

**A REPORT  
TO THE  
CALIFORNIA  
ENDOWMENT**

# Sustaining People Power

**JANUARY 2018**

**A BRIEF BASED ON**

*A Pivot to Power:  
Lessons from  
The California  
Endowment's  
Building Healthy  
Communities  
about Place, Health,  
and Philanthropy*

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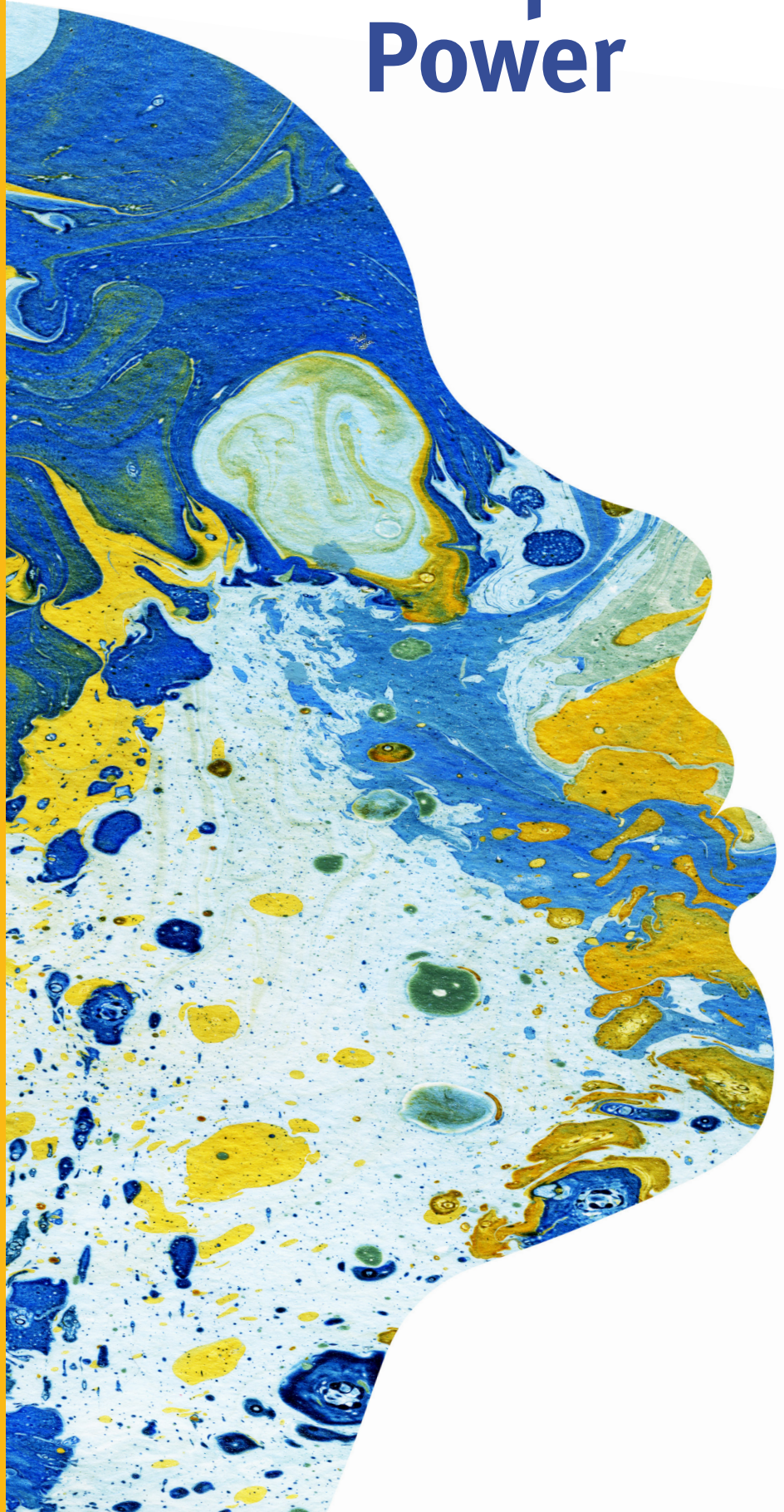
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## ■ Building Healthy Communities, Building People Power

Launched in 2010, The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities (BHC) is a bold and innovative initiative aimed at improving the health and well-being of all Californians. It is a 10-year investment in building capacity in 14 diverse communities to engage in policy and systems change for broader local and statewide impact. In addition, it is an investment in state-level policy advocacy, strategic communications, and leadership development among young people, including a special focus on boys and men of color.

A cornerstone of BHC has been its investment in building people power—that is, the capacity to organize grassroots residents to engage in campaigns aimed at improving their communities. In 2015, USC PERE launched a learning and evaluation project to help TCE assess its progress in building people power capacity at the halfway mark of BHC. Data were collected through an online survey of organizing grantees in the BHC sites and through 25 key informant interviews with organizers and intermediaries funded by Healthy Communities and Brothers and Sons, organizations not funded by TCE, and funders and academics who understand organizing and have a statewide perspective.<sup>1</sup>

This brief highlights successes and challenges from BHC's first five years of building people power capacity in its 14 places and provides recommendations for the final years. It begins with a snapshot of organizing capacity supported by BHC based on data from grantee surveys. It then identifies key challenges and recommendations for how to sustain that capacity based on the perspectives and insights of interviewees. This brief has been prepared to support discussions within TCE about how to ensure that its investments in people power contribute to lasting infrastructure for change past 2020. It draws from *A Pivot to Power: Lessons from The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities about Place, Health, and Philanthropy*, a longer discussion of the innovations of BHC at the nexus of place, health, and power and lessons for the fields of philanthropy, public health, and organizing.

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<sup>1</sup> The first survey of people power capacity was an inventory of resident-driven organizing in the 14 sites conducted in 2013 by the California Center for Rural Policy at Humboldt State University. See Methodology section for a more information.

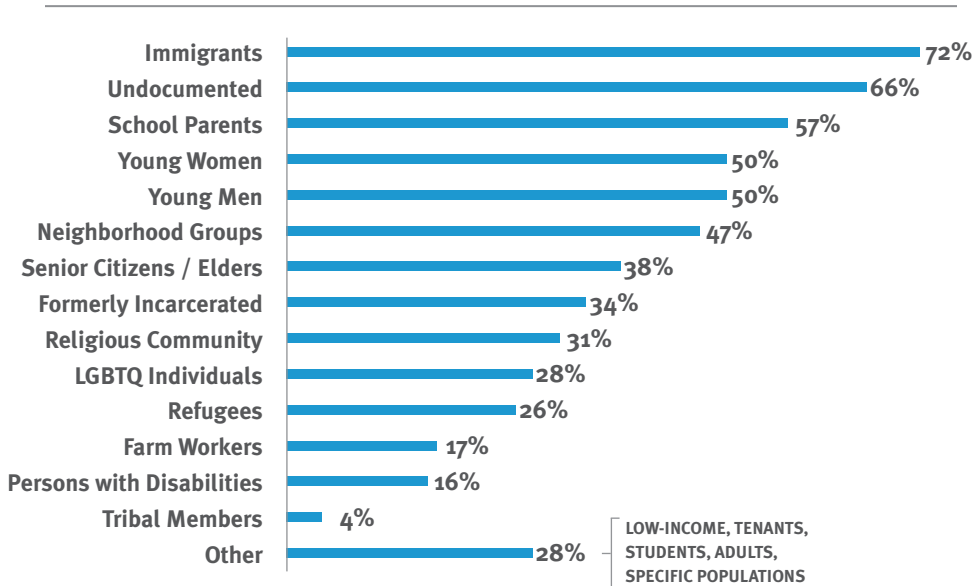
## ■ People Power in the BHC Places: A Snapshot of BHC’s Success

At the heart of BHC is its efforts to transform 14 communities that are among the most devastated by health inequities yet that are also high-opportunity because of their potential to develop and move a health equity agenda. In other words, places had some level of pre-existing non-profit infrastructure. BHC invested in building and strengthening that local capacity to engage residents in campaigns aimed at changing institutional policies, priorities, and practices that can lead to healthier communities.<sup>2</sup> This section provides a snapshot of this capacity for change that BHC has built in some places and strengthened in others.

### IMPACTED POPULATIONS WHO USUALLY DO NOT PARTICIPATE IN POLICYMAKING ARE BEING ORGANIZED

The 14 BHC places have significant populations of low-income individuals and families with poor health outcomes and limited access to opportunities. They are the same populations that are least likely to participate in public and private sector decision-making processes that affect their lives. Figure 1 shows the percent of BHC grantees that are organizing and building leadership among different populations ranging from undocumented immigrants to the formerly incarcerated to LGBTQ individuals.

Figure 1. TARGET ORGANIZING POPULATIONS, 2016



Source: TCE Resident Driven Organizing Survey, 2016

“[W]e are trying to develop the leadership of the residents most affected by the immigration issues (including licenses, healthcare access, higher education for undocumented students, and more) by giving them the tools they need to be active advocates in their community.”

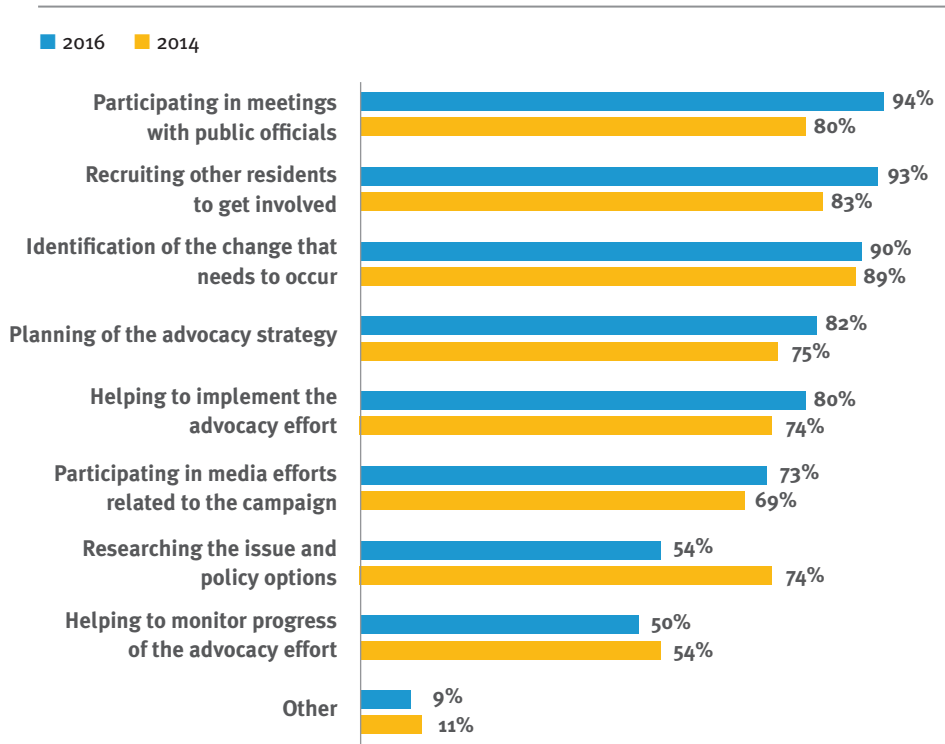
BHC ORGANIZING GRANTEE

<sup>2</sup> BHC’s approach to changing health outcomes is rooted in the Alameda County Public Health Department’s adapted Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative (BARHII) framework.

## RESIDENTS ARE INVOLVED IN CAMPAIGNS IN WAYS THAT DEVELOP THEIR VOICE, LEADERSHIP, AND ADVOCACY SKILLS TO INFLUENCE DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES EFFECTIVELY

Organizers develop and implement policy campaigns in ways that provide multiple roles for residents and opportunities to develop their voice, leadership, and advocacy skills over time. In this way, campaigns can build the trust and confidence among residents that extends beyond the life of the campaign and beyond any single issue. Figure 2 shows the roles are BHC grantee are giving residents in the policy and systems change work and how those roles are shifting over time. In 2014, 74 percent reported that residents are researching the issues and policy options, roles that happen in the early stages of campaign development. In 2016, it drops to 54 percent as more grantees report residents participating in meetings with public officials, recruiting others residents to get involved, and planning and implementing the advocacy campaigns.

Figure 2. ROLES OF RESIDENTS IN POLICY AND SYSTEMS CHANGE CAMPAIGNS, 2014 AND 2016



Source: TCE Resident-Organizing Inventory, 2014; TCE Resident-Driven Organizing Survey, 2016

“Residents play a pivotal role in the BHC initiative because they are valued through organizing. There is trust among residents, and they see the end goals of their campaigns. With the wins that have come about, residents are more confident and feel powerful in bringing about change in their community.”

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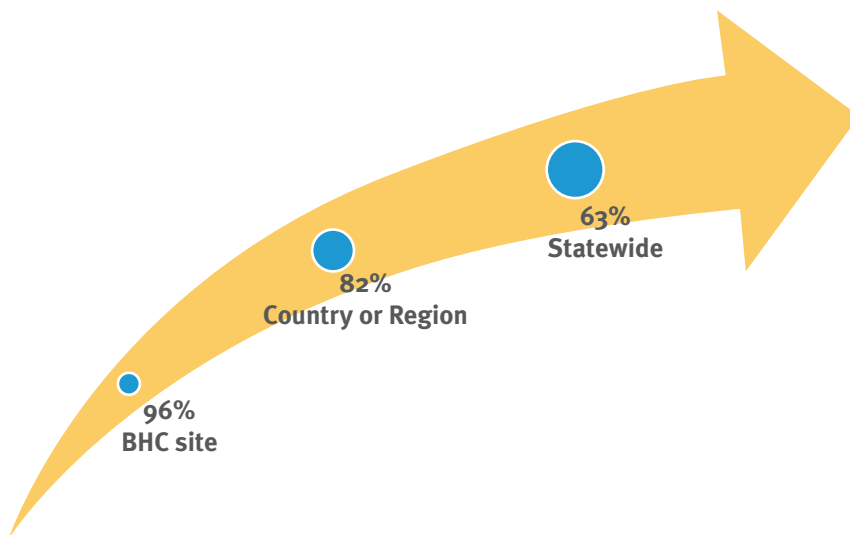
“[P]arents are taught about school board meetings, the purpose..., and their importance. Parents are then empowered and given the knowledge so that they can actively participate in the meetings adequately and be capable advocates for their kids.”

BHC ORGANIZING GRANTEE

## ORGANIZING GROUPS HAVE MORE POWER AND INFLUENCE DUE TO INCREASED COLLABORATIONS

Nearly all organizing groups (94 percent) report that BHC has resulted in increased collaboration with other organizations. They are collaborating with other organizing groups (91 percent) as well as non-organizing groups (80 percent). Figure 3 illustrates the geographic scale of collaborations. Almost all are collaborating within the BHC site; 82 percent are collaborating at the county or regional scale; 63 percent are collaborating statewide.

Figure 3. GEOGRAPHIC SCALE OF COLLABORATIONS, 2016



Source: TCE Resident-Driven Organizing Survey, 2016

**“BHC South Kern has created an atmosphere of organizing, collaboration, and care that was not here before, and an intersectionality of work across race, socioeconomic statuses, and cultures.”**

BHC ORGANIZING GRANTEE

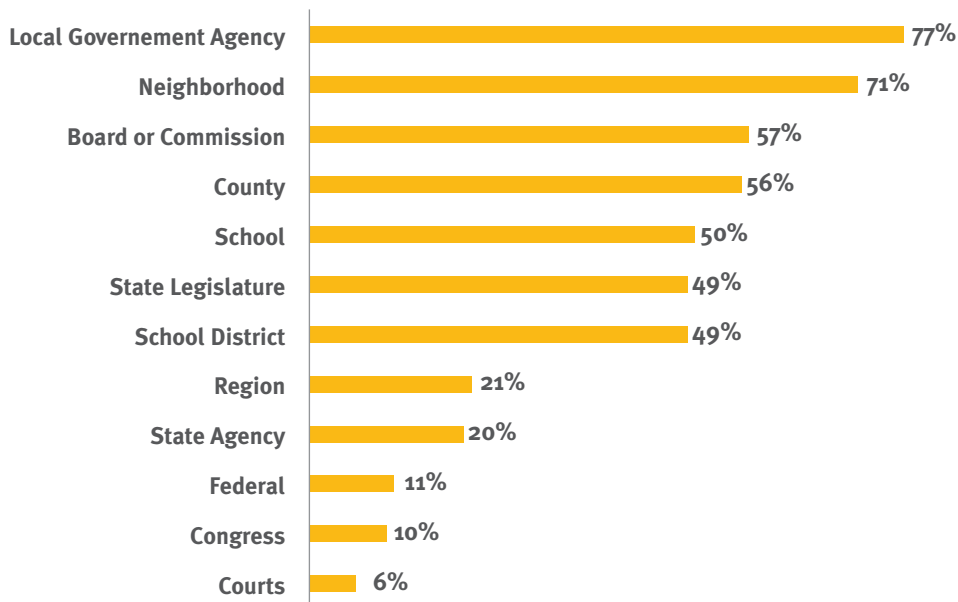
**“BHC brings residents across ethnicity and language to work together on issues. It builds understanding between groups and promotes a stronger sense of community.”**

BHC ORGANIZING GRANTEE

## THE CULTURE AND DYNAMICS OF DECISION-MAKING IN THE BHC PLACES ARE SHIFTING

The majority of BHC grantees are engaging residents in campaigns directed at neighborhood and local decision-makers, such as a local government agency (77 percent), board or commission (57 percent), county (56 percent), or school site (50 percent). Figure 4 shows the categories of decision-makers that residents are engaging through the policy campaigns. When asked about the greatest benefit of BHC, several grantees expressed how residents are now at decision-making tables and how participation in decision-making, formally and informally, is shifting the culture and raising the visibility of organized residents.

Figure 4. DECISION-MAKERS RESIDENTS ARE ENGAGING IN THE POLICY AND SYSTEMS CHANGE CAMPAIGNS, 2016



Source: TCE Resident-Driven Organizing Survey, 2016

“BHC has increased the visibility of communities of color. Due to the visibility, residents and community leaders are invited to be part of decision-making tables and discussions of broader systemic changes in the city.”

BHC ORGANIZING GRANTEE

“Community leaders are aware of [Santa Ana BHC] (SABHC) and the SABHC community has developed presence and political power in the community.”

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“[BHC is] creating a culture that recognizes grassroots organizing as a key element of a change strategy.”

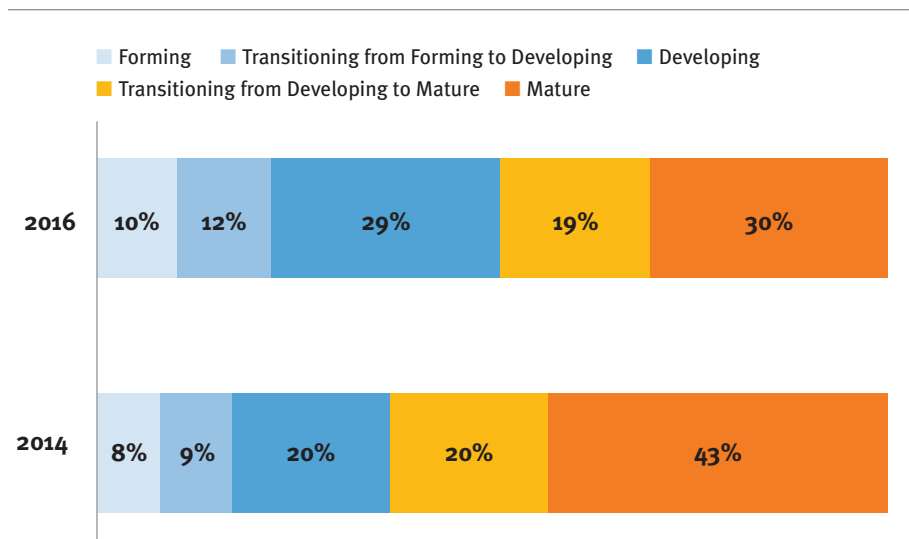
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## ORGANIZING CAPACITY HAS GROWN AND STRENGTHENED IN THE 14 PLACES AS A RESULT OF BHC

BHC has been successful in bringing organizing capacity to the 14 sites: 61 percent report that they have been organizing in the BHC site for five years or less (which aligns with the start of BHC). How strong and sustainable is that organizing capacity?

Sites are diverse in terms of the maturity of their organizing capacity: some are strong organizing groups that are new to the BHC site, others are new to organizing but have been working in the site for a long time, and others are entirely new organizations. A higher percentage of grantees in 2016 report being at the earlier stages of development in their organizing capacity than in 2014, the details of which are reported in Figure 5. This suggests that in the early years of implementation, BHC was relying more on established organizing groups to engage residents in policy campaigns. By the halfway mark, there is a much more diverse ecosystem of organizing in the 14 communities.

Figure 5. STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT OF ORGANIZING CAPACITY, 2014 AND 2016



Source: TCE Resident-Driven Organizing Inventory, 2014; TCE Resident-Driven Organizing Survey, 2016

## ■ People Power in the BHC Places: Key Challenges Facing BHC

An early look at BHC as it was transitioning from the planning phase to implementation surfaced considerable confusion and tensions in the sites about how to engage residents, what people power meant, and whether BHC was really going to support the kind of organizing that challenges power in the policy and systems change arenas.<sup>3</sup> The evidence now shows that BHC has been a success in building people power capacity in the sites. Nevertheless, there are challenges that organizing grantees face in the implementation of BHC.

### CORE OPERATIONAL CAPACITY

Organizations that are still forming and developing need core operational capacity—such as technology, websites, and social media platforms. In some cases, they require assistance becoming 501(c)3 organizations. Others note the need for the technology infrastructure and data that can support large-scale voter engagement.

### ORGANIZER SUSTAINABILITY

Burnout among organizers is a common challenge in the field in general. High turnover and lack of staff retention are often attributed to heavy workloads, but limited opportunities for increasing leadership positions within organizations also present challenges. Training new organizers requires resources and can strain capacity.

### LIMITED POLITICAL ANALYSIS

Key to grassroots organizing is an understanding of power and an ability to conduct a power analysis. Several interviewees also identified a clear analysis of race and racial equity as an important capacity and skill.

### TOO MANY COLLABORATIONS

While BHC-supported collaborations have contributed to the increased influence and power of organizing groups, they have also hindered capacity. The frequency of meetings is time-consuming and drains capacity away from organizing. Groups feel forced and inorganic when they are participating solely on the draw of funding.

**“The number one challenge has been politicization of staff and organizations who do not or have not done community organizing. Their perspective tends to lean on organizing being about bringing people out to events and not about the longer-term power building to have transformative change.”**

BHC ORGANIZING GRANTEE

**“[One challenge of BHC is] trying to ensure that our residents still consistently feel control and focus over the issues/campaigns they care about and have identified (not feeling like they are getting pulled in different directions or being asked to turn out to multiple different things), while also trying to strategically recognize the times when it is really important for our residents to also show up in support/solidarity for others.”**

BHC ORGANIZING GRANTEE

<sup>3</sup> See Pastor, Manuel, Jennifer Ito, and Anthony Perez. 2014. *There's Something Happening Here...A Look at The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities Initiative*. Los Angeles, CA: USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity.



## CAMPAIGN CHALLENGES

Tensions in campaigns emerge when there are differences in understanding and in practice around who is driving the campaign and how critical decisions are made. Keeping residents and leaders informed and engaged over time is a struggle, especially when resident priorities do not match BHC priorities. Juggling resident involvement in multiple campaigns simultaneously also stretches capacity.

## DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO POWER AND POLICY

Campaign challenges can stem from that fact that TCE supports organizations that employ multiple strategies for building power to win policy and systems change: advocacy, mobilization, and organizing. Each has its own base of power, purpose for engaging in campaigns, and pace in carrying out a campaign—which can create friction and tensions in the midst of a heated battle.

## BHC EXCLUSIVITY

For groups organizing in the BHC places that also have members in other neighborhoods, it has been a challenge to deal with more resources and attention going into one site over others. A TCE grantee not based in one of the BHC places feels that the overwhelming focus on the 14 communities has overshadowed TCE investments in other parts of the state. As a result, its work is not part of the overall narrative—it does not receive the same amount of attention and visibility.

**“Residents are acutely aware of the issues in their own communities. They also have a lot of experience having outsiders come in and impose their own ideas. There have been times when residents have felt that BHC was trying to impose their own projects and initiatives on residents.”**

BHC ORGANIZING GRANTEE

## ■ Strengthening and Sustaining People Power: Recommendations

Interviewees voice concern about the impending sunset of BHC funding and the implications of the potential loss of funding for individual organizations, for the infrastructure and momentum built through BHC, and for the field of organizing in general. Interviewees identified recommendations specifically for TCE and/or BHC that are critical for sustaining the organizing and organizing capacity supported through BHC—much of which TCE is already implementing.

**“We fear that when TCE leaves, it could just take the air out of the field.”**

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDER

### CONTINUE FUNDING GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT.

Several BHC grantees underscore the need for funding specifically (and solely) for organizing. Organizing requires dedicated resources, such as staff organizers who are building relationships with residents and developing community resident leaders. As one interviewee pointed out, the most successful organizations that engage the community in policy decision-making are those that have organizing as a core part of their work. Core operating support grants that are not tied to specific issues or programs will be essential over the next several years, especially for those groups that have been seeded through BHC.

## **CONTINUE THE SUPPORT FOR RACIAL JUSTICE AND HEALING.**

TCE's support of organizations that develop civic leadership among the formerly incarcerated, queer and transgender youth, and populations that have suffered from individual and collective trauma has been a "game changer" for the state. And while leaders from these communities are at the table, more can be done to ensure their full participation, voice, and influence. This includes ensuring language access, appropriate political education, continuous leadership development, and an ability to facilitate strategic dialogue to define issues, shape policies, and determine campaigns while being vigilant against biases and power imbalances.

## **CONTINUE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IN WAYS THAT SUPPORT LOCAL ORGANIZING.**

Organizers appreciate peer-to-peer connections where people can learn from each other about which strategies work, which do not work, and how to be more effective. Organizing training institutes, power analysis trainings, and policy and technical assistance are recommendations cited by organizers. The deployment of resources over the final phase of BHC should come from needs and opportunities that emerge from the bottom up. Finding appropriate technical assistance providers, particularly for the non-urban sites, is critical to success.

**"It takes a long time to gain community members' trust and to build the base. Nurturing the base as community issues are introduced and action plans are developed takes a long time and is difficult. Creating opportunities for experienced organizers to partner with [new] grassroots organizations might be helpful."**

BHC ORGANIZING GRANTEE

## **MEASURE CAMPAIGNS IN HOW THEY BUILD PEOPLE POWER.**

Policy successes should be measured not only in terms of what policies are proposed, but also how different types of power have been built. This includes how the community's understanding of issues or structures has deepened, how leadership has been nurtured, and how community involvement has grown.

## **CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR NEW ORGANIZING GROUPS TO PARTNER WITH EXPERIENCED ORGANIZERS.**

To ensure that BHC is a catalyzing investment, it will be important to ensure emerging groups are networked with established groups. This does not mean that there should be a single power-building approach or statewide network. Rather, emerging groups will benefit from a more diverse ecosystem from which they can borrow and adapt strategies for their particular contexts and conditions.

## **SUPPORT EXPERIMENTATION TO BUILD ALTERNATIVE SOURCES OF FUNDING.**

While interviewees noted the significant inroads made into philanthropies' awareness and recognition of organizing in recent years, they appreciate the leadership role that TCE takes in educating its peers nationally. Some groups have been long grappling with the question of funding and have engaged in experimentation, including different strategies to build an individual donor base—which TCE and other funders could support on an experimental level, then potentially replicate if proven to be effective.

## SUPPORT THE ORGANIZING PIPELINE.

With the growth and maturity of the organizing sector, several interviewees expressed the need to develop different parts of the organizing career ladder. This means both developing a pipeline for youth members of organizing groups to transition into organizing as adults, and reaching young professionals of color who have previously lacked experience with organizing. It also means supporting organizers by providing ongoing skills training and ensuring that they do not burn out so that they can continue to organize and move up within their organizations.

## ■ What's Next: A Pivot to Power

TCE has honed its vision of success in 2020 by defining North Star goals and indicators to guide the next phase of BHC. A top goal of BHC is ensuring that “historically excluded adults and youth residents have voice, agency and power in public and private decision-making to create an inclusive democracy and close equity gaps.<sup>4</sup> What has been a considered a key driver of change has now become the change BHC seeks to achieve. This will require refreshed thinking about the role of place and place as a scale for change, not only as a stage for change and about health equity campaigns as an opportunity to build power, not just win policies. Finally, addressing the root causes of inequities will require a new orientation to power rooted in values of inclusion and democracy—how BHC does this in relationship to the broader movement-building field in California will be critical.

The legacy of the BHC initiative will lie, in part, in the strength and sustainability of the civic infrastructure it leaves behind, and in the capacity to continue the ongoing work of organizing residents, developing their leadership, and engaging them in the decision-making processes that affect their communities. This is important not only for the future of California, but also for a nation in turbulent times. The fight for equity, voice, and power among the most vulnerable communities is more critical than ever. At a time when national organizations are pivoting to state-based strategies to move a justice agenda, the BHC initiative can offer lessons around challenges, opportunities, and risks worth taking in doubling down on organizing and building power among those who have typically lacked voice and influence.

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<sup>4</sup> The California Endowment 2018. “Building Healthy Communities North Star Goals & Indicators.” Los Angeles, CA: The California Endowment. Retrieved January 25, 2018 (<http://http://www.calendow.org/northstar/>).

## ■ Methodology

Evaluating people power has been a moving target as the understanding and definition of this driver of change—and its 2020 goals—have evolved over time. The first survey of people power capacity in the BHC sites was the resident-driven organizing inventory (RDOI) conducted from October 2013 through February 2014 by the California Center for Rural Policy at Humboldt State University. It captured data about the characteristics, activities, and priorities of groups receiving from BHC to engage local residents in policy and systems change. The RDOI had 65 respondents representing a 64 percent response rate with participation from 12 sites.<sup>5</sup>

From November 2015 to January 2016, USC PERE administered a second survey of resident organizing. The RDOI survey was streamlined and revised in order to capture data related to the resident-organizing 2020 goals. At that time, the 2020 goals were 1) to increase by 30 percent the number of residents actively organizing around health issues in the BHC sites and 2) to grow in strength and sustainability the advocacy and organizing networks focused on BHC issues in California. A total of 94 surveys were completed representing an 84 percent response rate with participation from all 14 BHC sites.<sup>6</sup>

From July to October 2016, USC PERE conducted 25 interviews with individuals involved in, or with deep knowledge of, power building and movement building in California. Interviews explored the impact of TCE on organizing capacity in the state, factors that hinder or help build that capacity, and recommendations about how TCE can ensure that investments and progress made through BHC contribute to a powerful and lasting infrastructure for change past 2021.

Interviewees were selected to ensure a diversity of perspectives from organizers, intermediaries, and funders. Three quarters were BHC grantees; the remainder were non-grantees familiar with the initiative. Sixty percent brought a statewide perspective with the remaining providing local or regional perspectives. Interviews were conducted by phone and in-person.

Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded using Dedoose, a mixed-methods program, to identify and analyze themes. Cross-checking procedures were incorporated to preserve accuracy across coders. Descriptors that help distinguish perspectives based on relationships to TCE and BHC Initiatives were also incorporated into the coding analysis.

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<sup>5</sup> For more information, see Stewart, Connie, Dawn Arledge, and Sarah Williams. 2014. *People Power in Building Healthy Communities: Resident-Driven Organizing Inventory Results*. Arcata, CA: California Center for Rural Policy at Humboldt State University.

<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that only 30 organizations participated in both surveys; therefore, data represent snapshots of the organizing capacity that TCE has supported at two points in time—and do not represent developmental progress among the same set of organizations over the two year period.

## ■ List of Interviewees

**Keith Bergthold**  
Executive Director  
*Fresno Metro Ministry*

**Cathy Cha**  
Vice President of Programs  
*Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund*

**Cathy Chu**  
Southern California Regional  
Manager  
*Genders and Sexualities Alliance  
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**Manuel Criollo**  
Director of Organizing  
*Labor Community Strategy Center*

**Venise Curry**  
San Joaquin Valley Regional  
Director  
*Communities for a New California  
Education Fund*

**Veronica Garibay**  
Co-Founder and Co-Director  
*Leadership Counsel for Justice  
and Accountability*

**Juan Gomez**  
Director of Programs and  
Innovation  
*Motivating Individual Leadership  
for Public Advancement (MILPA)*

**Isela Gracian**  
President  
*East Los Angeles Community  
Corporation*

**Luis “Xago” Juárez**  
Artistic Director  
*Baktun 12*

**Jim Keddy**  
Vice President  
*Children Now*

**Jeremy Lahoud**  
Senior Associate  
*Movement Strategy Center*

**Cesar Lara**  
Policy and Communications  
Director  
*East Salinas Building Healthy  
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**Sandra Martinez**  
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*The California Wellness Foundation*

**Tia Martinez**  
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**Martha Matsuoka**  
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*Occidental College*

**Joseph McKellar**  
Deputy Director  
*PICO California*

**Maricela Morales**  
Executive Director  
*Central Coast Alliance United for  
a Sustainable Economy (CAUSE)*

**Virginia Mosqueda**  
Senior Program Officer  
*James Irvine Foundation*

**Sammy Nuñez**  
Executive Director  
*Fathers and Families of San Joaquin*

**Diana Ross**  
Executive Director  
*Mid-City Community Advocacy  
Network (CAN)*

**Amy Schur**  
Statewide Campaign Director  
*Alliance of Californians for  
Community Empowerment (ACCE)*

**Gabby Trejo**  
Organizer  
*Sacramento Area Congregations  
Together (ACT)*

**Clara Turner**  
Research and Policy Analyst  
*Orange County Communities  
Organized for Responsible  
Development (OCCORD)*

**Amy Vanderwarker**  
Senior Policy Strategist  
*California Environmental Justice  
Alliance (CEJA)*

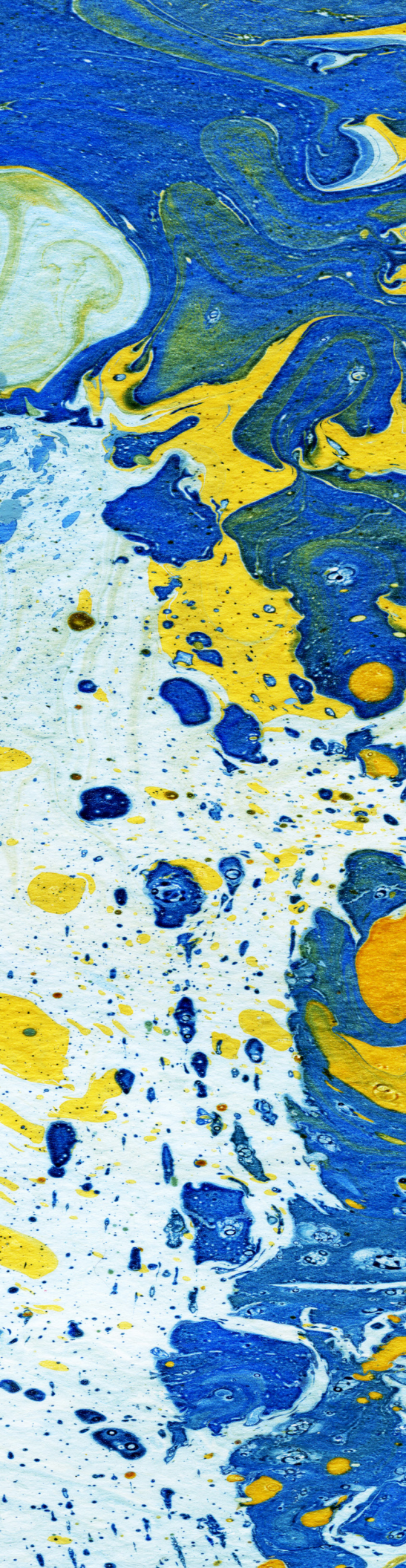
**Miya Yoshitani**  
Executive Director  
*Asian Pacific Environmental  
Network (APEN)*

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We also received the generous support of others. Connie Stewart, Terri Uyeki, and Dawn Arledge of the California Center for Rural Policy at Humboldt State University shared materials and critical insights from their experience in leading the resident-driven organizing learning and evaluation work before us. We were also fortunate to be advised by Verenice Chavoya who contributed her expertise on impact evaluation by providing feedback on the interview protocol.

Finally, this project would not be possible without the team at the USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE). Special recognition is owed to Magaly Lopez and May Lin who were central to the data collection and analysis. Other key contributors include Maya Abood, Robert Chlala, Natalie Hernandez, Preston Mills, Rachel Rosner, and Carolyn Vera. We are also grateful for the creative talents of Gretchen Goetz for the report design and layout.



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