

# Measuring What Matters for Our Transformation Towards a Healthy and Just California

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This brief offers a framework that can guide the co-development of indicators of changes, shifts, and transformations in California's power-building infrastructure that are of mutual interest to philanthropy and the field. It is based on developments in the power-building field in California (e.g. Movement Innovation Collaborative), national reports on power-building metrics, and interviews with California-based advisors and partners. While there is a wide breadth of measures to collect and track, we have attempted to focus on a core set that are relevant currently and in the near term.

This brief describes the framework (see visual on page 7) and is organized as follows:

- ➔ **DEFINING POWER: What is Needed to Transform California:** We start with a brief overview of long-term power-building goals that inform the strategies and capacities needed in the ecosystem. These long-term goals—which are beyond the reach of any single organization, approach, or campaign thus require an ecosystem of partners—undergird the overall framework.
- ➔ **STRATEGIC CAPACITIES: Core and Leading Edge:** We then highlight two sets of capacities, which is the heart of the framework: one set are based on the “core” strategies of organizing and movement building and the second set are based on the “leading edge” strategies of healing justice, narrative building, new connections, and Indigenous sovereignty.
- ➔ **MEASURING CHANGE: Three Dimensions:** In the next section, we describe three dimensions for measuring power building that draws from the practice-based evidence approach of the Democracy & Power Innovation Fund (DPI) with a cohort of national and state-based groups. The dimensions are: 1) people, resources, and capacity; 2) movement building; 3) impacts and outcomes.
- ➔ **NEXT STEPS:** We are seeking input and suggestions on research and projects that can inform and shed light on the evolution and trajectory of power-building infrastructure that is rooted in different parts of California, that has been built around critical issues or approaches to change, and/or that supports specific communities and populations.

# DEFINING POWER: What is Needed to Transform California

A North Star guiding the long-term direction and strategy for a growing number of grassroots organizations and alliances throughout the state is “governing power.” Grassroots Power Project, which works with state-based, power-building alignment tables across the country, defines governing power as the ability to “1) win and sustain power within multiple arenas of decision-making so as to 2) shift the power structure of governance and 3) establish a new common sense of governing” (McGrath, Goldberg, and Grassroots Power Program 2023:17).

As we discuss in more detail in [Looking Around the Corner](#) (Ito, Thomas, and Pastor 2023), there are three aspects of governing power that are particularly salient in these fraught times:

- 1 MULTIRACIAL DEMOCRATIC:** The rise of authoritarianism, attacks to our democracy, and attempts to pit communities against one another mean that grassroots organizing, civic engagement, and multi-racial coalition building are increasingly essential while at the same time more and more challenging.
- 2 ECONOMIC:** Control over the economy is so closely intertwined with control over our politics, policies, and priorities that shifting the power structure of governance means striking at the root of inequities upon which our economy has been built while diminishing the concentration of power among the economic elite.
- 3 NARRATIVE:** While campaign messaging and communications strategies are important in the short term, they are not sufficient to counter dominant and divisive narratives that undergird public values, views, and actions.

Aligned yet distinct are efforts in “sovereignty and nation building” and the ability for Native and Indigenous communities to self-govern and to restore thriving relationships to the land, water, to each other, and to our past, present, and future.

It is important to note that this framework is intended for measuring changes and shifts at the ecosystem scale. Measuring power building at this scale is what makes our collective inquiry in California new and exploratory—and a valuable contribution to the national conversation.

# STRATEGIC CAPACITIES: Core and Leading Edge

The framework is organized around the specific strategies power-building groups are deploying and evolving over the next decade—and thus shape the types of learning and evaluative measures and indicators. In this section, we briefly describe the two sets of strategies: core and leading edge.

Two core strategies that are foundational to power building are base building and movement building. For a longer discussion on other core power-building strategies and measures, see our report [Transactions-Transformations-Translations](#) (Pastor, Ito, and Rosner 2011).

## **BASE BUILDING**

The term “base building” is shorthand for building the power of people and communities most impacted by inequities through grassroots organizing, leadership development, coalition building, and shared campaigns. “Base” refers to an organized base of people and communities that have a sense of belonging and hold a shared vision, common interests, and long-term goals.

Grassroots base-building organizations usually have (volunteer) membership bases and leadership bases—and (paid or volunteer) organizers to recruit, retain, develop, and expand participation and leadership. It also includes activating and mobilizing people from their base. It is important to note that this is distinct from “activism” which often gets conflated with organizing. There are different forms of organization (both formal and informal).

There are a growing number of efforts to build ties between organizers across generations and across tenure and experience that are aimed at evolving the culture, strategies, and practices of organizing, leadership development, and movement building—and using organizational processes and practices for building the skills for governing power and Indigenous sovereignty needed at the societal level.

## **MOVEMENT BUILDING**

Movement building strategies includes efforts to scale up impact of base building organizations, such as through long-term alliance and coalition building around a shared vision, values, and strategy for large-scale, transformational change. While the intent is to inspire and incite large-scale mobilization of people that extends beyond the reach of any organization, it requires a long-term, disciplined, and intentional commitment to build between the moments of mass action—and to leverage the momentum into concrete changes.

As the [Movement Innovation Collaborative](#) has found, what is needed are both virtual and physical spaces for strengthening organizational ties and relationships and building organizational alignment. While organizational ties and relationships are usually developed by and for tactical coalitional campaigns, relationships can also fall apart under the urgency of a campaign. Spaces for sustained dialogue, visioning, strategy, and learning can be transformative and impactful.

There are four strategies that the power-building ecosystem is exploring, innovating, and experimenting with—which make them areas ripe for measuring as part of the learning process. For a longer discussion of these strategies, see [Looking Around the Corner](#):

### **NARRATIVE BUILDING**

While interest in finding ways to shift dominant narratives, worldviews, and values among organizers and movement builders is not new, there are more philanthropic resources going into narrative change strategies—and for communications, which is different, but could be leveraged for narrative work. Organizations and coalitions face challenges in what can be won through policy, legislative, and electoral fights because the underlying terrain of how issues are defined, debated, and understood has been ceded to others that want to preserve the status quo—or, worse yet, pull the public towards an authoritarian and anti-democratic agenda.

### **HEALING JUSTICE**

There is a growing interest and demand among grassroots base-building organizations to integrate healing justice practices into the work. While it can take multiple forms (e.g. embodied and somatic practices, cultural and spiritual ceremony), it is emerging from an acknowledgment of internalized trauma and harms passed through generations of surviving oppression—and how, when unaddressed, it shows up in our organizations, coalitions, and movements.

### **NEW CONNECTIONS**

Organizers and movement builders recognize the need to nurture and support diverse and dynamic power-building ecosystems for places and populations most impacted by inequities. What ecosystems need or need to be are shaped by conditions for change (demographic, economic, political, geographic, and historical) and existing capacities for change (people, organizations, and resources). For more, see [Changing States](#) (Pastor, Ito, and Wander 2016) or [Lead Local](#) (Pastor, Ito, and Wander 2020).

### **INDIGENOUS SOVEREIGNTY**

Native and Indigenous communities have an orientation to power and power-building that differs from the Western conceptions used by many movement builders. As decolonization and land back become a centerpiece of collective campaigns, it is important to listen, learn, and follow the lead of Native and Indigenous leaders.

# MEASURING CHANGE: Three Dimensions

In developing measures of change or indicators of progress for each strategic capacity mentioned above—base-building, movement building, narrative building, healing justice, new connections, and Indigenous sovereignty, we draw from the practice-based evidence approach of the Democracy & Power Innovation Fund (DPI) with a cohort of national and state-based groups (Cushman and McKenna 2023) as well as the Movement Innovation Collaborative’s definition of Power Building Infrastructure:

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***“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 (I-Center (now Movement Innovation Collaborative) Leadership Team 2022:9)”***

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The following are three dimensions—or categorizing—for developing measures of change: 1) people, resources, and capacity; 2) processes, practices, and actions; and 3) impacts and outcomes.

To illustrate what indicators could be for base building along these three dimensions:

1) resources, skills, and people involved in power building are growing, maturing, and being sustained; 2) resources are fostering deeper relationships and facilitating agency in decision-making processes; and 3) available resources and processes are translating to people feeling supported and effective in enacting change.

For movement building, the following are the types of indicators to measures and track:

1) the bonds between organizations are expanding to include new partners and fostering deeper connections of trust and sustained collaboration; 2) coalition spaces are translating to shared resources, learning, and strategy; and 3) collaboration between organizations is translating to governing power and structural change.

To support experimentation and the design of tools (e.g. discussion outlines, interview protocol, etc), we have a working compendium of questions that follow the design of this framework for each of the strategic capacities. See Appendix B for a sample of questions.

## NEXT STEPS

We are aware that approaches to gathering measures can have unintended consequences: It could inadvertently transmute into onerous grant-reporting templates, be extractive, further invisibilize communities, overlook emerging efforts, or harden disparities in funding distribution and power dynamics. We are also aware that any learning and evaluative process has to be iterative and on-going. Therefore, we offer this framework with the expectation that it should change and evolve through dialogue, inquiry, and experimentation.

Our next steps are to explore ways to collaborate with others interested in pursuing projects that can inform and shed light on the evolution and trajectory of California's power-building infrastructure. We are interested in efforts that provide a deeper look at infrastructure strengths and growing edges in different parts of California, particularly in suburban and rural regions, for addressing structural change around critical issues, and for supporting specific communities and populations. For more information or to get involved, please contact Jennifer Ito at [jennifer.ito@usc.edu](mailto:jennifer.ito@usc.edu).

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to acknowledge The California Endowment for the partnership in understanding, supporting, and measuring the power-building approaches and infrastructure needed in these times to ensure the safety, health, and well-being of all Californians. For the work that led to this brief, we are thankful for the leadership of Alexandra Desautels and the support of Jemila Morrison and Dana Ginn Paredes. We also want to recognize Ashley K. Thomas for her insights and input in early versions of the framework. Cristina Rutter of Sunny Day Design did the design and layout.

We are deeply grateful for the work of organizers, movement builders, grassroots leaders, and allies who are on the frontlines of the struggle for justice and equity. We are deeply grateful for the insights and guidance of the Advisory Committee. Finally, we want to thank the following foundations for their of our partnerships with power-building organizations: The California Endowment, The California Wellness Foundation, James Irvine Foundation, Open Society Foundation, and Weingart Foundation.

# APPENDIX A. WORKING FRAMEWORK: Visualization

## CORE CAPACITIES

### BASE BUILDING

The foundation for a vibrant multi-racial power-building ecosystem is people and relationships. Base building consists of strategies for recruiting and retaining organizers; developing, retaining, and expanding membership bases; supporting new leaders; and facilitation agency in organizational decision-making.

Members

Organizers

Organizations

### MOVEMENT BUILDING

To win large-scale transformational change, organizations need to work together and need to harness innovation and experimentation. Coalitions provide spaces of sustained dialogue, learning, and collaboration, which facilitates relationships around shared data, language, and strategy focused on fundamentally changing our systems of governance.

Organizational Ties

Support & Learning Infrastructure

Shared Vision & Strategy

### MEASURING CHANGE

Three sets of indicators:

- 1) People, Resources, and capacity.
- 2) Processes, Practices, and Actions;
- 3) Impacts and Outcomes.

For base building, progress can be assessed as whether: 1. Resources, skills, and people involved in power building are growing and maturing, 2. Resources are fostering deeper relationships and facilitating agency in decision making processes; 3. Available resources and processes are translating to people feeling supported and effective in enacting change.

For movement building, progress can be assessed as whether: 1. The bonds between organizations are expanding to include new partners and fostering deeper connections of trust and sustained collaboration; 2. Coalition spaces are translating to shared resources, learning, and strategy; 3. Collaborations are translating into innovations and shifts in governing power and structural change.

## LEADING EDGES

### Narrative Building

Narratives for the world we envision should both emerge from the grassroots—and replace dominant narratives, worldviews, and values. Shifting common sense thinking and action will make the terrain more favorable for the solutions we demand.

### Healing Justice

After generations of harm, the creation of spaces to heal, care for one another, and seek redress is vital to the sustainability of organizers and movement builders. In tandem, there is a need for spaces of joy, culture, and celebration.

### New Connections

There is a need to nurture and support diverse and dynamic power-building ecosystems for places and populations most impacted by inequities. This may require inclusive recruitment efforts, seed money, and technical assistance.

### Indigenous Sovereignty

Native and Indigenous communities have an orientation to power and power-building that differs from the Western conceptions. It is important to listen, learn, and follow, the lead of Native and Indigenous leaders.

# APPENDIX B. WORKING FRAMEWORK: Sample of Questions for Measuring Change

MEASURING CHANGES IN CORE CAPACITIES		
DIMENSIONS OF CHANGE	BASE BUILDING	MOVEMENT BUILDING
<b>People, Resources, and Capacity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› How are organizations' leadership, organizers, and membership bases reflective of the communities most impacted by inequities?</li> <li>› What financial resources and technical capacities do organizations have access to that support their base-building work?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› What resources and capacities are organizations committing towards building and expanding their alignment and coalitions/ alliances with others?</li> <li>› What resources, knowledge, learnings, and technical expertise are organizations sharing with others?</li> </ul>
<b>Processes, Practices, and Actions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› How are organizations building, expanding, and sustaining the leadership of organizers and of their grassroots leaders and members?</li> <li>› How do organizations engage grassroots members in decision-making processes to form organizational priorities and strategies?</li> <li>› How do organizations adapt to external conditions and experiment and/or take risks to achieve their goals?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› How are organizations sustaining and expanding participation in coalitions/ alliances?</li> <li>› How do organizations foster shared understandings of root causes, vision, opposition, and strategy among partners?</li> <li>› How do organizations work through differences, resolve conflicts, and reach agreement on campaign goals, sequencing, and strategy?</li> </ul>
<b>Impacts and Outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› How are grassroots leaders and members exercising their skills and leadership to achieve their shared goals?</li> <li>› To what extent are organizations able to achieve their goals?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› To what extent does participation in coalitions/alliances expand organizations' reach and impact?</li> <li>› To what extent are coalitions / alliances able to achieve their structural change goals?</li> </ul>



# APPENDIX B. WORKING FRAMEWORK: Sample of Questions for Measuring Change

DIMENSIONS OF CHANGE	NARRATIVE BUILDING	HEALING JUSTICE	NEW CONNECTIONS	INDIGENOUS SOVEREIGNTY
<b>People, Resources, and Capacity</b>	What staffing, tools, trainings, and funding do organizations have for narrative power building?	What resources (staffing, tools, trainings, funding) do organizations have access to that support their healing justice work?	What leadership and organizations exist in under-invested areas and communities that are well-positioned to build and sustain a grassroots base?	What Indigenous-led organizations are organizing and strategizing around tribal sovereignty?
<b>Processes, Practices, and Actions</b>	How are organizations developing narratives and narrative strategies within their organization and with others?	How are organizations creating spaces for members and staff to acknowledge harm, heal, experience joy, and chart a different path forward together?	What are approaches organizations are taking in reaching, engaging, and sustaining participation by people not civically or political engaged?	What approaches are Indigenous-led organizations and coalitions / alliances exploring and engaging in?
<b>Impacts and Outcomes</b>	What impacts, shifts and changes are organizations tracking as part of their narrative power-building strategies?	How are healing justice practices impacting organizations' people (staff, grassroots members) and influencing their campaigns?	How are new and emerging organizations connecting with other base-building and movement-building organizations?	How are Indigenous-led efforts impacting and influencing structural change goals and strategies in other communities?

# APPENDIX C: METHODOLOGY

This brief draws on several sources:

- **RECENT LITERATURE:** We reviewed evaluation reports, journal articles, toolkits, and case studies related to measuring power infrastructure, outcomes, and impacts at the individual (Ito et al. 2014), organizational, and field levels (Christens, Gupta, and Speer 2021; Kochhar, Gonzalez-Barrera, and Dockterman 2009; Lee, Lopez, and Gonzalez-Vasquez 2022; ORS Impact and Informing Change 2022; Pastor, Ito, and Ortiz 2010; Shapiro et al. 2013; Terriquez 2019).
- **FIELD INNOVATION:** Beginning in 2021, 37 movement leaders engaged over 500 community members and organizers representing California’s diverse regions, constituencies, and issues in a seven-month process to develop a shared vision, purpose, structure, and plan to connect, amplify, and accelerate the growth and impact of California’s power-building field (I-Center (now Movement Innovation Collaborative) Leadership Team 2022; Kumar and Kuang 2022). In May 2024, TCE made a commitment of \$85 million over 10 years to implement their concept of a network of power-building centers (both virtual and physical), now known as the Movement Innovation Collaborative.
- **INTERVIEWS:** We are convening a set of values-aligned and trusted advisors representing different perspectives and who are well-positioned to ensure that this work aligns with the field and philanthropy. Through one-on-one meetings and the first of two meetings with the full set of advisors, we gathered their insights on investments, challenges, and opportunities for California’s power-building ecosystems. Members of the TCE Power Infrastructure team engaged additional partners to get their feedback on indicators of progress. The list of interviewees is provided at the end of this memo.
- **PREVIOUS RESEARCH:** For the past 15 years, ERI has produced multi-disciplinary research on contemporary U.S. social movements, supported learning and strategizing for movement-based approaches to equity and justice, and developed frameworks and tools to advance dialogue among organizers, funders, evaluators, intermediaries, and academics.
- **FIELD KNOWLEDGE:** ERI has long-term formal and informal relationships with organizing groups and networks throughout the state that are working on issues of health equity, economic justice, immigrant rights, racial justice, and climate justice. For more about ERI and publications, see the [ERI website](#).

# APPENDIX D: ADVISORS AND INTERVIEWEES

## Advisors

Brenda Anibarro, Vice President of Learning & Community Engagement, Inatai Foundation  
Dawn Arledge, Executive Director, California Center for Rural Policy at Cal Poly Humboldt  
Tammy Bang Luu, Grassroots Power Project  
Jane Booth-Tobin, Director, The P3 Lab at Johns Hopkins  
Diana Colín, Director, Powerful Innovations for Voter Organizing and Transformation (PIVOT)  
Virginia Hedrick, Executive Director, California Consortium for Urban Indian Health  
Emma Noyes, Research Director, Inatai Foundation  
Tia Martinez, Managing Director, Organizing Roots  
Marc Philpart, Executive Director, CA Black Freedom Fund  
Cindy Quezada, former Farmworker Research Program Director, UC Merced Community and Labor Center  
Shannon Speed, Director, UCLA American Indian Studies Center  
Veronica Terriquez, Director, UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center  
Alex Tom, Center for Empowered Politics  
Miya Yoshitani, Co-Director, Movement Innovation Collaborative

## Partners Interviewed by The California Endowment Power Infrastructure Team Members

Kellie Carrillo, Executive Director, Native Star Foundation  
Juan Gomez, Executive Director, MILPA  
Lisa Weiner-Mahfuz, Director, Roadmap Consulting  
Brandon Sturdivant, Co-Founder, Mass Liberation Project and Black Men Maroon Space  
Center for Story-based Strategy  
Hermelinda Cortés, Executive Director, ReFrame  
María Samaniego, Associate Director of Operations and Strategic Partnerships, Center for Native American Youth  
Jessica Nowlan, President, Relmagine Freedom

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## About USC Equity Research Institute

Since our founding in 2007 by Director Manuel Pastor, USC Equity Research Institute (ERI) has contributed to a body of research aimed at advancing understandings of, funding of, and co-strategizing with a growing field of community power-building and movement-building organizations at the forefront of the struggles for racial, health, economic, and environmental justice. We have done so in collaboration primarily with foundations, movement builders, researchers, and evaluators.

ERI been a partner of The California Endowment since the formulation and implementation of Building Healthy Communities. We have also engaged with national foundations, such as the Ford Foundation, Wellspring Education Fund, and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in their explorations of the fields of community organizing, movement building, and community power building.

Our collaborations with foundations have resulted in such work as Transactions-Transformations-Translations; Changing States; Lead Local; Power-Building Ecosystem; Looking Around the Corner; and Catalyzing Community-Centered Redistricting for Racial Equity.

We also partner directly with movement-building organizations seeking to document and disseminate learnings from innovative pilots, initiatives, and interventions. Examples of these projects include: 1000 Leaders (and More) Rising; Transforming Lives, Transforming Movement Building; and Moments, Movements, and Momentum.

Our tagline is “data and analysis to power social change.” We seek to provide rigorous research that is coupled with strategies to shift the balance of power in social, political, and economic relations so as to realize a world rooted in equity.