off, albeit unevenly, across movement spaces. Healing justice work can take multiple forms: it can draw deeper connections to cultural and spiritual practices, it can strive towards personal liberation, or it can offer new practices like somatics that seek to reestablish the connections between our minds and our bodies. At its best, healing justice can begin to address the ways that internalized systems of oppression show up within organizing work and can help open up new avenues of thinking, new ways of practicing liberation, and new connections between generations.

It may be tempting for some to think of healing as a sort of middle-class indulgence in a world on fire. However, it is really a recognition of that fire, of the trauma wrought by racism, economic inequality, homophobia, and so many other oppressive systems. It is a way of neutralizing toxic cultures within organizations and key to visualizing and creating the world we are seeking to build. It is the new “inside-outside” strategy: it allows people to come into their power and their community’s power. It is also, quite frankly, the cutting edge of organizing these days — partly because it has great appeal to younger organizers who are working to combine soul and smarts, healing and strategy, reflection and action. Exploration of how to do this most effectively and with the most external impact deserves full support by the field and by funders.

A seventh key direction: **build the skills to anticipate backlash.** Those working for social justice can be an optimistic bunch — how else would you be able to maintain hope and overcome setbacks in pursuit of a better world? But progress is not linear and backlash is predictable. The uptick in racism in response to the nation’s demographic change — and especially the election of our first Black President — was entirely predictable. The recent attempt to utilize an off-year election to mobilize a minority of voters against progressive policy in California was clearly in the cards. And the current desire of the field and funders to build community power will not go unanswered or unmatched.

One organizer commented that “I have been alarmed with the pace, the speed at which cynical and fear-based appeals, [and] how effective they are.” That alarm should not be accompanied by a lack of preparation. Investments in the capacity of organizations to promote healing should be accompanied by investments in the ability to conduct hard-headed analyses of competing agendas and use those to anticipate likely flashpoints and tensions. Special attention should be given to parts of the state where the power building infrastructure is more nascent and more vulnerable. Building community power should take seriously the task of restraining those who have undue power over communities.



An eighth key direction: **seed and scale to meet our challenges**. One sign of the maturation of California’s power building groups is their desire to get bigger and stronger. This does not stem from a self-serving impulse to grow staff and budgets — indeed, many organizations need help managing that process and this should be supported — but rather from a sense that our state’s problems are urgent, that community needs are going unaddressed, and the time is now to make progress and secure the future. It not whether we scale but how we scale that is at stake.

Strategic scaling will take a combination of investing in organizations that have established track records as movement backbones and going beyond current foundation favorites to seed change and experimentation. Such a “both/and” approach will likely require investments in networks — in the “inter-structure” we referred to above. And it will need to balance the tension of moving at the “speed of trust” with the need to accelerate the infrastructure to counter resistance and to establish a movement for health equity that is statewide and also locally-rooted and locally-unique.

A ninth key direction: **develop a strategy for sequencing**. We are often asked to identify the one thing we think will turn things around, that will make people see the centrality of health equity, that will cause others to acknowledge the importance of community power, that will lead us forward to the healthy and just California so many desire. We generally have a simple response: in a world of interlocking challenges and intersectional oppressions, the one thing to do is to stop thinking that there is one thing.

That said, systems thinking is not a rationale for doing everything at once. It is critical to determine where to start — and to develop the discipline to sequence investments, campaigns, and locales. We do not presume to dictate what the first steps would be. Our own thoughts center on strengthening Black-led infrastructure, taking advantage of concerns about climate and the care economy, and deepening the organizing bench in parts of the state that have been neglected. Other choices are possible — but the critical thing will be understanding that we need to be impatient and passionate about injustice while patient and determined about strategy.



A final key direction: **measure what matters**. This has two elements. The first is simply creating better metrics of accountability for public policy. If governing power (rather than just winning power) is the North Star, then creating indicators to track public spending and capture changes by population and by issue — and then driving these factors down to the neighborhood level — is critical. This is work that will be taken up by researchers and advocates, but in keeping with the “power flower,” another sort of accountability will be between these more technical efforts and organizers and communities.

But there is also the task of measuring community power itself. We have argued that the eyes of the nation have been turned on California given its frequent early mover status in the realm of demographic change, climate policy, and movement strategies like integrated voter engagement. All eyes are also on these new experiments by funders and the field in community power building and ecosystem design. What we learn could inform efforts to broaden what we mean by health equity, deepen what we mean by civic engagement, and strengthen the will of other foundations to invest in power building across a nation that is in deep need of healing.





## WHAT'S AHEAD

We started this summary by naming this moment as a crossroads for the state and the nation. While that should trigger decision and action, we seem to be stuck waiting for the crises we face to somehow point the way. How can we have so much of the data needed to address our collective challenges, but so little of the urgency? How can we be racing toward the tipping point on climate change, and yet still seem unable to turn our ship around? Are we so overwhelmed with challenges and fractious divisions that too many of us bury our heads in the sand, frozen and not knowing where to start?



Our view is that paralysis is not an option — and power building is the cure not just to address the issues but to get unstuck from this fearful rut and renew a sense of collective efficacy. Getting there will require both small-scale experiments and large-scale implementation, bets on new organizations and investments in long-term anchors. It will require both a focus on what is specific about various forms of oppression but also what is common about the yearning for dignity and community. It will require building slow and intentional relationships across difference, remembering that organizations may score victories but communities and networks are what build and wield power to shape long-term change.

A well-resourced, intersectional, and intersectoral ecosystem for power building is possible if we combine soul and strategy, healing and action, vision and tactics. We will also need to create space for crossing old boundaries of who is in and who is out. We need more implementers who are on board with democratic processes and accountability, more activists running for office and being held accountable, more businesses that embrace an inclusive economy, and better connections between service and civic institutions and community organizers. At this crossroads, there is no going back to a California in which too many communities are left behind and kept behind; we must instead look around the corner for what's next and what we can make possible.



# INTRODUCTION

In 2010, when The California Endowment (TCE) launched its 10-year Building Healthy Communities Initiative (BHC), the economy had been in the throes of the Great Recession; the State of California was reeling from a structural deficit; and the mid-term elections had dashed the hopes for change in national politics. TCE's ambitious new initiative was seemingly well-designed, with pre-defined goals, outcomes, and processes. Communities developed theories of change and plans that had to align with TCE's stated goals, outcomes, and priorities. But as TCE moved along its BHC journey, people grew skeptical of the initiative's complexity and questioned whether it should be better connected to power building efforts already underway in the state.

The good news: TCE met the criticisms and suggestions not by pushing back but by pivoting. In 2014, we were pleasantly surprised when we found that a cornerstone of BHC was its investment in building "people power" which we captured in *There's Something Happening Here...A Look at The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities Initiative* (Pastor et al., 2014). In places with a deep-rooted history of organizing, the value-add of BHC was in bringing folks to the table to learn from each other's strengths. In places that had a thinner history of organizing, like Del Norte, TCE funding went towards hiring community organizers who engaged residents around BHC issues. In our review, we applauded the fact that TCE was loosening its grip on predefined outcomes and listening to the field.

The shift made sense. After all, at the heart of BHC was a recognition that efforts to achieve healthy communities begin at the grassroots — in the neighborhoods and with the people where inequities are most deeply experienced. Organizing, leadership development, campaigns, and communications come together in grassroots advocacy and lobbying in which people most impacted by an issue take collective action to confront directly those who have decision-making authority over the issue. The visible nature of mobilization and activism — especially among those who are historically under-represented — is what Grassroots Power Project calls the first face of power (Healey, n.d., 2015; Healey & Hinson, 2018). It is what people most readily associate with political power — influencing laws, policies, and priorities and swaying outcomes at the ballot box.



BHC's focus on policy and systems change from the get-go resulted in new voices and increased participation in public decision-making processes. People stepped into direct confrontation with decision-makers and over time shifted the dynamics of power so that public officials started considering their demands. In places that had a limited history of civic activism, the culture started to change. And early successes bolstered people's civic engagement and aspirations for what change is possible, deepening their involvement.

Fast forward to 2020 as TCE was planning its next 10 years — a global pandemic, a national racial reckoning, and wildfires across California revealed what many of us have known for some time: stark inequities by race, income, and geography leave many communities systematically marginalized and at risk. The COVID-19 crisis is only exacerbating pre-existing levels of economic inequality, straining state and local government budgets and services, and illustrating further divisions in our society, politically and socially. In this breach, there is room and reason for action — and TCE has an important role to play.

There are immediate needs to address — and there is an urgent need to think long-term. Our way out requires a reimagining of our future, a re-connection across people and place, and a clear-headed analysis of how to shift the terrain in a more inclusive direction. This is exactly what grassroots organizing and power building organizations have been doing over several decades — with the last decade being a particularly fruitful period in California, with the backing and support of TCE.

This report is a sequel to *There's Something Happening Here....* In that report, we called for three pivots in the BHC strategy. Pivot #1: From onerous to ownership: determining who was really driving the initiative and who would benefit at the end of the ten years; Pivot #2: From process to power: moving from engaging residents to meet foundation requirements and more towards building authentic and on-going power; and Pivot #3: From initiative to infrastructure: balancing the need to demonstrate immediate results with the need to build lasting infrastructure.



One indicator that TCE has made those pivots: In response to the strains that the COVID-19 pandemic and racial uprisings of 2020 put on its already-stretched grantees, TCE made a decision to augment their grantmaking funds with a large-scale, up-front investment to support the power building ecosystem (Ginwright et al., 2021). In 2021, the Board approved a \$300 million social bond with a focus on infrastructure for power building towards systems change.

Most dramatically, as an act of trust-based philanthropy, TCE partnered with the state's power building infrastructure and leaders in the field to craft a process to determine investments. They, in turn, established a broader committee of power building leaders to facilitate a process to understand the current state of power building infrastructure and to develop a full proposal about the mission, purpose, programming, structure, and budget for vehicles to strengthen that infrastructure. What TCE does with that proposal will be another indicator of how far along it is in its own transformational journey.

In this report, we offer a blueprint for California for the next ten years, drawing on efforts already underway that are on the leading edge of change and the wisdom of the field. We focus on the kinds of efforts that, if they become the norm of governing and living, would together dramatically shift the trajectory of our Golden State. If the past few decades established California as a “state of resistance” (Pastor, 2018), it is now time to pivot to a “state of renewal”: a model for the nation where all are welcomed, all have a sense of belonging and rootedness, and all have an opportunity to contribute to — and be supported by — a thriving community.

This report is organized as follows. We start by reviewing three key lessons from the BHC initiative: that building power is key to health equity, that organizing is key to building power, and that racial justice is key to effective organizing. One overarching theme from this analysis is that power building and organizing are not just tools or instruments for policy change but rather are fundamental to creating a sense of grassroots efficacy. To exercise power, you must feel powerful, and organizing is about facilitating a sense that ordinary people can achieve extraordinary things if they work together.

We then turn to the moment we are in and offer a blueprint for change. We insist that governing power be the North Star, and suggest that health equity will require a focus on economic justice, a commitment to multiracial democracy, and the development of a new narrative. We then turn to the structure the field of power building needs to go forward, including infrastructure and what we call “inter-structure,” the embrace of healing as a strategy, and the development of capacities to anticipate backlash and map power. We then discuss practical matters such as how to scale, how to sequence, and how to measure and celebrate success. We briefly conclude by returning to a discussion of the moment we’re in and the possibilities ahead.

A final word about methodology before we begin. Over the past decade, there has been a plethora of material — formal and informal, written and visual — generated from efforts supported by TCE. For this report, we draw from published literature as well as reports provided by the field of learning and evaluation partners that accompanied the work in the BHC places and on statewide campaigns as well as studies overseen by TCE’s in-house Learning and Evaluation team. Included are the research and reports that we conducted on TCE’s organizing grantees — including Dr. Veronica Terriquez’s work on youth organizing — and on developing the notion of a power building ecosystem.

To complement the body of reports and written literature, we interviewed a set of organizational leaders about their assessment of the current state of the power building ecosystem, insights on top priorities over the next five to ten years, thoughts on the possibilities for change if philanthropy made long-term investments in the power building infrastructure, and concerns about threats or challenges that present problems for those fighting for a healthy and just California. For a list of interviewees, see Appendix B.

Lastly, we draw on our relationships and projects across our research focus areas of economic inclusion, climate equity, immigrant integration, and social movement building. In our own organizational trajectory over the past decade, we have not only changed our name — from the Program for Environmental and Regional Equity and the Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration to the Equity Research Institute — but we have also come to realize that we, too, are part of California’s power building ecosystem and are committed to being a better research and academic partner to movements advancing equity in California. This report is part of that effort.



# **BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES: MANY VICTORIES, THREE KEY LESSONS**



Much has been written — and will be written — about the outcomes and lessons from Building Healthy Communities (BHC), an effort that leveraged over \$1.7 billion from 2010 to 2020 for 14 place-based efforts and statewide policy advocacy and narrative change. Part of this is due to TCE’s commitment to real-time learning and its funding of evaluation activities accompanying its grant-making strategies. For example, each of the 14 BHC places had evaluation partners, which was particularly important at the onset and at the sunset of the first 10 years. Key statewide campaigns, such as the implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and the Fight4All Fund to protect health coverage and for immigration response, were evaluated and their impacts documented. Other evaluators (such as USC ERI) provided data and analysis to inform its progress towards its North Star goals.<sup>1</sup>

It is a given that an initiative the scope and scale of BHC would offer many rich lessons. In fact, over 1,250 victories between 2010 and 2020 have been documented (Interactive Impact Labs, 2020). Each one of those policies that passed, system changes enacted, and tangible benefits to the community could be a case study of what happened, how it happened, and lessons learned. And many of those case studies have already been written. Outcomes could be monetized to make the case for a “return on investment” of philanthropic dollars: For every grant dollar that went to organizing and grassroots advocacy, one could calculate how many more dollars were garnered that directly benefited the community. And, one could quantify how many more people have healthcare coverage because of the funding for outreach and enrollment for the implementation of the Affordable Care Act and for advocacy efforts to defend ACA — and ensure health access for all Californians.

<sup>1</sup> For learnings compiled by TCE’s Learning and Evaluation Department, see <https://www.calendow.org/learning/>.



# BUILDING POWER IS CENTRAL TO HEALTH EQUITY

Out of the many victories and outcomes, there is one major lesson: **building power is fundamental to building healthy communities**. An engaged and active community is more likely to work together to keep harmful activities out of their neighborhood, like a polluting business or too many liquor stores, and advocate for beneficial services, like a safe park and good schools, than a community of disengaged residents. For communities that have been explicitly or implicitly excluded from partaking in such civic action, civic engagement is not even sufficient. It requires organizing: intentional and sustained efforts to identify, recruit, educate, and engage grassroots community members around a shared vision of what is possible and a strategy to achieve that vision. It means aligning people and organizations around a common agenda. And it means wielding their power to achieve common goals.

For Californians living, working, studying, and playing under some of the unhealthiest conditions, interventions are needed at multiple scales simultaneously, from the individual to community to societal. Solutions that get at the very roots of inequities are needed to dismantle structural barriers and to create and sustain the conditions for healthy communities. These include the policies, practices, decision-making processes, and priorities of our society's institutional systems, such as education, healthcare, land use, and planning. And, upstream from those structures lie deeply-held values and views that keep inequities in place, such as racism, sexism, patriarchy, ageism, ableism, and other harmful beliefs.

At the start of BHC, there were certain assumptions about power and policy. There was a sense that change had to start at the local level, that local residents had to be engaged directly, and that statewide policy advocacy and narrative shifts were needed as well. Yet how do you link local comprehensive place-based change to state-level policy change? TCE's answer in 2010 was to establish collaborative hubs in each of the 14 places through BHC and simultaneously support statewide policy and narrative change through Healthy California.



# **building power is fundamental to building healthy communities.**

In each of the 14 BHC places, a collaborative table was set with community stakeholders invited — individual residents, non-profit leaders, government agency staff, and other institutional partners. Within the parameters set by TCE, each table determined their near-term priorities with organizational leads and supporters. At the same time, professional policy advocacy organizations and communications firms were being supported to lead statewide campaigns. The idea was that the power built locally would be scaled up through statewide campaigns: that programs and pilots at school sites and in neighborhoods would inform the policies and reforms that professional advocacy groups could craft and present before policymakers. People from the BHC neighborhoods would testify at legislative hearings and move policymakers with their personal stories and experiences.

In theory, the approach was logical. In practice, it was fraught with tensions. A common tension exists between professional advocacy and grassroots advocacy approaches to policy and systems change. Professional advocacy is one approach in which the power of expertise is wielded by relatively few people whereas grassroots advocacy approaches engage large numbers of people, which requires more processes and more time for getting input and for making decisions<sup>2</sup>. This approach gives the professional policy advocates the final say in policy negotiations, while community groups are relegated to “outsider” mobilization and performative testimony. This dynamic could undermine the years of organizing and campaigning that community groups are leading — only to have the opportunity to push for bold reforms in state legislation co-opted based on political feasibility. The tension comes down to who has the power to shape the final set of demands — and community power is key to ensuring that community voice is both heard and centered.

<sup>2</sup> For more, see *How Organizations Develop Activists* (Han, 2014)



# ORGANIZING IS CENTRAL TO BUILDING POWER

The difference in access to policymakers and in organizational resources (policy shops tend to be better funded, have more staff, and higher-paid staff than grassroots organizing groups) is one dynamic that led to the creation of the “power flower” metaphor (Ito et al., 2019). In what we have simplified visually as a flower, a power building ecosystem should have organizing at its center with policy shops, funders, researchers, and others as the petals. The purpose for conceptualizing power building in this way is to upturn the notion of organizing as simply a tool to mobilize the community troops needed for policy and systems change. In order to challenge imbalances of resources and influence between organizations that engage in organizing as their primary activity and other organizations and agencies that partner with them, such as communications firms and researchers, we put organizing at the center.

As one of our interviewees aptly said, “Organizers can change the world. Organizers can inspire and motivate people to harness their love and passion to achieve things that seem impossible. Organizers support people to rediscover and invent tools for self-determination and sovereignty over their own lives.” In our own words, organizing is fundamental, not just instrumental. When community members participate in, take ownership of, and see themselves as public actors in determining the future of their communities, they are more likely to push for the deep transformational change that is truly needed rather than pushing for what is politically viable. This begins to push against the temptation to move towards incremental change rather than transformational change. And it can challenge philanthropy’s tendency — now changing — to assess grants only on policy victories obtained versus also considering the ways in which community residents were educated, agitated, and engaged in the policy fight.



Through BHC, hyper-local campaigns have provided on-ramps to organizing and advocacy among under-activated populations. In West Long Beach, for example, a walking club of primarily Filipinx elders organized by the Filipino Migrant Center led a three-year organizing and advocacy campaign directed at city council to complete the construction of a walking path at a neighborhood park. It was an issue that directly impacted them and that provided the initial spark of activism and advocacy that has since moved onto other campaigns (Sabado, 2021). Neighborhood-specific change efforts are important for engaging and making connections among neighbors.

Campaigns have led people to other issues. Youth-led campaigns in South Kern that started with cleaning up of local parks to support healthy physical and recreational activities (Chavez & Terriquez, 2014) then expanded to a full range of issues, such as the county's active transportation infrastructure, access to clean drinking water, access to higher education, and school funding. Parent leaders in Eastern Coachella Valley who were involved in the statewide Proposition 47 campaign to change low-level crimes from felonies to misdemeanors in 2014 started to see the connection to harsh school discipline policies and stepped up to lead a restorative justice campaign at Coachella Valley Unified School District (Mulholland Graves et al., 2020).



# RACIAL JUSTICE IS CENTRAL TO ORGANIZING

Beyond leading campaigns, organizers can also create spaces for communities to explore and understand the deeper root causes of their own circumstances and to develop an awareness and consciousness of white supremacy and systems of oppression. In East Salinas, MILPA Collective's approach to transformative leadership development is rooted in "las tres hermanas" of corn, beans, and squash which represent three essential elements of consciousness, culture, and movement building:

"Culture, and cultural healing specifically, is the process of building a relationship towards what's healthy and sacred while, also decolonizing the way we see the world and reclaiming Indigenous healing practices that cultivate our interconnected resilience, brilliance, and ancestral medication. Consciousness means learning our true ethnic social histories and origins while also developing a critical analysis of white supremacy and challenging systems of oppression that uphold the root causes of injustices people of color continuously face. Movement building is about creating the braid of intergenerational leadership needed to uplift and organize for strategies that divest funding from punitive carceral systems and instead re-invest those funds into building powerful alternatives to punishment, arrest, harsh sentencing, and incarceration." (Valenzuela et al., 2020, p. 11)

In Merced, youth organizers realized that they needed to address how racism shapes the way they think about and perceive themselves. Sheng Xiong, who was then a youth organizer with BHC Merced HUB, stated: "I think people have been afraid to validate their own experiences because [we] grow up being taught that racism doesn't exist. What helped was meeting with them weekly, doing camps with Boys and Men of Color (BMOC) and Girls and Women of Color (GWOC), those spaces allowed [the] unpacking of our own internalized racism...to create some spaces where young people were able to tap into this, just introduce to them these ideas and concepts so that as they grow older, [they] can question these ideas" (Central Valley Health Policy Institute, n.d., p. 8). Uncovering and working through deeply ingrained, unconscious beliefs about oneself, one's community, our laws, and society as a whole, lies at the heart of the work that is required of all of us to rebuild and remake California. What is emerging are new ways of organizing around transformative principles. For example, in Santa Ana, groups are attentive to "improving the quality of relationships, the depth of personal and social



transformation, and the dynamics of power even among those who organize” (Santa Ana BHC, 2019). In Fresno, BHC groups are developing their theory of coalition building which reflects an emphasis on capacity building in advocacy and leadership; commitment to shared values and understanding of root causes; and agreement to support coalition members in taking “real risks” which, in the Fresno case, came in the form of personal attacks by elected officials (Central Valley Health Policy Institute, 2021, pp. 19–20).

More and more communities are beginning to address individual and community trauma through building embodied awareness, critical analysis, and ultimately, collective action. The last decade has also demonstrated the power of healing the sometimes-strained relationships between movements and foundations with the emergence of trust-based philanthropy and a deeper understanding of the need to center the voices of those most directly affected by the structures we seek to change. Getting to the future we want — in which all Californians can flourish — will require not just more of the same but an even deeper connection between philanthropy and community and an even stronger commitment to movement infrastructure and ecosystem.



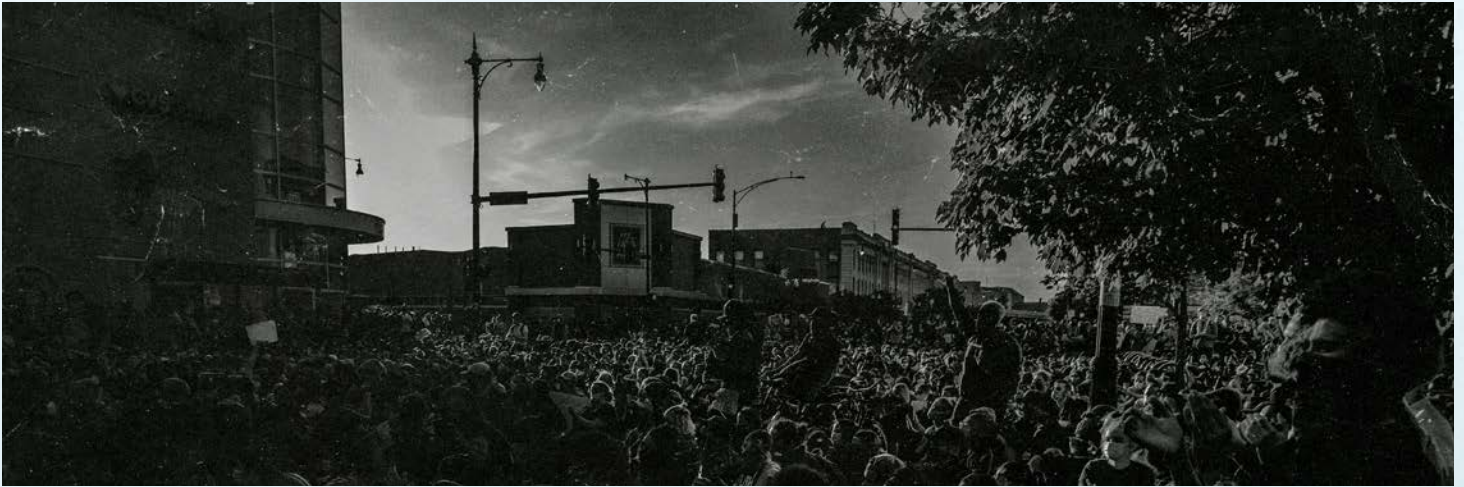
# SEIZING THIS MOMENT: MANY CHALLENGES, TEN KEY DIRECTIONS



**“We need to not only shift societal, sociopolitical, economic conditions, but we need to shift the conditions of the movement as well. To some extent, we need to create new movement culture, new movement praxis, new movement principles, new ways of functioning differently as a social justice movement.” - Interviewee**

So where are we today? The multiple crises that exploded in 2020 illuminated systematic inequalities and vulnerabilities across the state that had long simmered. Communities experienced an unprecedented global public health emergency at a time when our public health systems had sustained systematic dismantling and economic recession after decades of worker protections had long disappeared. The impacts of these twin crises were unevenly and deeply felt by communities of color, poor families, disabled communities, immigrants, and Indigenous peoples. In the midst of the crisis, the governmental response was unprecedented but remained woefully inadequate. The results of these failures will ripple out for generations. At the writing of this report, over one million Americans and over six million people worldwide have died as a result of COVID-19, and the pandemic is not over.

Simultaneously, the United States is experiencing a crisis of democracy. The January 6th Insurrection and the near immediate white-washing of its impact is the loudest example of the weakening of democratic systems. But the problem is much deeper than the storming of the Capitol: the quiet and insidious drum beat that “government is not to be trusted” has become so commonplace that it is accepted wisdom by nearly all political parties. The logical result is the widespread privatization of government services and the low expectations of public dividends from public investments. The feeling that government does not work leads to many shrugging their shoulders at our capacity to stem climate change, ensure health equity, or address income inequality. This political and policy paralysis leaves guns on the street, children under-educated, and all of us in a dreaded combination of fear and disempowerment.



In California, many leaders pat themselves on the back: we're different, we're progressive, and we have a can-do government taking action on climate, immigrant rights, and so much more. But with rampant homelessness and a state consistently ranking in the top five for income inequality, it often feels like we have become a state that is bold only on the surface — shallow wins covering up for a weakened government and the continuing concentration of civic, cultural, and economic power in the hands of a few. Some Californians may be still buying into the idea that our state of resistance is a beacon for an America gone MAGA, but many are disillusioned by the persistent gap between the promise of progressive change and the unyielding conditions they face every day. The gap between who we say we are and people's everyday experiences cannot and should not hold.

Power building is essential to choosing a different future, one that does not try to get back to where we were, but boldly moves us to a world we never imagined. This, in turn, requires strategic direction: we need to balance being impatient about injustice while being patient about the process, slowly building intentional relationships across difference that can become ready to leap to action at the right moment. We need to remember that organizations can win victories but only ecosystems and communities coming together can build and wield the power to reshape the terrain. We need to understand how we can overcome our collective "freeze" response by addressing trauma and demonstrating a record of "wins." And we need to overcome "either-or" models which pit seeding against scaling, so that we can invest in both small experiments and broad implementation, growing new organizations and strengthening our current anchors.

Drawing from the insights of our interviewees and our own experiences over the past several years, we offer a blueprint for how to reimagine power and what practices are going to require space, intention, and experimentation. We start by stressing that the new North Star for the health equity ecosystem is governing power. Next, we elevate three accompanying expressions of power that are pathways to getting there, namely economic power, multiracial democratic power, and narrative power. Thirdly, we elevate the structures and skills that need strengthening within the ecosystem, including building infrastructure and "inter-structure," embracing healing as an inside-outside strategy, and developing the ability to anticipate backlash and retrenchment. Lastly, we address issues of implementation, including scale, sequence, and measurement.



# 1 LIFT UP GOVERNING POWER AS THE NORTH STAR



“Being able to govern is a critical gap that is not being filled.”  
- Interviewee

We can forge more ground in the march towards equity by setting our collective North Star as governing power — or as one interviewee put it, thoroughly remaking civic institutions so that they “are seen as, and are, an extension of us.” Over the past decade, there has been a notable increase in organizations in California and across the country focusing on governing and co-governance. This is happening as more community organizers are running and winning elected office, becoming city councilmembers and mayors; as people’s budget campaigns grounded in participatory budgeting are shaping local government priorities; and as civic engagement tables are strategizing about leadership pathways into elected offices and appointments to boards and commissions.<sup>3</sup>

Governing power, simply defined, is an ability to set, win, and protect an agenda (Pastor et al., 2020). There are six arenas that define the full terrain of governing power: electoral, legislative, administrative, judicial, economic, and cultural arenas (Pastor et al., 2016). Winning requires building power and influence to win policies and politics in the electoral and legislative arenas — and, importantly, in the administrative and judicial arenas where laws and regulations are implemented, interpreted, struck down, and protected. The ability to deploy inside-outside strategies, — that is, to work with champions within government agencies to align resources, practices, and systems with the changes needed in the community — is critical. This requires a culture and capacity shift among grassroots-led organizations that have become accustomed to being outside halls of power and decision-making and winning their demands for change through tactics that agitate and hold power-holders as adversaries.

<sup>3</sup> For articles by and for organizers on governance, see <https://forgeorganizing.org/issues/governing-together>.



Part of this work is about recruiting, preparing, and getting leaders into key decision-making positions along with the staffing and support needed to be successful once in those roles. New formations and political organizations — including 501(c)4 organizations, new political formations like the Working Families Party, regional tables, and PACs — are needed to be able to elect political representatives who share our visions and values.

However, electing our own will not lead directly to community governance — another level of transformation is necessary. Firstly, if we reenact the adversarial or transactional relationships of the past with new leaders that hail from our communities, we will undermine our victories, isolate our friends, and retrench mistrust in government.

This is not to say that leaders do not need to be held accountable — quite the opposite. This is a call to a new type of deep, relationship-based accountability grounded in principles of community care and nondominant egalitarianism versus hierarchical and exclusionary rule (Topa (Four Arrows) & Narvaez, 2022).

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“And from there, we go on and develop the different leadership models of like how community members can be at the decision-making tables and for them to advocate for themselves. So, we go about different trainings, and ultimately the community [is] leading that campaign along with partner organizations.” - Interviewee



Additionally, electing community members into administrations and bureaucracies that were created to diminish democratic control will not change the terrain of power in which ecosystems operate. This is where we need co-governance — also known as democratic decision making or participatory democracy. Co-governance moves beyond models of representation and voice alone and into “the opening up of the core activities of the state to societal participation” in order to increase accountability and governance (Ackerman, 2004). In partnership with wielding governing power, co-governance is a strategy that can reshape the very terrain in which decisions are made, policies are enacted, and change is implemented.

Two examples of institutionalizing democratic decision-making processes and ongoing engagement between community and government agencies through BHC are in East Los Angeles and Long Beach. Countering the threat of displacement in East Los Angeles requires shifting narrative and institutions from “development done to us to development planned by us for us.” As one Eastside LEADS (Leadership for Equitable and Accountable Development Strategies) member noted:

“We would like not only for systems leaders to respond to our requests, but also to change how they interact with the community over the long term...HICP (Health Innovation Community Partnership) is a way to institutionalize a process for deciding how public investments happen. The old way of doing things is for the County to decide what to do, share information as relevant, and get feedback from the public. In HICP, there is the change for early communication between community leaders, residents, and systems leaders to identify community needs and how to engage more community members in the planning process.” (Bonis, 2020, p. 9)

The People’s Budget LB Coalition led by Black Lives Matter Long Beach, Black Agency, the Housing Justice Coalition, Language Access Coalition, Invest in Youth Campaign, Long Beach Immigrant Rights Coalition, Long Beach Gray Panthers, LA Voice, and Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE) put forward demands for FY2022: 1) reimagine community safety grounded in transformative justice and Black Empowerment; 2) establish and fund a citywide Rental Housing Division within the Development Services Department; 3) fund a Right to Counsel program for renters; 4) Community Land Trusts (CLTs) to stabilize communities against market-driven gentrification and displacement; 5) staff to implement the city’s Language Access Policy; 6) funding to implement the Long Beach Youth and Emerging Adults Strategic Plan; 7) establish an Office of Aging in the Health Department; 8) increase funding for the Long Beach Justice Fund for universal legal representation to immigrant residents facing deportation; 9) implement the City’s Digital Inclusion Roadmap.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> For more, see the Long Beach People’s Budget Proposal — FY 22 available at <https://www.lbforward.org/peoplesbudget>.

Given the widespread mistrust of government, there is an increased recognition of the need for explicit efforts to make government worthy of our trust. In the words of an interviewee, “what we’re trying to prioritize moving into the next decade is being able to prioritize what it means for the state to be an extension of us. What does it mean for a state to care for its people instead of agitating against us all the time? If we’re always thinking that the state is always going to be the enemy and we are always organizing against it, then what does a state look like that actually cares for its people and how do we build that?”

Over the next decade, it will be important to deepen the project and promise of governance for and by the communities most impacted by inequities. There are several opportunities for experiments over the next couple of years. This starts with directing Fiscal Recovery Funds from the federal American Rescue Plan Act to provide struggling Californians with immediate relief from the impacts of the global pandemic. However, there are opportunities to steer the state budget surplus and the emerging Community Economic Resilience Fund to start new programs and even new economic development strategies that address the longstanding underlying racial and economic inequities.

The unprecedented funding is also an opportunity to build trust and accountability in both federal and local government. Budgets are not only statements of values, they are also vehicles for governance and co-governance. Projects crafting different models of participatory budgeting at the local level are occurring up and down the state from San Jose to San Diego. In Los Angeles, Measure J — a ballot proposition passed in 2020 that sought to redirect ten percent of L.A. County’s unrestricted funding toward community investment and alternatives to incarceration — has great promise but implementation has been slow. In any case, these multiple opportunities vary in scope, and communities are wrestling with their own definitions of what community engagement and community control look like in practice.

As important as enhancing community power and community impact may be, attention will also need to be paid to constraining the power of those who currently hoard it or wield it with the explicit purpose of diminishing community voice. In the wake of the Supreme Court’s 2010 decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, the political terrain has shifted further away from communities. What is needed is a reshaping of the political process, breaking down barriers and systems that serve to obfuscate, and creating a politic that is responsive to the concerns of communities. Because of the intertwined relationship between economic and political power, there also needs to be an explicit strategy in the economic arena, a topic to which we now turn.



## 2 STRESS ECONOMIC JUSTICE AS KEY TO PUBLIC HEALTH



**“COVID is definitely a contributor, not just with the homelessness, but with the precarious healthcare and employment situation. It is making people feel very uneasy and insecure about the future.” - Interviewee**

Economic inequities threaten the possibility and probability of achieving a healthy and just California. There is no starker example of this than the pandemic, a public health crisis that both illustrated and exacerbated the precarity and instability of many people and families. Even as they have had to worry about illness, families have also had to figure out how to put food on the table, make rent payments, and keep their kids — often on the wrong side of the divide — learning so they can have a brighter future. We can no longer have a conversation about healthy communities without driving home the inter-connections with economic stability.

The state of our economy also threatens the survival of many non-profit organizations. During these times when there is increased demand for their services and programs, non-profits are constrained by the same economic drivers that are squeezing and displacing families: organizations are facing rising office rents often pricing them out of the very communities in which they were founded to serve. And it's not only those in the urban centers but also in places like the Inland Empire, where people have been moving and driving up rents and real estate values. Organizations also struggle to pay their staff a living wage with sustainable work hours and opportunities for mentorship, growth, and learning — all factors that are important to recruiting and retaining workers. The pandemic has only exacerbated these struggles.

All this raises an inconvenient truth: the shared roots of health, racial, and economic inequities in our capitalist economic system. In South Los Angeles BHC's blueprint “South Central Rooted: A blueprint to dismantle multi-generational inequity and restore community health in South Central Los Angeles,” economic disparities — i.e. poverty, disinvestment, and joblessness — are tied to gentrification, displacement, and homelessness; policing, suppression, deportation, and mass incarceration; and environmental racism (Muraída & Wat, 2020). In fact, “the story of South LA also demonstrates how the underlying drivers of disparity intersect to create a complex web of inequity that cannot be untangled by addressing any one issue alone” (Muraída & Wat, 2020, p. 119). If these conditions are the daily reality of South LA residents, then solutions funded by TCE and others seeking to build healthy communities should work at the intersecting root causes.

TCE has been among the leaders in the public health field in its focus on social determinants of health — and for its focus on the structural determinants that keep health inequities in place (Baum et al. 2018; Beckfield and Krieger 2009; Givens et al. 2018; Wailoo 2017). These “upstream” factors are institutional policies and priorities, cultural norms, and values (i.e., racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, and ableism) — as well as disparities in power and influence to be able to dismantle structural barriers. The next frontier of this work is expanding the notion of public health to include economic health and well-being.

Poverty due to unemployment, underemployment, and low-paid work is a central and persistent issue. While TCE funds workforce development in health careers and includes land use and economic development as part of building healthy communities, economic issues are more at the margins of TCE’s focus because they are often not seen as a direct health issue. But they are — and California’s social movements are saying so. If trust-based philanthropy is about respecting the goals and analyses of your grantees, then it seems clear to us that foundations should support the field’s demand for new economic narratives and policies that directly challenge our current economic system.

Research from Stockton’s guaranteed income demonstration project illustrates that the connection between economic power and well-being are already clear. The evaluation of the two-year program that provided \$500 to randomly selected residents shows that stable incomes create additional benefits to people’s health and well-being. The study found that participants were healthier, particularly as it related to their mental health, and that the income “alleviated financial scarcity creating new opportunities for self-determination, choice, goal-setting, and risk-taking” (West et al., 2021). Economic precarity is at the root of many of our health disparities and it is important to lift up interventions, like guaranteed income, that both meet immediate needs and move towards a bigger vision of a society that takes care of its people.

Aside from funding such experimentation in economic alternatives, foundations will also need to contend with their relationship to capital and corporate power — which provide the resources to do their work while also being a root cause of the systemic inequality that they hope to address. This relationship to global capitalism is not just a quirk of the system, it actually upholds, maintains, and reinforces the system. It shows up in what is funded, what is kept quiet, and who people must convince. Two questions remain: (1) how can foundations challenge capital to do better at delivering a world in less need of repair? And (2) how can philanthropy redistribute resources and be a part of organizing themselves out of existence or at least into the backseat?



**“We’re in a whole new world, and we need to do a lot of listening. We need to figure out what people’s priorities are because they may not have been the same as they were two years ago.” - Interviewee**



# 3 PROMOTE MULTIRACIAL DEMOCRACY AND CENTER BLACK AND INDIGENOUS VOICES

While crafting a vision of a multiracial democracy and the powerful movements that will lead us there, the central question of dismantling racist systems will remain at the forefront. As movements center race, they are confronting the need for both a multiracial lens, while resisting toxic “melting pot” frames. Indeed, multiracialism without specificity can tend towards a glossy façade while ignoring the demands of repair, dismantling systems, and redistributing resources. Multiracial democracy is a powerful force when it centers the specificity of anti-Black racism and settler colonialism. These “isms” are the foundational systems of oppression in the context of the United States. They lay the groundwork and set the terrain for other experiences of xenophobia, for example, and can be reinforced if we do not center these identities and experiences in our analysis and collective action. By centering Black and Indigenous voices and leadership, we can begin to strike at the heart of systemic racism. Failing to do so will leave intact racialized capitalism, hollowing out victories and retrenching the systems that oppress all, regardless of their identities (McGhee, 2021).

Working collectively in order to build a multiracial democracy that can wield the power needed to dismantle systems of oppression requires that movements are strong enough to honor a multitude of stories and build a broader “we,” while acknowledging power differentials and transmuting racial hierarchies. The work of holding the multiplicities of our identities, of practicing solidarity, of crafting a shared analysis, building liberatory narratives, and dismantling power is a continual process. In practice, that will require several places of reflection and action, the first being the acceptance that there is no point at which we check this off our list — it is continual labor, reflection, repair, and action.



**“When we’re talking about law enforcement interactions for Arabs and South Asians, we need to connect the dots to law enforcement interactions for Black individuals and Latinx individuals. It should always be top of mind that these systems that come after us are intertwined. And so, in that same way, our resistance needs to be interconnected with other communities.” - Interviewee**

The second place of reflection and action is investing in and caring for Black and Indigenous leaders, communities, and organizations explicitly and intentionally. This work will require new approaches and frameworks than we currently see in both movement ecosystems and philanthropy. It will require developing an instinct to follow first, not act first. It will require an analysis of extraction — extraction of resources, time, energy, and wisdom — and the ways in which our movements are already built on the extracted labor of Black and Indigenous communities. It will require moving beyond investing and towards reparations. Funders and ecosystems need to interrogate the ways in which they perpetuate anti-Black racism and anti-Indigeneity and need to match that interrogation with action and resources.

The third space is getting clearer about our language and the ideas they represent. Terms like People of Color and BIPOC serve to assert the kinds of solidarity that are needed in order to build a multiracial democracy, but terms alone do not create shared identities. As we discuss in the next section, identities of solidarity are built over time, and are crafted intentionally. The identity of a “person of color” will need to be nurtured and strengthened if it is to serve as a unifying force or a rallying cry.

While the term “people of color” paints with broad brush strokes, it also hides identities and power, and can place those with the most relative privilege at the center when we need just the opposite. This is not a call to find a new and improved word to convey complicated ideas of race, class, and gender — although that may be what is needed. It is a reminder to say Black when we mean Black, to disaggregate Asian-American identities, to return land to Indigenous stewardship, to name that Black and Indigenous migrants have vastly different experiences in the immigration systems, and to understand the unique experience of Latinos in a state, California, that has long marginalized that community (Almaguer, 2009; Lytle Hernández, 2020). This is a call to reject the fear of sowing division and an invitation to be clear and honest.





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**“In particular with Asian-American organizations is how we’re shaping the conversation around anti-Asian hate and hate violence in our communities, right? If we go back to February and January, the stories that emerged in mainstream media were about Asian victimhood and the subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle anti-Black orientation around crime and violence. And I think through the work of our organizations on this issue, especially in the Bay Area, we were able to shift the frame by March or April around kind of highlighting and making visible and significant opportunities and spaces for solidarity and understanding, and also sort of like collective vision around some of this stuff.” - Interviewee**

The fourth is to bring a “both/and” approach to building multicultural spaces, campaigns, and movements. Movement actors are continuing to develop this muscle in the ways they hold space with each other and the ways they develop campaigns. That includes developing spaces to learn about anti-Black racism and anti-Indigeneity that can also honor other racialized experiences. Organizers do that through storytelling and healing work that creates opportunities for mutuality and action. Investing in organizers, both their skill and their well-being, will allow the movement to remain diligent and flexible, meeting folks where they are at and unwaveringly asking more of us all.

# 4 CRAFT NEW NARRATIVES TO SHIFT BELIEFS AND NORMS

Narrative, norms, and shared identities are fundamental to power building and organizing. Alongside movement and philanthropy's work to change conditions, there is a need to attend to worldviews that support a radical reimagination of what can be possible rather than those that maintain the status quo. Work at the Grassroots Power Project (formerly known as Grassroots Policy Project or GPP) has pushed the field forward to understand what they call worldviews, one of the four faces of power, that must be wielded in order to shift systems.

For GPP, “worldview refers to the collection of beliefs, norms, value systems, core themes, popular wisdom, and traditions that people draw upon to help them make sense of the world around them” (Hinson, 2016). These components of the worldview — including narratives, norms, and shared identities — represent a type of power to shape people's understanding of the world (Healey & Hinson, 2018). By ignoring these deeper worldviews, change makers are contesting over messages and solutions that are based on the opposition's definitions of problems and values — they have ceded the very terrain on which ideas and agendas are contested.

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**“And, there are other kinds of power. People often call this narrative, we used to call this ideology. Are we waging the battle of big ideas? Often, the fastest way to win a campaign is to fit within the dominant ideology, which may not be yours. For example, if we advocate against prisons saying it's cheaper to educate children than to keep them in jail. That might help pass an anti-prison policy, but in the long term it makes it harder to move a decarceration agenda, which is usually the goal of a campaign like that for a racial justice organization building power in a prison-impacted community.” - Interviewee**

Investing in narrative and worldview change does not mean an investment in large communications firms. On the contrary, understanding and analyzing worldviews is a skillset that needs to be developed throughout the ecosystem and capacity that needs to be built “in-house” and at the grassroots level. Assessing and shifting narratives is not an individual process that can be taken on by a single individual or organization. As GPP posits, “developing narratives that shift the dominant world is a democratic process...it is something people struggle with, develop, and test out together” (Hinson, 2016). It is critical that we invest in the process of building consensus on transformative narratives.



# FOSTERING TRANSFORMATIVE NARRATIVES

Movements need more profound narratives that can get underneath slogans and towards the emotional frames that are hiding beneath the surface. The opposition already has a head start in this area — after 400 years of shaping our collective common sense, it is easy to rely on well-trodden mental maps of personal responsibility, self-interested individuals, the invisible hand, and acceptable levels of inequality. This head start can make it tempting for our movements to use those same deeply entrenched ideas — using a story of hard-working immigrants, for example, rightfully attaches human dignity to hard work and taps into existing mental maps, but it can also feed into a notion that perhaps some of those at the bottom of our economic hierarchy just didn't work hard enough to make their way. If you want to attach root causes, you need to dive deep to understand and transform our deeply rooted stories.

Movements will need to continue their work to develop new worldviews and transformational narratives. That will include creating new connections between ideas — like connecting prosperity to mutuality as opposed to selfishness, or connecting social movements to government accountability, a process of creating trust as opposed to inherent trustworthiness (or lack thereof) in the state.<sup>5</sup> It will also include centering “older ideas” like the sacredness of our planet, the interconnection between our well-being and the well-being of the land, and the value of communities to help us live in right relationship with each other (Barish, 2019). These ideas emerge most strongly from Indigenous traditions and the movement must do a better job centering Indigenous leaders and thinkers on restoring these transformational and intersectional narratives.

<sup>5</sup> For more information, please see *Solidarity Economics: Why Mutuality and Movements Matter* (Benner and Pastor, 2021) and <https://solidarityeconomics.org/>.

# FOSTERING MUTUALITY AND SHARED IDENTITIES

Narratives are understood as a contest of big ideas, but how exactly do we share those big ideas and put them into practice? This is where our ecosystems may have a head start and a clear advantage over communications shops promoting new messages: narratives are internalized through practice and relationships. As Benner and Pastor (2021) share, “solidarity does not just naturally exist, but is strengthened through processes of working together in common efforts.” Transformative narratives can help us connect to each other, building and strengthening new relationships that compel us to act on those connections. Through the process of collective action, we are able to foster new norms of solidarity and transfigure oppressive ones. This cycle of new narratives, relationships, and collective action can deepen norms of solidarity and create shared identities. Those shared identities built on trust and solidarity allow us to collectively create new narratives. The reality is not linear, nor is it a circle — it is iterative, mutually reinforcing and constantly changing. However, without practice, relationships, and attention to the narratives and norms, we can quickly (even if inadvertently) reinforce oppressive narratives and undermine the work to change conditions.

In essence, this is the work of our social movements. Organizers, communicators, and campaigners already do the work to craft shared identities that are grounded in solidarity — but without the investment in developing the skills of analyzing and recasting narrative power, movements can reinforce the systems they seek to reimagine. Movements will need to continue intentionally crafting narratives and norms that reinforce connection — to each other, to mutuality in exchange, to the environment, to the commons, and to the shared fruits of our collective labor. We will need to rebuild the habits of turning towards each other first and the belief in the efficacy of our communities’ ability to meet our biggest challenges.



# 5 INVEST IN POWER-BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE AND INTER-STRUCTURE

TCE's pivot from initiative to infrastructure is one of a growing number of institutions and collaborative efforts talking about strengths, gaps, and needs of power building organizations. PIVOT, for example, is a joint practitioner-funder table focused on longer-term power building needs statewide. Together TCE and The San Francisco Foundation initiated a table focused on Bay Area needs. Haas Jr. Fund has been shaping a strategy and plan for strengthening the leadership infrastructure to different pathways including boards and commissions, elected offices, and judicial appointments. Field-led planning efforts to address the critical need for more organizers and more organizer trainings include: South Los Angeles-based Community Coalition's National Organizing School; Bay Area-based In-Advance Organizing School; and Grassroots Power Project's Strategy College. A number of organizations committed to power building provide fellowships as well: YO! Cali has an Emerging Organizers Fellowship and Power California runs a New Majority Fellowship.

The *i-Center Concept Blueprint: Infrastructure to Grow Transformative Power* (Zimmerman et al., 2022) provides a vision, strategy, and starting priorities for a Power Building Infrastructure Center (or i-Center, for short). Designed and conceived by a broad swath of power building leaders from across the state, the i-Center would be a new entity, more specifically, a network of centers both physical and virtual, new and existing, and would be a key part of power building infrastructure for the state. Its purpose would be to strengthen and connect power building practitioners around collective learning, capacity building, and innovation, particularly around movement strategy and power building, intergenerational leadership development, and long-term sustainability and resiliency.

The sole existence of a concept paper for an i-Center is in-and-of-itself an indicator of the readiness, alignment, and strategic capacity of California's power building ecosystem. With the funding from four foundations, a committee of 37 power building leaders representing California's diverse populations, issues, and regions, conducted one-on-ones, surveys, and focus groups engaging over 500 individuals and in seven months reached alignment around the key contours and concepts of what shared infrastructure is needed.

But what is meant by power building infrastructure anyway? On the one hand, infrastructure is considered the underlying foundations for a sector, a definition that draws on the fact that "infra" is the Latin root for beneath. For example, the definition for "Power Building Infrastructure" from the i-Center Concept Blueprint is: "The people, systems, and resources that provide the foundation or basic framework needed for a long lasting, robust, 'power building' ecosystem for transformative change — change that advances social justice and racial and health equity in California. This includes the skills, capabilities, services, organizational forms, resources, and apparatuses that support and advance this work" (Zimmerman et al., 2022, p. 9).

Another way to think about this: ***infrastructure is the "commons" of power building ecosystems***. It is the capacities that are enduring in nature, needed by all (or at least by a critical mass), and beyond the reach for any single organization to develop alone. In this regard, perhaps a more accurate term would be "inter-structure," drawing on the Latin root meaning between. A power building infrastructure is about needs in the work (infra-structure) and spaces between organizations and organized groups of people working towards a shared goal (inter-structure).

For example, California Calls itself serves as the shared infrastructure that independent, neighborhood-based, grassroots organizations needed to reach the kind of scale of integrated voter engagement to influence statewide legislation and ballot initiatives.<sup>6</sup> Such infrastructure includes the technology to reach over a million voters: a centralized and constantly updated database of registered voters, regional computer-based phone centers, and the computer programs to map precincts and target voters.

<sup>6</sup> For more, see Vote, Organize, Transform, Engage (VOTE): New Frontiers in Integrated Voter Engagement (Lin et al., 2019)

To improve, both dramatically and permanently, the daily living conditions of those most impacted by inequities, we need to take seriously the project of building infrastructure for governing power and “inter-structure” could be a more fruitful approach. Why? Discussions about infrastructure can often overlook existing organizations and planning efforts. Often times, this stems from a deficit approach that starts with questioning about needs and gaps. In funding only the gaps, new efforts put existing organizations and efforts in competition.

Through an “inter-structure” approach, existing organizations and efforts are assets upon which to build or expand. They can serve as critical nodes to be strengthened and expanded and serve as connectors between new and existing entities. Rather than looking at what is not there, this approach starts with what is there then builds out from there. Additionally, funder-driven tables that pick and choose organizations to sit at the table risk supplanting and complicating relationships — rather than taking the time to explore existing relationships, which are often invisible and not obvious to an outsider.

To guide intentional decision-making and sequencing in investments, there are at least five distinct analytical pathways for assessing the current state of infrastructure: by geographies; by issues; by arenas; by populations and communities; and by strategic capacities. In other words, there are distinct (though related) infrastructure needs by place, campaigns, target populations, types of power, and strategies. These five pathways closely map to TCE’s past approaches through BHC: Building Healthy Communities (place); Healthy California (campaigns); Boys and Men of Color (target populations); Narrative Power (type of power); and Integrated Voter Engagement (strategy).

To minimize misinterpretation, we want to emphasize that we are defining these pathways as an analytical application and not as a grant-making strategy. We think that it will be a helpful way to clarify, sharpen, and focus discussions about infrastructure strengths and gaps. To illustrate what may be revealed by thinking along these pathways, we draw from our research and our experiences to offer an assessment of the governing-power infrastructure through the lens of place, targeted populations, and strategy. Lastly, we discuss the added value to existing efforts by seeing through the lens of governing power.



# SUPPORTING AND CONNECTING REGIONS

Regions are a key geography. Regional power building efforts can link neighborhood concerns to the political structures that have a direct role in improving or harming communities.<sup>7</sup> As we have learned in our research on economic inclusion, regions are also at a scale that allow for repeated interactions between people over time that are necessary for building relationships, understanding, and, ultimately, trust (Benner & Pastor, 2015). We have long called for a regional approach to linking local efforts to state-level policy and systems change (Pastor et al., 2014).

A starting formula for what regional infrastructure looks like: envision a network map with each dot representing an organization that is connected through a regional hub, and each regional hub is connected through another hub. This formula applies within a region as well as statewide. The particular roles, capacities, and scale of reach of each “hub” is shaped by the context, characteristics, and priorities of the existing power building field. Infrastructure needs to support power building efforts at the regional scale look different in different regions of the state.

Opportunities to building lasting infrastructure have been leveraged through short-term campaigns such as the 2020 Census. In Los Angeles County, there have been intentional efforts to build civic infrastructure in Southeast Los Angeles, San Gabriel Valley, and Palmdale / Lancaster and linking them to places with longer histories of social movement building such as South Los Angeles, East LA / Boyle Heights, and Long Beach (Engage R+D & USC Dornsife: Equity Research Institute, 2021). The census was an opportunity to invest in regional anchor organizations and a countywide network of over 100 organizations and build civic engagement capacities, including an ability to raise awareness via social media and to mobilize via text.

Additionally, there are infrastructure needs to connect across regions around shared concerns. Statewide alliances serve some of that need by connecting independent grassroots organizing groups across the state (e.g. California Calls, Power California). But there is also interest among organizations working along California’s Central Coast, for example, being in regular dialogue with organizations working in the Inland Valley about the particular opportunities and challenges in organizing in more rural areas and in places with fewer organizations and foundations. This highlights an important regional dimension: strategies, tactics, and lessons from Los Angeles or Oakland are not necessarily transferrable to every locale, and supporting peer-to-peer sharing from groups in what they believe to be more similar political conditions needs to be part of the infrastructure package.

<sup>7</sup> For a look at the early stages of the field, see *This Could Be the Start of Something Big: How Social Movements for Regional Equity Are Reshaping Metropolitan America* (Pastor et al., 2009)

# SUPPORTING AND CONNECTING IDENTITIES

From a population-centered lens, infrastructure for building power is different than it is for building power in places. To achieve a goal of multiracial democracy, there needs to be clear strategies to engage under-mobilized and under-represented groups. For undocumented Californians, they have to see their stake and role in civic engagement and ability to make change even when they are not (yet) allowed to vote. For immigrants who are “legal permanent residents” or LPRs, supporting citizenship drives can help shift the electorate and help their communities. And for the original peoples and Tribal communities in California, concepts of “power” and the types of organizations that can be brought into a power building ecosystem are different.

For example, as a direct result of the American Indian Movement, there are federal government-funded health centers and student programs in schools. These service providers are starting places for engaging Indigenous people and potential partners. Groups like the California Native Vote Project see existing leadership development programs as opportunities to provide complementary curriculum to build organizing capacity within the community.

The 2020 wave of anti-Black violence and brutal murders of Black people at the hands of police and the attacks against Asian Americans reinvigorated conversations within philanthropy about what could be done in California. One result has been the California Black Freedom Fund, a five-year, \$100 million initiative to accelerate the formation of an ecosystem of Black power building and movement-building organizations.<sup>8</sup> Organizing and coalition efforts won the Asian and Pacific Islander (API) Equity Budget, a 3-year investment of \$166.5 million sponsored by California’s API Legislative Caucus.

How to fund and resource organizations rooted in vulnerable populations, and the capacities needed not only to shore up leadership and organized power within specific communities but also to work across different communities, is a question that always needs to be asked, answered, and revisited. The political education to address anti-Blackness is just as needed in Latinx and Asian American communities as it is in white communities. The work within communities should be with an eye towards working across communities.

<sup>8</sup> For more, please see <https://cablackfreedomfund.org>

# SUPPORTING AND CONNECTING LEADERS

A strategic capacity for achieving governing power and being able to co-govern is leadership. California is rich with leaders who have the potential to serve in elected office or on oversight boards and commissions. There are proven programs and organizations that have demonstrated success in preparing and supporting leaders to sit in positions of authority and decision-making. Since 2009, Urban Habitat has led a Boards and Commissions Leadership Institute (BCLI) to prepare and support under-represented leaders to serve on decision-making bodies that have authority over housing, transportation, and land use issues in the Bay Area. It has helped replicate the program over the years by working with partners such as the Center for Policy Initiatives (CPI) in San Diego, Liberty Hill Foundation in Los Angeles, Building Healthy Communities Merced, and Organize Sacramento.

What might the infrastructure look like that could support leadership pathways? It would need to start with building a pool of leaders, move on to recruiting and preparing candidates to securing leadership positions (whether appointed or elected), and evolve further to support leaders in office and their planning for succession. The current organizations, networks, and relationships with our ecosystems are parts of the infrastructure for identifying leaders, training potential candidates, recruiting mentors, and providing peer-to-peer support.

What is needed are the connections between programs and efforts that facilitate the sharing of models, curricula, and lessons learned that can ease the “start-up costs” that can make such efforts challenging to get off the ground. Sustained funding is also critical. Funding for proven programs has been episodic, causing organizations to make choices about whether to continue such efforts, especially when there is no funding for the programming required for leaders once they are successfully appointed or elected. And there is the question of how to keep connected to the alumni of these programs — and what the possibilities are for keeping them engaged or networked.



# 6 EMBRACE HEALING JUSTICE FOR INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL IMPACT



“The healing work could lead to [a] good health outcome, but it might not lead to a political outcome.” - Interviewee

An emerging strain of work sometimes called healing justice is taking off, albeit unevenly, across movement spaces. Healing justice work can look multiple ways — it can draw deeper connections to cultural and spiritual practices, strive towards personal liberation, or offer new practices like somatics that can reestablish the connections between our minds and our bodies. What it tends to share across these different forms is another “both/and”: taking seriously the work of healing from systemic oppression *and* directing that healing energy through organizing to challenge those very systems.

At its best, healing justice can begin to address the ways that internalized systems of oppression show up within organizing work and can help open up new avenues of thinking and practicing liberation. It can strip away dominant practices and build shared identities grounded in mutuality and reject toxic narratives. This work is by no means universally accepted across movement spaces, as some see it as a distraction from the work and the urgency of what needs to be done. Without a connection to power building, there is a fear that healing can be a narrow experience of individual self-actualization and that organizations without the skills, resources, or interest will be forced to contend with an overflow of trauma within the workplace.

However, if healing justice is grounded in the principles of safety, belonging, dignity, purpose (brown et al., n.d.), and community care, then it is a practice of creating the world we are seeking to build. If healing is connected to addressing root causes of oppression, if it is supported by trained and trusted community members and staff, and if it is connected to organizing and power building, then it has the potential to create healthier and more powerful movements. We see that happening in a few ways.

The first is investing in the ability to address trauma and systemic oppression within our movements. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, trauma, harm, and oppression seep into our collective work, cause discord, and reinforce the very systemic harms that organizations hope to address. Healing justice does not offer a magic bullet; instead, it offers perspectives, practices, and skills that allow movements to address these harms in ways that craft stronger relationships.



**“I think there is a growing recognition that there is value and importance in creating, actually, a healthier, more functional movement culture and movement ecosystems, and that that is a part of actually supporting a transformation agenda.” - Interviewee**

The second is meeting community members where they are and helping them see organizing as itself a healing practice. Healing justice tools can equip both community members and organizers with skills to help communities transform “private shame into a public stance” and not allow that private shame to continue to live in their bodies and impact their health and well-being. Healing justice can also be one of the lenses used to evaluate organizing practices, to see where white supremacy and capitalism are embedded in the history and culture of organizing, and to continue to transform a field that has never remained stagnant. When the skills and practices that transmute trauma are connected to organizing, it sets the conditions for deeper expressions of community power and stronger organizing practices.

The third is implementing healing justice as a practice to strengthen relationships, including between organizations and funders, across and within communities, and between humans and our natural world. Our movements are developing the language to address harm and build practices of reparations. These practices can address power dynamics and allow movement actors and funders to shift away from charity models or savior mentalities. They can support decentering whiteness and address racism and harm between communities of color. They can also become a new foundation for addressing our climate crisis that reaches for renewal and relationship over technology. Attending to both the material and the relational holds abundant possibilities at the interpersonal and the societal levels.

Implementing healing justice principles and practices will require more time and attention within movement ecosystems. However, it cannot cannibalize other power building work; instead, it must bolster and strengthen the tools movements have to build power. This means that funders will need to support organizations to allow them to have space and time to reflect on their internal culture and practices that may perpetuate harm and what new practices can emerge in time. Fortunately, there is a growing set of resources to draw on, with consultants and staff, particularly people of color in those roles, who are already doing this work.

While healing justice can be supported and funded, it will backfire if it is mandated by foundations. But neither should such “internal” work be shunted off to one side in favor of campaigns and other flashy external wins. As our movements grow and mature, they bring in new leaders and new staff who have experienced exactly the sorts of oppressions they now seek to challenge. Younger organizers are working to combine soul and smarts, healing and strategy, reflection and action — and they are frustrated by those who do not wish to challenge toxic cultures within the movement itself. Exploration of how to do this most effectively and with the most external impact — to put our values into practice in our own organizations *and* the world — is the other “inside-outside” strategy for change. It deserves full support by the field and by funders.

# 7 DEVELOP THE SKILLS TO ANTICIPATE BACKLASH

One of the big Achilles heels in movement ecosystems, particularly in relationships between organizations and funders, is the failure to anticipate backlash. History shows us that every step forward toward equity will be met with forces that will attempt to both dismantle our wins and actively codify new ways to strip community power. The election of Barack Obama was a perfect example of a watershed moment of hope and change. But as it became an administration and not a campaign, good ideas became mired in ineffective bureaucracy (Obamacare rollout, anyone?), bad ideas were not derailed by vibrant social movements keeping government accountable (Deporter-in-chief, anyone?), and reactionary white supremacist ideas took deeper root in a nation already primed by racism (Birthers, anyone?).

As disappointing as all that was, the key question is not whether we should hold any particular political leader culpable but rather why the field was surprised and underprepared. Progress is not linear and reaction will always come. For example, as movements became stronger in California, we could have predicted that there would be a strategic recall effort in an off-cycle election to assert minority control. After a season in which the phrase “Black Lives Matter” was embraced by many, it was foreseeable that some of the key demands of that movement regarding incarceration and policing would be challenged by those stirring up fears of crime and disorder. We need to deploy a power analysis not just to figure out how to move our pieces forward on the chessboard but to also understand the moves that may be made by others.

Imagine what could be possible if organizers, funders, and all parts of the “power flower” were mapping out the landscape continuously and collectively in order to be constantly on the watch for opportunities to tip the scales of power. To do this, we need a different set of funder-grantee relations. The traditional funder environment requires that organizations continually prove themselves and demonstrate their efficacy in order to secure long-term funding. This leads to an environment where organizers don’t readily talk about the opposition with funders, or share where they come up short against those actively attempting to entrench powerlessness for impacted communities. But as everyone knows, we often learn more from our shortcomings than from our accomplishments.

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**“On the conservative side what you have is the development and the cultivation of people of color to run as either conservative Democrats or as Republicans, right. There has been a longstanding effort by the Republican Party there to build its conservative leadership through churches and they have been targeting Latino churches for years now, really, decades.” - Interviewee**



This is where tools of power analysis can provide a path into the discomfort and create rigorous, collective practices across siloes. The components of the power analysis — including understanding the agenda and worldview of the opposition, and realistically mapping relative relationships of groups to power and competing agendas, flashpoints, and community priorities — are fundamental to co-creating forward-looking, shared perspectives. That mutual reasoning can help contextualize policy wins and losses, track narrative change, make strategic decisions about investments, and pivot away from reactive choices.



**“I think I have been alarmed with the pace, the speed [of] cynical and fear-based appeals, how effective they are. And I think this is like a challenge and a change in politics, right, as a whole, just how deep-seated some of that is.”**  
- Interviewee

Power analysis can also help movements prepare for the inevitable backlash and repression that happens both at the national and local levels. For example, in Orange County, after a mix of (c)3 and (c)4 organizing yielded wins in both community-connected elected officials and changes to structural barriers including districted voting, leaders are experiencing threats of violence (Staggs, 2021). This is a result of an under-discussed reality that there is significant investment in reactionary and violent politics in the region, resulting in a very dangerous environment for folks stepping up into leadership.

Orange County is not the only region confronting organized, reactionary forces of racialized capitalism and violent white supremacy. Across the Central Valley, organizers are facing a surge of organized Proud Boys who have begun to co-opt progressive tactics of coalition building and local governance (Owen, 2022) while threatening both movement wins and the people themselves. While the Proud Boys may be a newer organization, the long legacy of violent white supremacist organizations and their deep relationship with unchecked police violence is not a new phenomenon, but one with a long history dating back to the founding of the nation. In keeping with our earlier discussion of healing justice, the realities of violence and the long-term trauma it causes must be addressed by movements as it impacts organizers and leaders who want to step into governance.

Flexing the muscle of collective analysis and anticipation will require developing the skills of future-casting, seeing not just the vision we want but also the scenarios where everything goes wrong. Organizers can use flashpoints strategically to ensure that community power is maintained and expanded, wins are protected, and unorganized communities are brought into the fold instead of losing them to the politics of fear and hate that characterize backlash in the history of the United States. Funder partners can also prepare to mitigate against the tools of fear and violence as they anticipate the inevitable pushback from capital, from white supremacy, and from those who have something to lose by the fundamental reshaping of power.

# 8 SEED AND SCALE TO MEET OUR CHALLENGES

We face big and deep challenges — and we need big and deep power building ecosystems in California. But the reality is that we are not where we need to be in terms of achieving an agenda, wielding power, and changing conditions in the Golden State. In order to meet the demands of communities in a state this large and diverse, there will need to be new organizations, new projects, new ideas, and new conversations to get closer to what we envision. There are organizations working on all the critical social issues, like education, housing, climate, and policing; however, they are not working at the necessary scale to make lasting progress at addressing the root causes.

So, what do we need to do? We are not — and the field is not — suggesting that we should build one giant organizational empire. This is the season to plant new seeds as a part of strategic growth strategy. By focusing on new pilots within existing organization, creating incubators for new projects, and supporting new organizations led by organizers and people with lived experiences, foundations can support community-grounded expansion. And the more they can be BIPOC-led, the better (for all the reasons discussed earlier).



**“And yet, we’re all still traversing the same community organizations. The ability to really engage new and unique leadership is challenging. Because we’re all kind of drawing from the same pot, in many instances. And I think you can break through that. But it just requires more intentionality regarding the spaces and places where people organize.”**  
- Interviewee

If we are being honest, funders play favorites, and they often do it for good reasons — organizations that are established, that have built a community base, that have proven results, and who have long established relationships are important to the longevity of our movements. Yet the ground to be seeded is in the local organizing field where groups are strapped for resources. To be clear, we need to both support the organizations that are the backbone of movement and build a new cadre of organizations. It’s not a question of who is more deserving; it is a question of funding “both/and” rather than “either/or.”

Those projects that are seeded and doing well will need to scale up, and scale up strategically. Scaling up well is not about exporting a one-size fits all approach. One of the important lessons from Building Healthy Communities is that context matters, and place matters. Strategic scaling up requires time to understand what lessons work and what won't in new contexts. Shifting contexts requires the development of local knowledge and expertise, and the ability of those experts to experiment with tools. New experiments will require new relationships.

To get to scale, we must accelerate our time frame for change. There is exceptional wisdom in the idea that we can only move at the speed of trust — and there is also a risk of being all talk and no action, particularly as it relates to changing conditions faced by communities. We need to accelerate our vision and investment in building local power and that should start with unprecedented investments in base-building to build trust and action at a scale we haven't yet seen.



**“And so I think the more that relationships [between philanthropy and movement] look like that, where the economies of scale does not look like a transaction but really like being able to build kind of like a co-developed strategy while considering them as a part of the stakeholdership, you know, they’re not the base per se but they’re part of the economy of scale like what we’re able to accomplish and do, that’s something that I think we’re — yeah, that I think we would like to continue to see.” - Interviewee**

Luckily, it's not philanthropy's role to do that alone. Grantmakers should understand the power they have, as funding decisions will directly translate to determining the size, scale, and look of the power building ecosystems. In this vein, funders need to invest in two skills — co-developing a muscle to identify and envision long-term investments and releasing decision-making power to the field. That, in turn, will require organizations that are more established and well-resourced to connect emerging organizations and their leaders to power brokers and influencers — and it will require smaller organizations to step into networked ecosystems and build relationships rather than going at it alone.



## 9 ADOPT A STRATEGY FOR SEQUENCING

It is easy for us to say that there should always be a “both/and” approach. Strengthen anchor organizations *and* seed new ones. Deepen investments in the 11 counties of the original 14 BHC places *and* expand regionally into new counties. Double-down on tried-and-true strategies of integrated voter engagement and coalition-building *and* experiment with new approaches to healing justice and leadership development. But we recognize that there are finite amounts of time, funding, and people to carry out the work. And we recognize that tensions emerge within organizations and across an ecosystem when choices need to be made about what moves forward and what remains on hold.

Yet, there is much to be gained through the struggle of transcending tensions to taking coordinated actions. On the other side of this struggle, there can be deeper understandings of the desired outcomes, new perspectives gained, and unspoken intentions made explicit. It is, in fact, these transformational byproducts of strategizing and choice-making are the foundational building blocks for future conversations and actions. Setting aside one’s own position to embrace and nurture others’ ideas and projects as the logical first step is how trust, mutuality, and deeper solidarity are built.

So how do we strike the balance between what seems urgent and what is strategic? Fortunately, keeping an eye on governing power stretches the time horizon beyond what may be a ten-year funding initiative. And at the same time, ten years is a helpful interval for planning and strategizing at the onset, mid-term assessment and adjustments, and reflecting and learning until the cycle restarts. It allows for the sequencing and phasing of priorities over time. Holding a vision of what governing power looks like in California can help thread together a multi-phase, multi-generational approach to building healthy communities that can be a model for the rest of the country.

The questions at hand are: What are the most strategic capacities in a place, for a population, to move an issue that will accelerate progress towards governing power? And how are those capacities best built or strengthened? What are the timeliest campaigns given current conditions? The art and skill of facilitation to answer these questions in a timely, inclusive, and generative way should not be underestimated. The ability to work through differences to achieve stronger alignment and solidarity is a leadership skill that must not be undervalued. The ability to discern between responding to opportunity as opposed to reacting to crises is increasingly important. The i-Center is one place to build muscles to answer these questions — a connected “hub” to coordinate efforts and experiments, and to develop a culture and discipline to evaluate results.



# 10 MEASURE WHAT MATTERS FOR TRANSFORMATION

Above, we have offered nine directions for seizing this moment. Our tenth is about gauging success: measuring what matters. How will we know whether or not we're on track? Or, more critically, how will we know whether the tracks we are on are actually leading towards a healthier and just California? What are the data, analyses, and evaluations needed to assess the impact on people's daily lives — and what are the interim measures that are about understanding whether we are achieving and wielding the kind of governing power we envision?

Discussions of measurement can often quickly drift to determining new data that can be collected, counted, and evaluated. We're all for numbers, particularly if they are used to track performance and disparities in government spending, community health, and economic benefits. Tools such as the National Equity Atlas, Race Counts, and California Health Interview Survey, to name a few, can point to trends over time, disparities by race/ethnicity and by place, and levels of performance or outcomes. These data tools — especially when they disaggregate data by detailed race/ethnicity, nativity, gender, and neighborhood — are helpful in generating attention to problems as a first step towards shared action and for tracking shifts over time.

Yet such data tools also require constant interrogation and careful attention to the possibility of further invisibilizing and erasing peoples and communities, particularly for those cases in which numbers are small (thus not reported) or for those identities and characteristics that are not captured — such as non-conforming genders and certain disabilities. In such cases, it is important to ground truth findings with the experiences and insights from key constituencies — and to do so in partnership with organizing groups, service providers, and other community-based organizations. Building in such feedback loops between data centers, policy shops, and community-rooted groups is a critical part of the measurement and accountability infrastructure.

We must also go beyond the usual focus on quantitative data capacities. The purpose for building governing power is to create the conditions, contexts, and circumstances so that all Californians are cared for, are caring for each other, and are active champions for greater equity and inclusion. Because the landscape is so different in the northern border with Oregon than in the southern border with Mexico, for example, the pathways to governing power will be different. However, there is a common skillset to assessing shifts in the landscape, determining strategy, then setting markers of success.



While this is an essential capacity for effective strategists, organizers, and campaigners, it is not a common capacity among evaluators who are the ones often looked to as experts and arbiters of success. Cultivating evaluation capacity within ecosystems — both as a connected “petal” and within the power building organizations themselves — will pay dividends into the future.

Fortunately, there is a growing field of research and evaluation walking the road alongside community power building groups. Supporting local evaluators for each of the 14 BHC places was one way to seed and nurture people and partnerships that could straddle evaluation for the field and for the foundation. Nationally, researchers at the P3 Lab at the SNF Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins University are engaged in what they are starting to call “practice-based evidence” as opposed to evidence-based practice, and researchers at Vanderbilt University are actively working on measuring community power for health equity (Pastor et al., 2022). While investment in organizing and community power itself should be paramount, deepening this analytical bench could also be important.

Also important: continue to develop a set of shared transformative metrics that can be applied to the art and science of movement-building (Pastor et al., 2011). Doors knocked will always be easier to measure than transmutation of private shame to a public stance — yet we must measure both and doors knocked must stay in service to transformation. That does not mean that we reduce transformation down to a number. On the contrary, we need to develop understandings about what keeps people coming back into an ecosystem — what makes the movement a social and political “home.”

Focusing on the “metrics of belonging”<sup>9</sup> — on what it takes to inculcate a sense of belonging and create opportunities and confidence for community leaders to exercise agency — will allow us to remain accountable to people-centered goals, to measure for strategic decision-making, and to tell the story of movements to multiple audiences. Creating metrics of belonging allows organizers to focus on engagement that transforms, communicators to focus on narratives that shape deeper values over the long-term, and strategists to focus on both policy wins and intergenerational retention of leaders.

<sup>9</sup> Thank you to the Measuring Community Power Advisory Committee for their influence on this section, particularly for providing the language of “metrics of belonging,” “practice-based evidence,” and “measuring the magic.”

# CONCLUSION: LOOKING FORWARD

We started this report by reviewing the experience of the Building Healthy Communities (BHC) initiative launched by The California Endowment in the midst of an earlier period of financial and social crisis, one triggered by the financial collapse of 2007-2008. With the state at a seeming crossroads, TCE made a ten-year commitment to a model based on building local collaboratives in fourteen different places to promote health equity and influence key state health policies.

It was an elegant plan — and one that was soon modified as TCE learned that what communities really wanted to do was build power to control the decisions affecting their lives. Trusting those that they had chosen, TCE loosened its grip and unleashed a wave of “people power” experiments that facilitated a series of important policy victories. Just as key: it led to a transformation of the foundation to one that centered community power as not just instrumental to winning new policies but fundamental to building collective efficacy and individual and community health.

We are now several years into another crisis, one triggered by the public health disaster of COVID-19 and the realization by many that the racist policing evidenced by the murder of George Floyd is just the tip of a racist iceberg of unequal educational,



economic, and environmental outcomes. TCE is again cooking up a plan for its next decade, but what's different this time is that the sort of community leaders that once challenged top-down design mid-way through BHC are now at the table themselves designing the ecosystem for a more just and healthy California.

Supported by TCE and other foundations in this effort, these leaders are suggesting that what will help get California to the promised land of social justice is a permanent infrastructure to support power building. In this report, we have suggested several important steps to achieving that overall goal, including the need to emphasize “governing power,” to stress economic justice, to center Black and Indigenous voices, to craft new narratives, to build “inter-structure” that links organizations, to embrace healing justice, and to develop the skills and discipline to anticipate backlash, experiment and scale, and to measure what matters in the long-run.

Achieving well-resourced, intersectional, and intersectoral ecosystems for change will also require that we expand the boundaries of who is in and who is out of a robust movement for a better California. We will need more inside implementers who are on board with democratic processes and accountability, more outside activists running for office and being held accountable, more forward-looking businesses who see the possibilities of an inclusive economy, and more service and civic institutions who see the benefits of connections with community organizers.

In building these bridges and sustaining this movement, we will need to combine soul with strategy, healing with action, vision with tactics. We will have to focus on what is specific about various forms of oppression but also what is common about the yearning for dignity and community. We will need to stress the power of working together, remembering that organizations may score victories but communities and networks are what can build and wield power to shape long-term change. At this crossroads, there is no going back to a California in which too many communities are left behind and kept behind; we must instead look around the corner for what's next and what's possible on our journey to a more equitable Golden State.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We dedicate this report to Dr. Beatriz Solis, a champion for communities, strategist for change, and visionary who was always looking around the corner and anticipating a need before it was needed. It was Bea who asked us to consider writing this report, and so we honor her forward thinking with the title “Looking Around the Corner.” We miss her deeply and hope she rests in power.

Our sincere gratitude to the staff and leadership at The California Endowment, particularly Lori Nascimento and Dr. Sandra Witt, who helped this report come to fruition. Additionally, we thank those who provided invaluable feedback on early versions.

This report and all of our work could not happen without a power-building ecosystem. It reflects the wisdom and insights of interviewees, listed by name and organization in Appendix B, and rests upon years of research, strategy, and storytelling by dozens of organizers, activists, and leaders.

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# PHOTO CREDITS

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# APPENDIX B. INTERVIEWEES

**Damon Azali-Rojas,**  
Coaching for Healing, Justice, and Liberation

**Zahra Billoo,**  
Council on American-Islamic Relations

**Ludovic Blain,**  
California Donor Table

**Juan De Lara,**  
University of Southern California

**Rev. Deborah Lee,**  
Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity Nunu  
Kidane, Priority Africa Network

**Timmy Lu,**  
AAPIs for Civic Empowerment

**Jonathan Paik,**  
Orange County Civic Engagement Table

**Sylvia Paz,**  
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