

AUGUST 2021

Funding Housing Justice For Thriving Communities

Reflections and insights from the first three years of learning
and funding in partnership with housing justice organizations



Fund FOR AN
Inclusive
California



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About

Common Counsel Foundation

Common Counsel Foundation has more than 30 years practicing progressive philanthropy, funding grassroots social movements and centering the leadership of communities that have historically been marginalized by intersecting systems of oppression. We partner with families and individual donors and are home to multi-funder collaborative initiatives, all with the goal to expand philanthropic resources for progressive social movements. In 2020, Common Counsel directed nearly \$15 million in grants to community-led organizations, and welcomed new donors and family foundations to our CCF community. As the backbone of the Fund for an Inclusive California, Common Counsel Foundation's history of funding social justice movements and relationships with movement leaders anchor the Fund in a practice of aligning priorities and strategies with frontline communities and movements.

The Fund for an Inclusive California

The Fund for an Inclusive California is a collaborative funding initiative co-designed with grassroots leaders to advance racial and economic equity by building the power of communities of color to achieve housing justice. We believe that the people who bear the brunt of unjust housing policies and the negative impacts of profit-driven development should have decision-making power to determine what development looks like in their neighborhoods. That's why we are committed to supporting long-term power-building and organizing infrastructure in California.

F4ICA is a pooled fund, held at Common Counsel Foundation, made up of diverse foundations that are committed to racial and economic justice and dedicated to supporting community-driven solutions. The Fund is led by a team made up of Common Counsel Foundation staff and a core team of consultants that represent and practice the values of the Fund and add capacity and expertise to match the needs of the Fund and the priorities of Community Advisors.¹

This Report

This report shares the journey of the Fund for an Inclusive California and how we have approached funding power-building efforts in California. In this report, we share the genesis of the Fund, the design and development of our strategies, and focus largely on key findings from a two-year period of listening and learning alongside community leaders across California, with close attention paid to community responses to the unprecedented events of 2020-2021 unleashed by the COVID-19 pandemic and systemic police violence against Black communities.

The learning and evaluation approach of the Fund and this report are led by Maricela Piña, MPH, founder and principal of Community Centered Evaluation & Research (CCER), a learning and evaluation consultancy that is guided by equity-oriented and culturally responsive principles.

CCER and the Fund for an Inclusive California are firm in the belief that communities are best positioned to identify and craft solutions for the issues they face. The learning and evaluation methods used to gather information in this report were designed and implemented under the guidance of the community partners to the Fund and center these principles: honor and validate multiple forms of knowledge production and expertise; prioritize co-learning with community advisors, ensuring transparency and accountability to them in evaluating the Fund's activities; orient materials development and dissemination processes toward community ownership of the data and information gathered; and, to minimize the burden on community advisors at all steps of the process.

Funding Partners

Akonadi Foundation, Amplify Fund at Neighborhood Funders Group, California Community Foundation, Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, East Bay Community Foundation, Liberty Hill Foundation, San Francisco Foundation, Sunlight Giving, The California Endowment, The James Irvine Foundation and Weingart Foundation.

Appreciations

We extend our deepest appreciations to the leaders and organizers who shared their perspectives with us in this report and, importantly, are close partners advising our work. We hold our responsibility and commitment to your vision of an inclusive state where all people can thrive as the central driver in our work and are grateful for your leadership, generosity and trust.

OUR CURRENT AND FORMER COMMUNITY ADVISORS AND PARTNERS

Bay Area

ACCE Institute, Contra Costa
ACCE Institute, Oakland
AYPAL: Building API Community Power
Causa Justa :: Just Cause
East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy
East Bay Permanent Real Estate Cooperative
Eastside Arts Alliance
Eden Community Land Trust
Faith in Action Bay Area
Filipino Advocates for Justice
Glad Tidings Community Development Corporation
North Bay Organizing Project
Regional Tenant Organizing Network

Central Valley

California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc.
Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Stockton
Faith in the Valley
Fresno Barrio Unido
Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability
LOUD for Tomorrow
Power California

Inland Region

ACLU Foundation of Southern California for the Inland Empire Housing Justice Coalition
Congregations Organized for Prophetic Engagement (COPE)
Inland Congregations United for Change (ICUC)
Inland Equity Partnership (a project of Inland Equity Community Land Trust)

Pueblo Unido Community Development Center
Starting Over, Inc.
Time for Change Foundation
TODEC (Training Occupational Development Educating Communities) Legal Center

Los Angeles

ACCE Institute, Los Angeles
Alliance for Community Transit – Los Angeles
Burbank Tenants' Rights Committee
Community Power Collective
East LA Community Corporation
Innercity Struggle
Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA)
LA Voice
LiBRE: Long Beach Residents Empowered
Little Tokyo Service Center Community Development Corporation
Los Angeles Center for Community Law and Action
Public Counsel
Social Justice Learning Institute for the Uplift Inglewood Coalition
Southeast Asian Community Alliance
Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE)

Statewide

ACCE Institute
Housing Now!
PICO California
Right to the City Alliance for Homes for All California
Tenants Together

A Letter of Introduction

CEDING PHILANTHROPIC POWER TO COMMUNITIES IN CALIFORNIA

When the reality of the pandemic came into focus in March 2020, our team called an emergency meeting. We did not know the path forward, but we knew we could not wait for firm answers or perfect strategies to start taking action.

In times of crisis, the muscle memory of our routines serve us. For the Fund for an Inclusive California, that routine is acting from a place of deeply-rooted values and practices, listening to our partners in social movements and having the agility to do what is demanded of us in the moment.

We know that communities that have been the target of historic divestment and racist policies are the same ones hit hardest by the pandemic and its aftermath. The COVID-19 pandemic made visible and exacerbated the existing housing crisis in California.

As eviction moratoriums begin to expire, we will be faced with a wave of evictions and foreclosures unless bold action is taken. This is a moment of reckoning for philanthropy to set aside our notions of charity and ties to pre-set outcomes and act from a place of trust and solidarity, with a commitment to racial justice and transformative change. We must support organizations who are accountable to their communities and that are holding elected officials accountable. We must double down on our efforts to support community-driven solutions that will work for communities to not only survive this pandemic but for a recovery that is just, reimagines systems and builds an equitable future where communities thrive.

The Fund for an Inclusive California focuses on investing in the leadership of communities directly affected by unjust and racist housing policies, so that they may harness their individual and collective power to ensure that all people regardless of income have a safe, healthy, affordable and stable place to call home. Their vision is to shift the current paradigm of housing as an extractive tool for investment in the financial market to housing recognized as a basic human need and human right. It is a vision where communities are stewards of the land they live on and determine how that land is used, not for profit, but for the well-being of the people that live there. It is envisioning a future where people of color, particularly Black and Indigenous people most harmed by systemic racism, can live and thrive in California. Our work is to align and mobilize resources to support this vision.

Over the last three years we have developed deep relationships and learned immeasurably from and with our organizing and funding partners. Through this work we have experienced humility in listening and knowing that our role in philanthropy is to show up as a partner, organize resources, to lift community voices and amplify the vision and demands of grassroots power-building organizations.

As more foundations step into supporting systems change and power-building strategies, it is imperative that as a sector we do our own work to shift power to

communities, and continue to dismantle harmful philanthropic practices that perpetuate injustice. The recent influx of funder interest in power-building should not come with a boom of top-down philanthropic solutions that distract from the voices and priorities of people who are most impacted.

In this reflection report, we hope to share the insights we have gained through our partnerships and practice over the last three years. It marks the beginning of our journey as we move into the next phase of the Fund for an Inclusive California work, continuing our practices of elevating the leadership, strategies and solutions put forth by communities who bear the brunt of unjust housing policies.

This is a historic moment that calls for us to take bold action, leverage our resources towards systems change and invest to win. After all, we have a mandate from communities we partner with to use all points of leverage that we have in philanthropy to pursue transformative approaches that will achieve housing for all in California.

We are excited to join growing efforts that reimagine a world in which all communities, particularly those who have historically faced racism and discrimination, have the power to lead and experience joy, justice, equity and well-being in neighborhoods where they have access to an affordable, safe and stable place to call home.

In community and solidarity,



Jazmin Segura

Director, Fund for an Inclusive California

Making the Most of This Reflection Report

The Fund for an Inclusive California was set up to create space for learning from a practice that centers racial justice and the belief that community power is a critical driver of housing justice. While we have shared these learnings and insights with our closest partners, this reflection report provides a wider audience with the story of and key findings from the initial phase of the Fund.

This reflection report is a culmination of our collective learnings, intended to share lessons learned and approaches to support power-building organizations, through the lens of Common Counsel Foundation staff and consultants, working in partnership with funders and under the guidance of Community Advisors. We are providing this information as a commitment to lifting up the expertise, leadership and vision of community leaders who we have had the privilege to learn from and work with.

As such, this is a resource for funders who are interested in centering racial justice and adopting equitable philanthropic practices by learning from local community leaders and taking action to direct more resources towards systems change and power-building strategies.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR YOUR PRACTICE

Throughout the report you will see highlighted reflection questions. These are questions we asked ourselves, our funding partners and our community advisors along the way. We hope it provides you with an insider perspective to our analysis, and may also serve you as you reflect on how you might approach your work.

EXAMPLE

What principles and practices can we adopt to ensure we are not perpetuating harm or extractive practices in communities?

SHARED LANGUAGE AND TERMS

This report captures a moment in time and as our culture and language evolve to better and more deeply describe the movement for housing justice, we know the words will, too.

Too often philanthropy and other institutions with positions of political and financial power use words and terms that may distort their meaning away from the intentions of the communities and people that originated them. We are not immune to this. Our practice includes grappling with language so that we are clearer about the work.

The following are definitions for terms that we use throughout the report. The definitions have been informed by the work of our partners, and the 30 years of practice and perspective of the Common Counsel Foundation. By describing them here, we hope that readers of this report will be able to navigate some of the more complex terms and ideas from a place of shared understanding. Our intent in sharing these definitions is to help forge a shared understanding of movement-building and power-building strategies.

Power-building strategies

Power + Organizing

In order to more effectively invest in real change, Common Counsel Foundation has strived to maintain core strategies that are responsive to and aligned with social justice movements. This includes a longstanding commitment to

- 1) Community organizing and broader community power-building
- 2) Movement-building that aggregates the power of organized communities across constituencies, geographies and issues sectors
- 3) Centering social, racial, economic, gender and environmental justice

Community power

[A Primer on Community Power, Place and Structural Change²](#)

“Community power is the ability of communities most impacted by structural inequity to develop, sustain and grow an organized base of people who act together through democratic structures to set agendas, shift public discourse, influence who makes decisions and cultivate ongoing relationships of mutual accountability with decision makers that change systems. A core principle of community power-building is that impacted community members are best positioned to push for the deep structural changes that are needed and so should be active and direct participants in decision-making processes that shape their lives.”

Base-building organizations

These organizations are developing an active and aligned base of leaders and members that can engage decision makers and keep them accountable. It includes the ongoing work that starts with the development of grassroots leaders so that they can find their voice and develop their skills, not only to speak before decision makers, but also to be engaged from the start in identifying policy solutions, fighting for their adoption and finally seeing through their implementation.

Community organizer/organizing

[Organizing Transformation, Best Practices in the Transformative Organizing Model³](#)

Applied to social movements, Common Counsel Foundation uses Steve Williams’ practice of transformative organizing as its working definition of community organizing: “If organizing is the attempt to bring people together to take collective action to resolve a commonly identified problem, then transformative organizing is a particular approach to organizing that situates individual campaigns within a conscious analysis of the underlying [and intersecting] systems of exploitation and oppression. Transformative organizing is defined by its explicit intention to transform both those systems and the individuals engaged in those campaigns in an effort to win genuine liberation for all.”

Social justice movements

Movements

Movements are more than single organizations focused on single issues or single policies; we define social movements as “sustained groupings that develop a frame or narrative based on shared values, that maintain a link with a real and broad base in the community and that build for a long-term transformation in power” (Pastor and Ortiz, 2009, 7). Common Counsel Foundation further elaborates that base-building and power-building organizations are at the forefront of social movements led by historically marginalized communities and that center intersectional social, racial, gender and environmental justice. Social movements may also more broadly include organizations that engage in direct service, advocacy, educational strategies as their primary strategy for change but nonetheless are aligned and follow the broader goals and strategies of base-building and power-building efforts.

The connection between housing justice and equitable development

People

When the Fund started, we used “equitable development” as the understood term for the practice of development designed by the community, where the people closest to the issue have the power to lead and make decisions about their lives, their neighborhoods and communities. As we built relationships with Community Advisors, and the movement for housing justice grew, we began using “housing justice” more frequently to underscore their efforts and the value that term imbues: that every person has the right to a safe, affordable, healthy place to call home. You will see both in this report, and we want to emphasize that housing justice and equitable development both represent an approach where communities carry out their vision for their neighborhoods – untethered from the investor market, and in fact, intended to disrupt and dismantle housing as a commodity, and instead recognize it as a fundamental resource for the well-being of communities. This is how long-term change and true transformation into a just society is possible.

About race and ethnicity

Whenever possible, we will be explicit about the race and ethnicity of the people and communities we are referring to in this report and in our work. We are grappling with the term “Black, Indigenous and people of color” or the abbreviation “BIPOC”, understanding that it is often swapped in place of “people of color” without intentional shifts in practice or deepened understanding. We acknowledge that Black and Indigenous people are disproportionately harmed by systemic racism and anti-Blackness. We also know that California is rich in diversity and each community harmed by systemic racism experiences a unique context and intersections to account for in the movement toward racial justice and liberation. The term Black, Indigenous and people of color does not reach as expansively or deeply as necessary to hold these experiences, and we try to be more specific where we can throughout this report.

**We learned from local partners that the extreme racism in the Inland Empire created a desire for some community members to distance their efforts from the term “empire.” Through discussion with our local community partners, we resolved to use “Inland Region” as the term to describe this region in our work.*

Regions

The Fund for an Inclusive California is currently working with partners in four geographic focus areas and among statewide networks. These regions include:

Bay Area, including Sonoma, Napa, Marin, Solano, Contra Costa, Alameda, San Francisco, San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties

Central Valley, including San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and Kern Counties

Inland Region*, including Riverside and San Bernardino Counties

Los Angeles, representing Los Angeles County

Growing the Political Power of California's Communities of Color

THE CATALYST FOR THE FUND FOR AN INCLUSIVE CALIFORNIA

In California and across the country, we are witnessing community residents and institutions coming together and organizing in new ways to create a people-powered alternative vision for housing policy and local development.

This vision is not driven by profit, speculation or the influx of new corporate and investment capital, but centered on self-determined community needs. At the heart of this shift is local development powered by the leadership and vision of residents who typically are at the margins of the social and political process. This approach to development centralizes decision making by residents and specifically empowers people surviving on low incomes to have the authority to say what development looks like in their neighborhoods and define where and how they want to live.

Democratic Development for Thriving Communities, a report developed in 2017 by Martha Matsuoka, played a pivotal role in the development of the Fund for an Inclusive California. In the report, Matsuoka distills the drivers of California's housing crisis and the role that philanthropy can play to make a difference and act in solidarity and accountability to the communities they serve. While the report was written several years ago, the analysis still holds true today.

Four years after the release of Matsuoka's report, we are continuing to apply these insights to the Fund's approach to ensure philanthropy does what it can to be a true champion and partner to movement-building organizations advancing housing justice and thriving communities.



"Addressing gentrification and displacement requires addressing the unequal power relations between low-income communities and the economic and political elite that now define development decision-making."

The same drivers that facilitated gentrification and displacement can be interrupted and/or redirected toward more inclusive development goals. For funders committed to building long-term resilience and vibrancy in underserved communities, there is no single magic solution or policy approach. However, resourcing power-building strategies is a strategic approach that pushes beyond housing as a single issue and creates opportunities to build broad strategic coalitions."

MARTHA MATSUOKA

[Democratic Development for Thriving Communities](#)

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED



"The economic devastation our community is facing is not going to go away. We saw how long it took to recover from the economic recession in 2008 and this is much more profound. We have to plan for a long period of recovery."

COMMUNITY ADVISOR

In the second half of this reflection report, we detail our key findings and call to action from what we learned in the initial phase of the Fund for an Inclusive California. We focus attention on insights gathered in the last year, when the COVID-19 pandemic amplified longstanding, stark racial disparities that are thoroughly embedded into everyday structures and systems.

An abundance of external data clearly documents the disproportionate impact of both the pandemic and police violence on communities furthest from opportunity who have been directly affected by unjust, racist policies and systems. In California, people with low incomes lack access to safe, stable and affordable homes in every corner of the state. This shortage of affordable, habitable and safe housing is the primary driver of homelessness, economic and health inequities.

As such, Community Advisors have lifted up the fight for housing justice - a systemic change approach that centers communities most harmed by systemic racism and housing injustice, to carry out their vision for their communities - as a key driver for advancing safe, thriving communities for the long-term, responding to the current crisis moment while addressing persistent root causes.

The past three years of partnership with Community Advisors has shown us that we must reimagine learning and evaluation to ensure greater support for community partners and their power and base-building strategies. The two-year period of evaluation activities underscored that funding in alignment with movement priorities is critical, particularly funding that is flexible, multi-year and aligns with region-specific strategies. The decision to continue the Fund's activities in a next phase is rooted in the learning that pooled funding efforts matter because we will be more effective and create a deeper impact together, rather than on our own. A pooled effort also facilitates a learning community among funders.

This historic moment calls for philanthropy to reimagine what is possible by centering racial and economic justice and focusing on long-term and systemic changes. The reflection report findings show both the opportunity and responsibility available to any and every funder committed to racial justice, to advance housing justice and equitable development in true partnership with community.

A PHILANTHROPIC RESPONSE GROUNDED IN SOCIAL JUSTICE VALUES: THE FUND FOR AN INCLUSIVE CALIFORNIA

Housing solutions backed by philanthropy are often designed within a market-driven framework that centers and benefits for-profit corporate developers rather than the needs and priorities of the people living in the neighborhood. While a growing number of foundations have been working to build more housing and expand access to affordable housing in California, there is a growing recognition that we cannot build our way out of this crisis. Persistent racial and economic inequality and growing housing insecurity are inseparable structural problems that require comprehensive and transformative solutions.

As such, the Fund pays attention to a spectrum of policy and systems change that center the needs of communities from community stabilization policies to the preservation and protection of affordable housing to community planning and development projects to community ownership strategies. The Fund's specific purpose is to strengthen the power of communities, so that they have a voice, influence and power over equitable development and the way housing is protected, preserved and developed.

"What is happening right now is akin to what happened in 2008. There were terrible practices around housing. Then there was an economic collapse and people were – particularly Black, Brown and Indigenous folks were decimated [by the Recession]. What happened at the end of [the Recession] was no real systemic change. We have got to figure out how we are not letting this [happen again]. We can't be caught off guard this time. This is one of the most critical moments around housing in the last decade."

COMMUNITY ADVISOR

We believe that the people who bear the brunt of unjust housing policies and the negative impacts of profit-driven development should have decision-making power to determine what development looks like in their neighborhoods, that's why we are committed to supporting long-term power-building and organizing infrastructure in California.

Anchored in a power-building framework, the Fund invests in a set of strategies described and illustrated with examples in the [Key Findings](#) section, that build the capacity of communities to influence decision-making as well as the development, implementation and protection of policies that meet the needs of communities closest to the issues.

These strategies are centered around the belief that we need political and governing infrastructures that prioritize the needs of people and the environment above corporations and investment capital, and empowers communities who are marginalized and excluded from democratic processes to be authentic leaders in the decisions that affect their daily lives. In practice this means that instead of focusing only on specific policy objectives, the Fund focuses on long-term power-building and organizing infrastructure that positions community leadership and community needs at the center of policy debates in a sustained way, leading to sustained impact and long-term systems change.

The Fund's Collective Efforts



Through our collective efforts we aim to reach these outcomes →



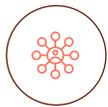
Strengthen organizational capacity

Strengthen the organizational capacity of core base-building organizations, coalitions and alliances working to advance and implement community-driven solutions.



Grow a bigger "we"

Grow the "we" of the housing justice movement by supporting organizing groups with an intersectional approach as well as emerging organizing efforts.



Strengthen organizing infrastructure

Strengthen the organizing infrastructure across California by facilitating collaboration in and across regions and issue areas, and by supporting local organizations to play a more active role in state-level advocacy and civic engagement efforts.



Elevate a vision of community-driven development

Elevate the vision of community-driven development, one in which low-income communities and communities of color are empowered to shape what sustainable development looks like in their local neighborhoods.



Model equity-driven practices

Model equity-driven collaborative philanthropic practices that are rooted in racial and economic justice by creating a learning community to catalyze increased philanthropic funding for power-building organizations.

CASE STUDY

Centering Community Priorities and Strategies: Right to Counsel



Community Advisors have emphasized the need for flexible grantmaking practices particularly in moments of crisis. Applying resources from F4ICA's general fund for their Right to Counsel campaigns was named as an example of how funders can offer support in critical moments.

These resources facilitated the opportunity to advance Right to Counsel campaigns in local jurisdictions across the state – including the city of Fresno in the Central Valley. Community leaders shared that Right to Counsel was one of “the opportunities [they] did not see as feasible,” particularly in the central regions of California, before the onset of the pandemic. As one Community Advisor explained, “we thought it was going to take 10 years to build power around Right to Counsel. The opportunity to [work on Right to Counsel in the Central Valley] came out of a couple of different spaces and seeing how the Bay Area and Los Angeles groups have [approached the work] and our own visioning conversations.”

Right to Counsel is a growing national effort to make it a legal right for people facing evictions to have a lawyer. Research⁴ shows that cities and regions that pass Right to Counsel legislation show “reduced displacement due to eviction, increase housing stability and reduce inflows into homelessness.”⁵ According to Andrew Scherer’s “Why a Right: The Right to Counsel and the Ecology of Housing Justice⁶,” the Right to Counsel has the potential to:

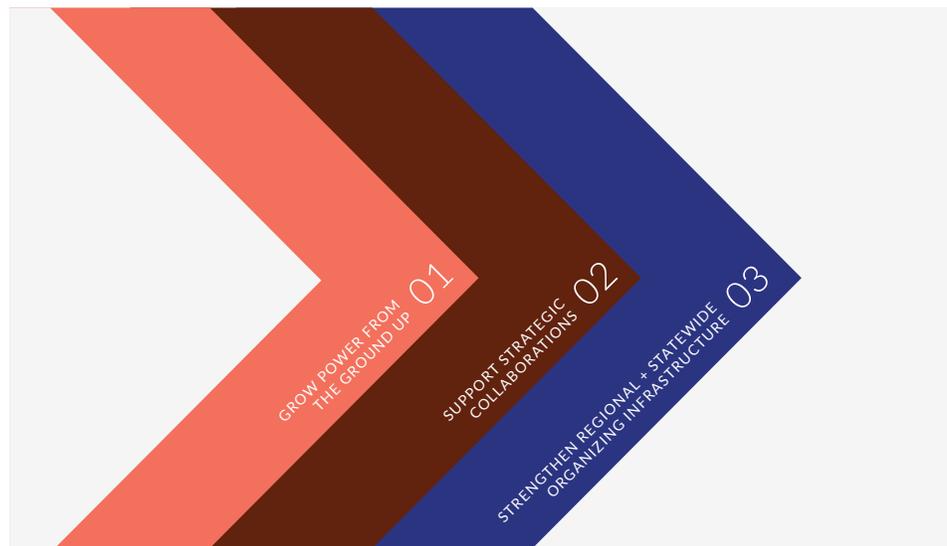
- Keep families together in their homes and communities.
- Reduce the loss of affordable housing units.
- Decrease the number of families and individuals that find themselves unhoused for the first time.
- Protect families against the trauma and long-term consequences of eviction and being unhoused.
- Mitigate the growing economic inequality.
- Generate cost savings for government agencies that are expanding resources to preserve communities and decrease the number of unhoused families and individuals.

Community leaders agree that the Right to Counsel is essential to protecting families from eviction and many noted that “it is hard to organize communities without it because of the lack of legal aid” available in several regions of the state. For example, according to the Fresno Right to Counsel Coalition “less than 1% of Fresno tenants have an attorney in eviction court, compared to 76% of landlords.” This underscores the uneven playing field that tenants face and the need for legal aid services.

Mobilizing and Aligning Resources for Power Building

The Fund for an Inclusive California works on multiple levels of coordination and connection to support organizers building broad and strategic collaborations that drive policy at every level. We believe that these interconnected strategies are required to effectively invest in real change and advance a community-driven agenda for housing justice.

Funders interested in systems change must respond more proactively to the scale and urgency of the housing crisis by mobilizing and aligning resources to support a robust ecosystem of power-building organizations.



01

The Fund is set up to support the leadership development of community residents and sustainability of power-building organizations to advance housing justice across the state through multi-year flexible funding.

02

The Fund facilitates and invests in strategic collaborations, particularly at the regional and state level. The Fund's Regional Capacity Building grants and convenings build trust amongst local leaders and connections to leverage existing resources. This is the connective tissue that has allowed organizers to address complex issues with creative solutions.

03

The Fund helps connect organizations regionally and statewide to aggregate their power to drive statewide change and strengthen intersectional movement building. Many power-building organizations work primarily at the local level. While they build significant power in their community, they also build infrastructure to aggregate that power across regions and the state, to tap their full potential.

Reflection Questions

While developing the foundational tenets of the Fund, we grappled with these questions:

What principles and practices can we adopt to ensure we are not perpetuating harm or extractive practices in communities?

What is the unique contribution and value add of a pooled fund? What is needed to strengthen the organizing infrastructure for housing justice at the local, regional and statewide level?

[Download partner list](#)

ABOUT OUR PARTNERS

Multiple partners, one learning community

Our partners include funders and community leaders coming together to leverage and broaden coordinated funding, build collective strategies, share learnings and be in partnership with one another. Together, we aim to build, strengthen and scale community power and self-determination.

Community Advisors and Nonprofit Partners

Community leaders and organizers have helped shape the design of the Fund from the beginning. We partner with community-led organizations across California to learn about the local context, how housing instability is impacting communities of color and what we can do as funders to align resources in support of their vision for thriving communities.

We call the core leaders who advise our work Community Advisors. Community Advisors are leaders at grassroots organizing and base-building organizations, primarily Latinx and Black leaders. They are our advisors in a very real way. We center their leadership and expertise, and have developed deeply respectful and reciprocal relationships made tangible through co-creation practices, funding practices aligned with movement-building priorities and informing our evaluation practices as an accountability tool.

"This is the first time I've been in real partnership with funders; where we are truly sharing expertise, budget and an aligned vision."

COMMUNITY ADVISOR

"The relationships and connections I have been able to build are important. I got further, quicker in those relationships because of the [F4ICA]. [I am] benefiting from the direct perspective of Community Advisors and what is bubbling from the Steering Committee – especially as I come up to speed on the decommodification of housing. And that is a big topic and it's been more accessible because I have the backdrop of what Community Advisors want."

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBER

"Allowing grassroots groups to have a seat at the table during the initiative's design and implementation has meant that the goals and structure of the Fund have augmented and built on ongoing work rather than requiring organizations to abandon projects or make sudden, resource-draining changes to their programs."

COMMUNITY ADVISOR

Steering Committee and Funding Partners

The Fund for an Inclusive California mobilizes philanthropic resources to support housing justice. At the core of our funding partners is a Steering Committee made up of a diverse set of foundations that are committed to learn in community through the Fund, take action together through this effort and align resources outside of it as well. Large and small, geographically diverse, private and community foundations – across our partners there is an understanding that we are stronger together, we cannot do this work alone and we must take the lead from community leaders and organizers doing work on the frontlines.

In this group, foundations are learning what it takes to mobilize and align resources with movement priorities, and to develop and operationalize practices that live our values.



COMMUNITY POWER COLLECTIVE

UP NEXT →

Values of Common

Counsel Foundation

A VALUES-FORWARD APPROACH

The decision to hold the Fund at Common Counsel Foundation is not solely an operational choice, it is rooted in values. Our practices are an outgrowth of those that CCF follows in its work to recognize and mitigate power imbalances, center community self-determination and align with social justice movements. The values of Common Counsel Foundation are:

We believe in the power of communities and the right and ability of those communities to lead their own path to solutions to the challenges they confront.

We intentionally align our priorities and strategies with frontline communities and movements.

We engage stakeholders with transparency, accountability and candor.

We bring an intersectional justice-oriented lens to the work.

We support organizations based in and led by people living on low incomes, people of color (and are attentive to Black-led organizing specifically), women and LGBTQ people who incorporate an intersectional analysis and approach in their work.

We invest in structural and systemic change that will impact root causes.

We utilize philanthropic practices that reflect the way frontline organizations and movements are developing and growing.

We attempt to recognize and mitigate barriers, including power imbalances, in philanthropy for grassroots groups.

We are committed to racial justice, equity and sustainability.

We promote full and democratic participation and seek to overcome barriers for all communities to engage in civic processes.

Because we are grounded in social justice values, we are guided by the leadership and vision of residents who are most impacted by housing injustice and systemic racism, and we developed the approach of the Fund with their insights and direction. The following are a few examples of the ways this is practiced:

- 01** | **Community Advisors informed the selection criteria for the core community organizations and new community partners to the Fund.**
 They determined that we need to center base-building organizations as well as movement partners, coalitions and alliances that are accountable to communities most affected by legacies of racism and segregation, those that address systems change and have a movement-building orientation.
- 02** | **Community Advisors co-designed the funding strategy for capacity building,** and had full decision-making power over the allocation of capacity building resources in each region.
- 03** | **We adopted equitable grantmaking practices that centered on what organizations need us to know,** rather than centering information for our internal processes. We provide flexible general operating grants, resources to build their organizational capacity, we accept previously written proposals and streamline reporting by replacing reports with feedback opportunities and interviews for organizations to share learnings, stories and updates that continue to inform the evolution of our work.
- 04** | **We approach evaluation as an accountability tool to hold ourselves accountable to movement priorities, not to evaluate an organization's performance.** We use methods that minimize the burden on Community Advisors and are committed to transparency and community ownership of information gathered. We assess the impact of the Fund on how effective of a partner we are in aligning and growing resources with movement priorities.

These practices are the core of our accountability and actions to ensure we continue to center the vision and priorities of community partners.



Reflection Questions

While codifying the practices of the Fund and engaging partners, we grappled with these questions:

What operational processes can we put in place so we are able to work at the speed and scale necessary to address the housing crisis in California? How do we ensure our agility to respond to partners?

We are committed to values that require different discussions and practices from traditional philanthropy, how does that shape our role as funders? How do we want to practice accountability to these values with funders and the Steering Committee?



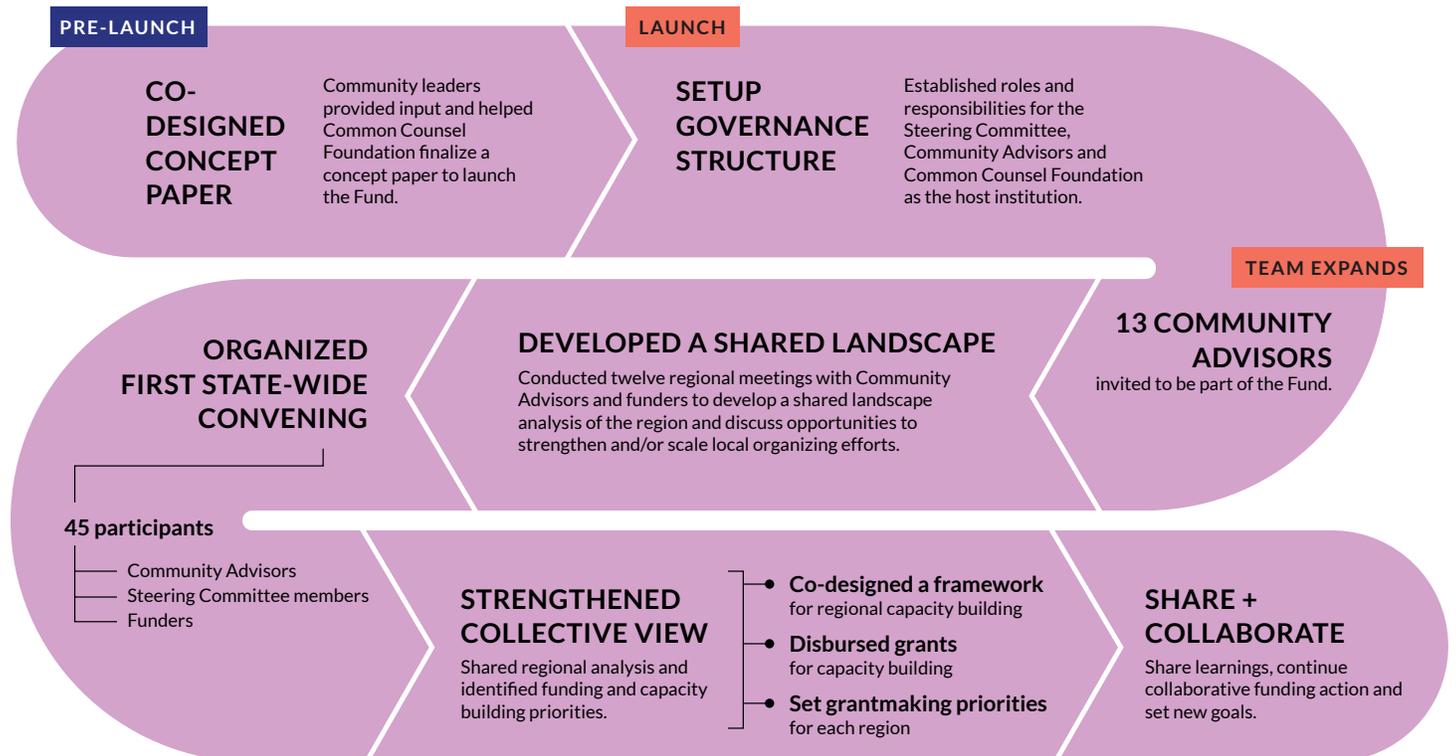
Investing in Community Priorities

IDENTIFYING PRIORITY REGIONS & COMMUNITY ADVISORS

The Fund for an Inclusive California relies on the deep expertises of community leaders as our partners in strategy, to hold us accountable to our mission. While philanthropy is critical in resourcing the solutions, without community organizations and their insights, this work is not possible.

Our Initial Steps to Co-Design Strategy with Community Advisors

In 2018, the Fund for an Inclusive California began the strategy development process which included: entering a planning and development phase, and working in partnership with Community Advisors to refine outcomes and funding priorities.



Getting Started

At the very beginning, Common Counsel Foundation and funding partners knew that we needed to begin building partnerships with community leaders to ensure our resources were driven by their experiences and vision. We had to start somewhere, and so we began with the knowledge that was in the room. The initial funding partners connected with nonprofits in the regions they worked in to get the nonprofit’s input on which organizations and coalitions were critical to include in a power-building fund focused on housing justice.

It was an imperfect process that attempted to balance a variety of interests and priorities at play, including the institutions, the short timeframe we hoped to stay within to begin making grants and the commitment to ensuring this process is co-designed with Community Advisors. Nonprofit partners were instrumental in identifying potential Community Advisors, and we focused the list down to a core group of 14 organizations and their leaders that met specific criteria:

- A highly engaged and growing membership/constituent base comprised of people most directly impacted by the structural systems they seek to change;
- A track record of driving policy and systems change to address gentrification and displacement;
- A clear opportunity and plan to scale local work and build collective power at the regional and state level;
- A clear long-term movement-building orientation that goes beyond a specific policy campaign or an individual organization;
- A strong racial and economic analysis and an understanding of root causes of displacement and gentrification; and
- A leadership that reflects the diversity of its members and the community it serves.

Following this criteria and funder partner priorities, we determined the Bay Area, Central Valley and Los Angeles as geographic priority regions to begin our work. Community Advisors were granted funds to support the time and expertise they provided the Fund. Expectations of Community Advisors were that they would appoint a staff member of their organization to serve as a Community Advisor to the Fund for an average of three hours a month for the duration of the grant period. They were expected to provide thought leadership, knowledge and expertise in the development of the Fund, primarily on the overall grantmaking strategy, goals, short and long-term outcomes.

The selection process and criteria for grants and priority regions evolved once the initial Community Advisors were on board. They shared their insights and nuance in their geographic region and helped us understand the influence and interconnection of regions.

Growth of Priority Regions + Community Partners

of Organizations

Regions engaged in the Fund



As we learned more, and had resources to expand, we were able to grow the number of partners in each region with a focus towards expanding the base outside of the urban core, and ultimately we expanded our work to include the Inland Region.

We acknowledge there are many places in California facing similar challenges, and much to be done to support housing justice and power-building efforts in and beyond California. We hope more foundations will take action to continue filling the gaps and building on what we have learned and heard from community leaders about the importance of this work.

Reflection Questions

While designing grantmaking strategy and criteria, we grappled with these questions:

| Which voices and perspectives are missing and how can we incorporate them?

| Holding that this is going to be an imperfect and evolving process, what work can we start in order to begin learning and adapting?

OUR GRANTMAKING

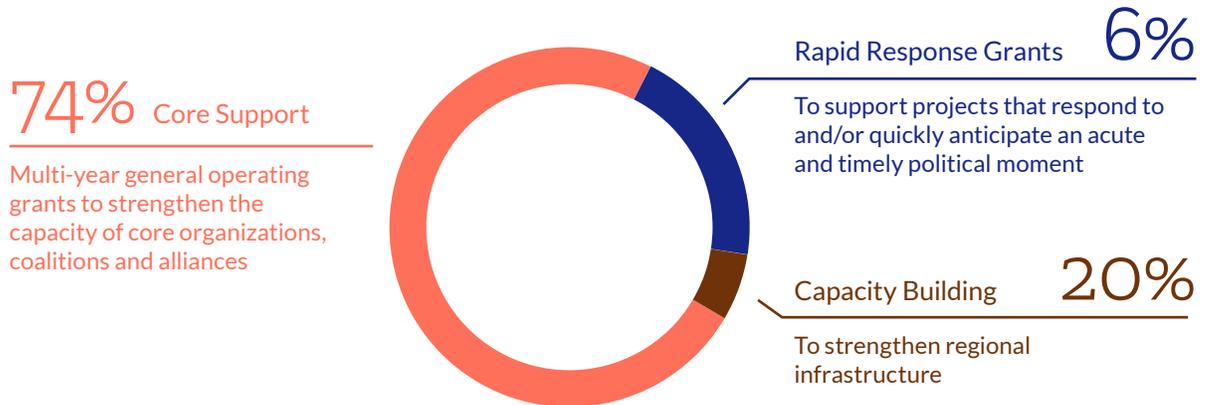
Types of Grants

The Fund for an Inclusive California aims to distribute approximately \$10 million by the end of 2022. These community investments have been described by advisors and funders as trust-based, relationship-based, participatory and restorative. While this resonates deeply, our strategy begins with listening and learning from community leaders, and our grantmaking practices are streamlined to honor our trusting relationship, partnership and expertise.

Through learnings from the field, our investments started with multi-year general operating grants in 2018, and were fortified through additional support including capacity building grants for regional infrastructure, rapid response grants, facilitated convenings and intentional space for learning and collaboration.

Targeted Grantmaking Goals

2018-2022



Cumulative Community Investment

\$10M

in Grantmaking

11

Funding partners

4

Regions + statewide organizing networks

45

Unduplicated organizations funded

Reflection Questions

As we carried out grantmaking for the Fund, these are a few of the questions we considered:

Can we accept grant proposals that were recently submitted to other foundations, and is a final report needed at all if our evaluation calls or regional convenings will cover the intended learnings?

What processes are necessary, and which can we streamline to get grants out to partners more quickly?

Key Findings from Our Learning & Accountability Practices

REIMAGINING LEARNING AND EVALUATION IN SERVICE OF OUR PARTNERS

The Fund for an Inclusive California approaches evaluation as a tool for learning from community leaders and as an accountability tool to align our priorities and strategies with frontline communities and social justice movements.

This approach shifts away from a traditional reporting mindset and attachments to predetermined outcomes and instead inspires us to learn more deeply about the evolution of the work, the challenges and opportunities that emerge in real-time and it pushes us to be adaptive, agile and apply what we learn. For us, this approach deepens relationships and facilitates strategic conversations that spark new ideas and drive greater impact. Our learning and evaluation approach is grounded in four key principles:

- 01** Focus on learning about the work of community leaders, not on evaluating their work or performance. Evaluation engages community leaders in meaningful and genuine ways to capture their insights and perspectives with the aim of surfacing conditions and strategies needed to advance housing justice and equitable development. In this way, we are constantly engaging, learning, adapting and responding to be as closely aligned with movement leaders as possible.
- 02** Minimize the burden on community leaders by building on existing work. Learning and evaluation efforts identify opportunities to engage with community leaders by coordinating with activities that are already in motion. In this way, learning and evaluation does not seek to extract information but to create atmospheres conducive to mutual learning and benefit.
- 03** Honor and validate multiple forms of knowledge production. Evaluation activities recognize that knowledge is produced along a spectrum of qualitative and quantitative data collection formats, and we aim to gather insights in ways that respect the wisdom and knowledge of diverse individuals and their communities.
- 04** Orient learning, creating and disseminating information with a community-led lens. Learning and evaluation emphasize the importance of establishing deep-seated partnerships with community leaders and residents by trusting their expertise and guidance in the design, implementation and sharing of learnings.

Methods of Listening & Learning

We are deeply grateful to the Community Advisors, Steering Committee Members and Common Counsel Foundation staff and consultants for sharing their wisdom, knowledge and expertise across the time of our partnership, and during the two-year period of learning and evaluation activities. Below we briefly document the learning formats used during this time.



60

One-on-one interviews conducted with community leaders



6

Statewide and regional convenings



11

Interviews with Steering Committee members

Including ongoing reflection sessions with CCF staff and team of consultants



PICO CALIFORNIA



INFLUENCE OF OUR FUNDING

Over the last three years, the Fund for an Inclusive California listened, learned and adapted our approach to support community-based organizations that are building, strengthening and amplifying the power of directly-impacted communities to advance justice and equitable development. This approach built and deepened trusting relationships with community leaders that helped the Fund understand the real needs, challenges and opportunities to advance a community-driven vision for housing justice.

“There is more flexibility in funding, but I think that may change again as we come out of the pandemic. I think there is momentum for us to push to keep funding flexible since it does give us [the] ability to quickly respond to material conditions on the ground.”

COMMUNITY ADVISOR

01

Flexible, multi-year funding is strategic and critical to pivot and respond to emerging needs.

02

F4ICA’s region-specific strategies strengthen the connective tissue within regions and among statewide organizing networks and alliances.

03

As part of the Regional Capacity Building strategy, the groups exercised full decision-making power over the development and design of their grantmaking priorities.

04

The inclusion of inland regional perspectives in statewide discussions created a fuller context and stronger connection among coastal and inland regions of California.

01

INFLUENCE

Flexible, multi-year funding is strategic and critical to pivot and respond to emerging needs.

Community leaders identified flexible, multi-year funding as essential and critical to supporting grassroots community organizations. Such funding gives community leaders control and flexibility over how to deploy resources within their organizations and is one of the first steps funders can take to shift away from monitoring performance to building trusting relationships. Community leaders stated that flexible funding transmits a message of trust in the leadership of community-based organizations, it is a strategic approach and helps establish a foundation for more authentic and strategic conversations with funders, not only in times of crisis but always.

The COVID-19 pandemic proved to be a rare moment in philanthropy when funders, according to community leaders, sent an overwhelming message of trust to community-based organizations. During a conversation with peers, one community leader reflected on their experiences with funders during the pandemic: “[the] trust factor is important, and it sends the message that ‘we’re in this together.’” While community leaders appreciate the elevated trust that funders are showing during the COVID-19 pandemic, most are concerned that funders will revert to traditional philanthropic practices that exacerbate inequities and get in the way of transformational change.

The flexible grantmaking practices funders applied during the pandemic allowed organizations to pivot resources quickly to respond to the emerging needs of their respective communities and, most importantly, to leverage emerging opportunities during a global pandemic.

One Community Advisor in the Central Valley recounted that they were able to use resources from their general fund to identify and develop a Right to Counsel proposal and in doing so “create a model” that can be expanded to neighboring cities in the Central Valley.

Similar stories were shared by our partners who in the midst of unimaginable devastation, leveraged diverse funding streams alongside their existing flexible funding, to push for eviction moratoriums and permanent and affordable housing approaches such as Project Roomkey, among others.

02

INFLUENCE

F4ICA’s region-specific strategies strengthen the connective tissue within regions and among statewide organizing networks and alliances.



In the early stages of the Fund, Community Advisors voiced a need to “create intentional spaces for organizations to connect, strategize and vision together at the regional level.” Convening such spaces requires significant resources that most organizations do not have at their disposal. The potential benefit of convening mission-driven groups to address complex issues, such as housing justice, is that it builds connections and relationships among groups that can spark creative solutions to intricate issues.

In response, the Fund instituted mechanisms to help community leaders convene, connect and learn about each other’s strategies to identify places for alignment. As one Community Advisor commented, “there is little time for dialogue across organizations so more opportunity for this is valuable.” Taking direction from community leaders, F4ICA stepped more intentionally into a convener role and directed resources to statewide convenings and the development of a Regional Capacity Building grantmaking strategy.

The Regional Capacity Building grantmaking strategy was conceptualized from the recognition that each region has a unique local context and the ecosystem of

organizations in those regions has unique strengths and rich histories advancing housing justice and equitable development. Embracing this, the Regional Capacity Building strategy was adapted to meet each region's specific needs, readiness to advance their region-specific strategies and strength of relationships among community leaders. The Regional Capacity Building strategy accounts for these differences by embedding flexible and nimble structures that are responsive to local and regional needs.

Community leaders highlighted the Regional Capacity Building strategy as a hallmark of the Fund. According to these community leaders, the strategy cultivates and deepens existing regional relationships among organizations, builds upon trusting partnerships and encourages regional strategy alignment and visioning. Across all four regions and among statewide groups, community leaders agree that they have strengthened their collaborations, are building trust among themselves and are “thinking strategically about the region with [their] colleagues.” Community leaders are thinking beyond what their individual organizations can achieve and, instead, are focused on the importance of nurturing a strong ecosystem of organizations to bring about policy and systems change at the local, regional and statewide level.

Components of the Regional Capacity Building Grantmaking Program

The intent of the Regional Capacity Building Grantmaking Program is to strengthen the organizing infrastructure or “connective tissue” within the targeted regions of Los Angeles, Bay Area, Inland Region, Central Valley and Statewide networks by:

Building and strengthening relationships

Create spaces to form and sustain trusting relationships and deepen connections.

Engaging in collective power and landscape analysis

Sharing research and data that strengthen collective strategic thinking and identify points of alignment.

Supporting leadership development

To nurture the development of current and rising community leaders to ensure the fight for housing justice and equitable development spans generations.

Creating a shared vision

To explore, reimagine and/or clarify a shared vision.

Aligning communications strategies

To form an echo chamber and identify key messages that create a groundswell of support for housing justice and equitable development.

03

INFLUENCE

As part of the Regional Capacity Building strategy, the groups exercised full decision-making power over the development and design of their grantmaking priorities.



Each region tailored their grantmaking priorities to meet the unique conditions and needs of their region. For community leaders, this distinctive approach was a departure from traditional funding approaches where organizations are asked to fit into predetermined, funder-led strategies. Our staff shared that it was difficult to “convince” community leaders that they were constructing their own strategy for the region. Similarly, we facilitated conversations with funding partners to help them understand and trust the approach being undertaken. CCF’s long history as a social justice foundation was critical to bringing funding partners along this path of shifting control and decision-making power to community leaders. A F4ICA staff person reflected on this approach: “We had to trust the process, lean into the power of relationships and [CCF’s] long history of grounding our practice in social justice values. Most importantly, we had to learn how to embrace the discomfort of the unknown.” Lastly, this adaptive approach allowed for a timely and strategic response when the pandemic hit. This approach set the stage for bold, strategic conversations with community leaders and funding partners around long-term visions and the development of a “north star” for housing justice in California.

UP NEXT →

Highlights of the components
of the Regional Capacity
Building Grantmaking Program

Highlights

Regional Capacity Building Program Components



Component: Relationships

Building trusting relationships is a key factor to establishing a robust housing justice movement infrastructure. Through the Regional Capacity Building Program, the Fund created spaces to bring community leaders together to engage in discussion, reflection and strategic thought partnership. Below we share a few highlights about how deepened relationships have impacted the work:

Funded Statewide Community Advisors who are leaders of largely multi-issue organizations that include housing justice and equitable development. Because Statewide Community Advisors are vastly different in their approach and structures, developing relationships is key to building a statewide housing justice movement. In a recent round of conversations, statewide organizations highlighted the stronger “political alignment” that resulted from their ongoing participation in the Regional Capacity Building Program. These organizations shared that the Fund helped establish platforms to understand their unique approaches and perspectives which increased alignment. As a result, the statewide organizations worked in unison to launch the California is Not For Sale campaign to expose the opposition’s spending to influence ballot propositions in the 2020 elections that would have benefited tenants and homeowners such as Proposition 21 and Proposition 15.

The Inland Region has a deep-rooted history of white supremacy and racism that is unsurprisingly embedded in housing policies and broader development projects in the region. Local partners have been fighting against “housing discrimination” that is widespread in the region and legalized under “crime-free housing” policies. These policies, independently approved by each city, give landlords the right to evict tenants based on police calls for service, encouraging landlords to exclude people previously

involved in the criminal justice system from all housing. Community leaders shared that “crime-free housing” policies “have been a way to get around current laws against housing discrimination and serve to keep racial discrimination in housing alive” in the Inland Region.

Because of the vast geographic span of the region and the localized needs of communities of color, organizations tend to work at the hyper-local level. While housing justice was a priority for many organizations in the region, community leaders explained that the Fund helped “build a collaborative that did not exist [in the region] before.” The ground was fertile for collaboration, but base-building organizations needed additional capacity to work more collaboratively on housing issues, specifically on local policy campaigns. The funding catalyzed relationship building and increased the organizations’ capacity to convene on a regular basis to work on collaborative campaigns.

These relationships were critical in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic as it positioned organizations to secure eviction moratoriums at the local and county-level immediately after shelter-in-place orders were announced. Building on this momentum and the global response to the murder of George Floyd, our partners in collaboration with other racial justice groups in the region secured a major win in June 2020 when San Bernardino County became the first county in California to declare racism a public health crisis.

Component: Shared Vision

A priority of the Fund for an Inclusive California is to support community leaders to identify points of alignment among organizations that can lead to the development of a shared vision of housing justice. Through the Regional Capacity Building Program, funded regions and statewide groups identified the process they wanted to undertake in their region to learn more about each other’s work, identify points of alignment and craft a shared vision. Below we highlight how community leaders in the Los Angeles region came together to organize a planning retreat which led to the development of a “north star” vision for the region.



Community leaders in the **Los Angeles region** had established trusting relationships before joining the Fund. As one community leader in the region affirmed, “[our] collaboration structures are built upon existing relationships and that makes [our partnerships] stronger.” As foreshadowed by one Community Advisor, “when opportunities arise for collaboration [we] move quickly and effortlessly because of the already-built trust, common goals and relationships. We see all of the community leaders as essential partners.”

The Fund resourced the organizations to build upon the established trusting relationships and their aligned priorities. In December of 2019, with funding from F4ICA, community leaders held an in-person overnight retreat that resulted in the development of the region’s “north star” that focuses on the decommodification of housing. A member of the group echoed the sentiment of other community leaders sharing: “the conversations that took place at the regional retreat set us up to be more successful because we identified a ‘north star’ for the organizations.”

As the group shared in their Los Angeles Grantee Cohort Planning Retreat Final Report: “to transform the causes of the housing affordability crisis, it will be necessary to craft, refine and advance scaled strategies to decommodify housing.” Earlier this year, Community Advisors in Los Angeles shared that in partnership with Los Angeles Community Land Trusts (LA CLTs), affordable housing developers, Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles and Enterprise Community Partners, they established the **Los Angeles Acquisition/Rehabilitation Working Group**. This working group has secured \$14M in public resources to resource social housing strategies focused on community land trusts, received additional philanthropic funding and successfully advanced policy changes to work towards tenant ownership through the community land trust model.

Component: Communication Strategies

The need to develop clear and aligned communication strategies was identified by community leaders in the early stages of the Fund. The Regional Capacity Building Program resourced regions to align their communications strategies to form an echo chamber and identify messages that create a groundswell of support for housing justice and equitable development in their region.



The Central Valley, like the Inland Region, covers a vast geographic region that includes eight counties. While each county and sub-county areas have specific housing needs and strengths, the Central Valley shares common housing challenges that include ever increasing evictions, rising rents, substandard living conditions and limited tenant protections. Despite these common housing injustices, community leaders in the region continue to push “against the concept that the [Central] Valley is affordable.” As one organizer shared, “the housing crisis is seen as a myth in the Central Valley. We don’t have housing champions in the Central Valley that are decision makers at the local, county, regional and state levels.” Because of this ubiquitous “myth” about housing in the Central Valley, community leaders are relentless in their efforts to educate elected officials and candidates “about the history of housing [in the Central Valley]” and what is needed to improve housing conditions for communities of color that are most impacted by housing injustices.

To continue to push against the Central Valley’s housing “myth”, funded groups are taking a multipronged approach that includes establishing a regional coalition to ensure effective coordination across the eight-county region, resource sharing, collaborative advocacy and the development of a shared communications strategy and narrative framework.

Component: Leadership Development

Community leaders noted that the fight for housing justice and equitable development is multi-generational. As such, it is imperative that we invest in the development of current and rising leaders as well as the sustainability of seasoned organizers. Particularly now given the growing staff burnout that organizations are reporting across all levels – from community leaders to organizers to leadership staff.



The San Francisco Bay Area is composed of nine counties. Each county, and more specifically subregions of each county, have unique local context, political differences and face distinct challenges when dealing with housing justice issues.

According to community leaders, the Regional Capacity Building Program was successful in bringing Bay Area base-building groups together and “increased bridge-building

across differences” that existed among groups in the region. As Bay Area groups re-established their connections and relationships, they recognized the need for leadership development particularly given the high turn-over rate of leadership staff among base-building organizations in the Bay Area.

Through the Regional Capacity Building Program, community leaders identified the need for a Regional Coordinator position to help build leadership capacity among Bay Area groups and help keep organizations connected and aligned. The primary role of this position is to coordinate the Regional Tenant Organizing network (RTO), a network of tenants rights organizations, and the Peoples Land and Housing Alliance (PLHA), a network of organizations fighting for long-term, community-based solutions to the housing crisis. The added capacity seeks to strengthen the infrastructure, and membership and leadership development for the networks; support the implementation of network projects; and cultivate relationships across the region, and with statewide and national networks.



04

INFLUENCE

The inclusion of inland regional perspectives in statewide discussions created a fuller context and stronger connection among coastal and inland regions of California.

Initial conversations with community leaders documented the growing population of inland regions that, according to community leaders, was heavily influenced and driven by the displacement of communities in coastal regions of California such as the Bay Area and Los Angeles.⁷ Community leaders explained that low-income communities in inland California are being pushed farther away from higher opportunity neighborhoods to find affordable and often dilapidated housing. Yet, investment in neighborhood amenities continues to elude many of the lowest-income communities, further perpetuating the division between those who have access to healthy housing and those that do not.

At the beginning of the Fund in 2018, the dominant housing narrative at the state level focused on coastal cities and urban centers, often excluding the inland regions from statewide housing policy discussions. This coupled with the narrative that inland California is relatively affordable, created additional challenges for organizing groups seeking to advance a community-driven agenda for local equitable development in inland California. As one Community Advisor in the Central Valley expressed, it is time to bring the inland regions' "housing crisis out of the shadows."

Community leaders value the efforts taken by the Fund to amplify the voices of inland regions in California in statewide conversations. We believe that statewide policy solutions should be responsive to the needs of local communities across the state, including inland regions and rural communities. Bringing in the perspective of community leaders that work with communities in the Central Valley and Inland Region helped increase their visibility among funders that do not typically fund in inland regions. The increased visibility resulted in additional funding, invitations to participate in other statewide discussion and technical assistance grants offered by funding partners.

Moreover, Steering Committee members recognized that through their involvement in the Fund they increased their understanding of the efforts undertaken by community leaders in the Central Valley and Inland Region. As one Steering Committee member shared: "The alignment [of the F4ICA] with the direction of the movement has been good to witness. [Our foundation] has been able to build a lot of political trust with the community leaders that are part of the F4ICA and we have gained a better understanding of power dynamics in inland regions and learned more about the roadblocks and gained a granular perspective on the local political dynamics."

Similarly, another Steering Committee member explained that the Fund helped them learn more about the dynamics of displacement in the Los Angeles region and the interconnectedness with the Inland Region. The Steering Committee member went on to explain that hearing from organizers in the Inland Region, which is where "communities from Los Angeles county are being displaced," helped the foundation examine their funding strategies within Los Angeles County and the organizing models of the surrounding regions. Because of this greater level of understanding about the regions and the local context, a few Steering Committee members noted that they are more intentional about reaching out to their local partners in these regions outside of the F4ICA.



LESSONS LEARNED

The Fund for an Inclusive California's focus on aligning priorities with social justice movements and following the lead of community leaders continues to inform our practice. Below is an overview of key learnings we've gathered along the way with the goal of encouraging more funders to join the work of building, growing and sustaining the movement to advance housing justice in California and beyond.

01

It's critical for philanthropy to shift power to community leaders.

02

Intentional focus on creating a listening and learning community to adapt and respond to emerging needs in real-time.

03

Support movement building that grows from pre-existing networks and relationships, not funder-imposed ideas or initiatives.

04

Philanthropic leadership matters.

05

Be bold, and explicitly examine how structural, racist policies and rhetoric impact communities of color.

01

LESSONS LEARNED

It's critical for philanthropy to shift power to community leaders.

Power dynamics are inherent in funder-grantee relationships. The Fund introduced equitable processes and practices with the aim of establishing authentic and trusting relationships that, in turn, would meet the goals of the collaborative fund. We recognized that this approach required a different level of engagement with community leaders and that it would take time, trust and vulnerability on their behalf to build these relationships.

Community leaders responded positively to the Fund's approach to a co-created process. A Community Advisor captured the sentiment of nearly all interviewed: "there are always power dynamics with funders and community-based organizations, and I feel [F4ICA] set an example for how to have these conversations and create a process that feels safe. [They] were very intentional about creating a process that wasn't just about the outcomes. It was really about how do we create a conversation and an ongoing process together. Continually being aware of that power dynamic in ways that [F4ICA was] sets an example for other funding partners who aren't as intentional."

KEY STRATEGIES →

Instrumental in building trusting and authentic relationships according to community advisors

Lead with values

CCF's role as social justice public foundation inspired the framework for F4ICA's approach, including weaving in CCF's values and approach to collaborations with community-based organizations. Community leaders highlight the importance of working with funders who are "values aligned" with their own organizational values and tenets.

Model transparency

The CCF team emphasized the need for transparency with community advisors as they developed their programmatic and strategic approach. For example, CCF shared F4ICA project budgets with community leaders early in the partnership to signal our commitment to a co-creative process.

Center expertise of Community Advisors

Forming and transforming the funder-grantee relationship paradigm started at the onset of the initiative with CCF actively consulting with community advisors to share their expertise and wisdom, and providing planning grants and stipends for the expertise and guidance. For example, Community Advisors took an active role in planning the initiative's first convening and much of the event's success can be attributed to their insights about topics and approaches to creating a beneficial convening for all community leaders.

Move at the pace of trusting relationships with Community Advisors

F4ICA was intentional about following the lead of Community Advisors and moving in unison with them. CCF staff relied on frequent touch points with Community Advisors to learn in real-time and align F4ICA's work with them. Because the Fund was intentional about understanding the needs of Community Advisors it helped build trust, enabling F4ICA to be nimble, agile and responsive to emerging needs.

Shift accountability from grantee to funder

CCF staff reimagined the role accountability plays by shifting the focus from outcomes produced by Community Advisors to accountability of the Fund in delivering on our commitments and practices to advisors. In doing so, community leaders concentrated their energy on their ground efforts and not on meeting funder requirements.

Fund relationship building

F4ICA is intentional and thoughtful about creating opportunities for funding partners and community leaders to build and strengthen relationships.

02

LESSONS LEARNED

Intentional focus on creating a listening and learning community to adapt and respond to emerging needs in real-time.

Following the values of Common Counsel Foundation, the Fund took a movement-building approach to learning and evaluation. Instead of developing a Theory of Change and accompanying outcomes and metrics, we leaned in on the expertise of Community Advisors by listening and learning from them. Conversations were set up with Community Advisors to learn about their organization, the role they played in the region, lessons learned and best practices, and what they wanted to discover through the Fund's evaluation. Based on what was learned through the initial conversations with Community Advisors, the Fund's Learning Framework (or Theory of Change) was developed. As such, the Learning Framework reflects the conditions on the ground and the strategies community leaders are implementing.

Similarly, based on initial conversations with Community Advisors it became apparent that there was an interest in continued engagement through one-on-one conversations and regional meetings. Community Advisors appreciated that the fund “asked for feedback and input” from them. This extends to grant applications and reporting requirements. The Fund replaced our reporting requirements with one-on-one conversations with community advisors, where they could also provide feedback on what was needed from the Fund in that moment. This shift helped F4ICA staff stay connected to what was emerging in-real time on the ground, which was critical during the pandemic. These conversations emphasized learning as a partnership and advanced relationship building with Community Advisors.

03

LESSONS LEARNED

Support movement building that grows from pre-existing networks and relationships, not funder-imposed ideas or initiatives.

While the Fund helped nurture and deepen existing relationships, collaborations and networks among community leaders existed before the Fund. As noted earlier, the Los Angeles region is a clear example of the importance of building from established relationships and not imposing cursory collaborations. Because of the established relationships, Los Angeles community leaders called for support from the Fund to convene a two-day retreat to develop their “north star”.

04

LESSONS LEARNED

Philanthropic leadership matters.

When working on issues that directly impact communities of color, Community Advisors expressed that it was important to have foundation staff who reflect the demographic composition of the community and that they have on-the-ground experience with the issues impacting communities. Community Advisors voiced that it was important to have an ally inside philanthropy that understood the work happening on the ground. As echoed by a Community Advisor: “[F4ICA staff] come from the organizing world and understand the organizing world, the stories [they] have shared with us and [having them] in this position really helped organize the funding world and change the perspective of funders. We are deeply appreciative of that.”

While progressive foundations in the philanthropic sector are pushing to increase the number of nonprofit leaders of color “because these leaders often bring strategies that reflect the racialized experiences of communities of color and the issues they face,”⁸ the philanthropic sector trails behind in diversifying their own staff. More emphasis needs to be placed on the composition of staff, leadership and board who lead philanthropic efforts to ensure power-building strategies are seen as critical to advancing racial and economic equity and to engender more trust from community groups leading efforts on the ground.

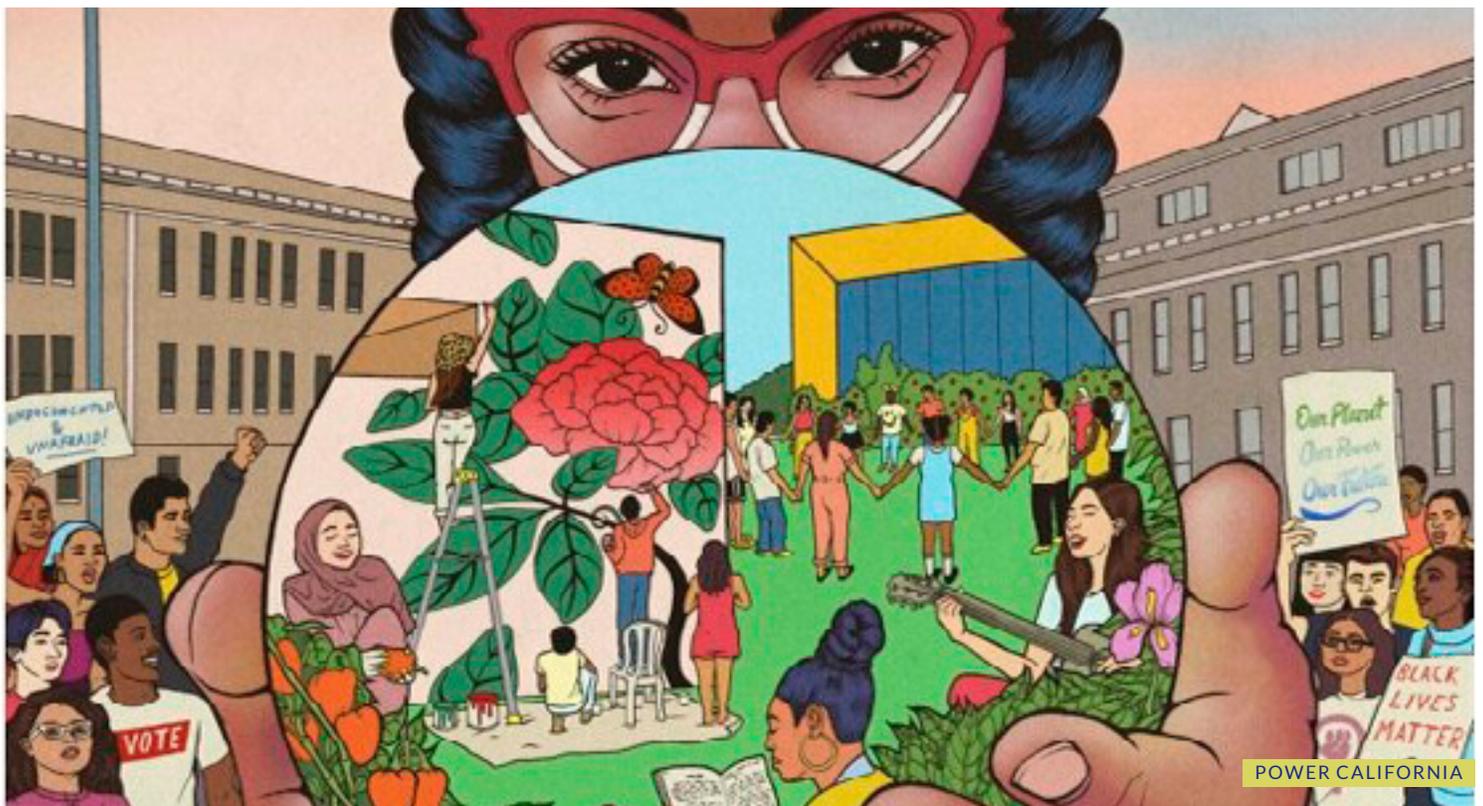
05

LESSONS LEARNED

Be bold, and explicitly examine how structural, racist policies and rhetoric impact communities of color.

In Martha Matsuoka’s report, *Democratic Development for Thriving Communities* (2017)⁹, structural racism is identified as one of “four mutually reinforcing systems that define the process of gentrification, displacement and neighborhood change.” Community Advisors who partner with the Fund all incorporate an analysis of the root causes of structural racism and this analysis informs their strategies for building community power to advance housing justice and equitable development. At this moment when the pandemic has exposed the structural racism woven across different layers of society including housing, community leaders are calling for a more explicit focus on how racist policies, many of which are still in effect, along with increasing racist rhetoric, are impacting communities of color.

An explicit focus on the impact of structural racism alongside overt acts of racism are urgently needed in regions that are experiencing a rise in racist rhetoric and intimidation tactics by both community members and elected officials. For example, Community Advisors in the Inland Region shared stories of racist attacks by white supremacist groups whose actions have been emboldened by the previous administration. Community Advisors also pointed out an increase in racist speech coming from local elected officials such as city council members who called organizers “terrorists”. It is time to incorporate a more comprehensive analysis of structural racism, denounce racist hate speech and explore opportunities to support power-building organizations that are being targeted by overt racist acts.



POWER CALIFORNIA



ON THE HORIZON

As communities continue to grapple with growing pressures of housing insecurity and deepened racial disparities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, they are reimagining what is possible in reality and demanding bold action to achieve housing justice for all Californians. Throughout our conversations with Community Advisors, the following themes were uplifted consistently as critical pathways to advance community-led strategies and for a just and equitable recovery.

01

Double down on tenant organizing.

02

Invest in leadership development to sustain the growing housing justice movement.

03

Maximize funding for advocacy and civic engagement.

04

Resource collective community ownership models.

01

RECOMMENDATIONS

"We are not a direct service provider but, in many ways, we are filling the role of a quasi-direct service provider. We are who the community calls to connect with resources and information because that is where the relationships are."

COMMUNITY ADVISOR

Double down on tenant organizing.

Organizers are doubling down their tenant organizing for tenant rights and tenant protections by leading local and statewide campaigns to pass eviction moratoriums and bring about rent and mortgage relief.

These successful organizing efforts culminated in the passage of Statewide COVID-19 Tenant and Landlord Protection Senate Bill 91 (SB 91) signed by California's Governor, Gavin Newsom, in August 2020.¹⁰

While community organizers believe that SB 91 brings critical relief to many California renters and landlords, it leaves far too many tenants at risk of eviction and crushing debt. According to housing advocates SB 91 does not fully address the needs of impacted residents and, more importantly, does not address the root causes of the embedded housing inequities faced by communities of color and lower-income communities. Community Advisors, along with other housing advocates, collectively are calling for rent and mortgage relief and forgiveness for those most impacted by the loss of income from the COVID-19 pandemic.

For Community Advisors, particularly those working with communities in coastal areas, the urgency to act is exponentially magnified as they witness the flight of communities of color from urban centers to more inland regions in California or a complete exodus from the state. Community leaders predict that the flight of communities of color from urban centers will create reverberating impacts on the environment, family structures and the rich diversity that has long been a characteristic of urban regions. Indeed, it is the diversity of these regions that make them vibrant communities.

A Community Advisor echoed the sentiment of base-building groups working with communities in urban centers: “We don’t have a lot of time. In the next couple of years, we either get it done or we don’t. And we’re going to lose people of color, we’re going to lose poor people and we’re going to feel the impact of that... What will it mean for a mom to have to drive two and a half hours to get to [her] job, and then have to raise a child [in a different region]? And then the environmental impact of increased commutes. Folks that are on the frontlines, folks that are organizing, folks that are being impacted – they know that their days are numbered, unless something changes and we are able to stop the bleeding.”

02

RECOMMENDATIONS

Invest in leadership development to sustain the growing housing justice movement.

As communities of color were devastated by wage loss and witnessed family and friends succumbing to the virus, demands and pressure on base-building organizations amplified. The heightened demand for services from base-building organizations translated to an expanded need for staffing capacity, particularly for organizers who needed to work on eviction moratoriums, and to educate and share information with impacted communities about their rights and eligibility for relief funds, all while becoming critical lifelines for their communities. Community leaders that once primarily focused on building people-power became “frontline responders” overnight. “We jumped headfirst in[to] the types of services we hadn’t done before like food aid and economic assistance and [have] gone turbo on organizing community and policy,” shared a Community Advisor at the height of the pandemic.

To mitigate the impact on current staff, executive directors are promoting self-care for staff that includes additional paid time off, wellness stipends and coaching opportunities. Community leaders also noted that salary adjustments are needed along with adequate health care benefits.

The transformed and intensified role that community-based organizations took on resulted in an all time high staff burnout, unprecedented staff turnover across all levels of organizations (including leadership roles) and heightened need to support the mental wellbeing of staff. One community advisor shared their perspective as an organizer: “organizers become organizers because they have been impacted and are part of the community [they work with.] We are now being impacted emotionally, physically and mentally. Organizers live in the communities and see the disparities and challenges.”

Prior to the pandemic many Community Advisors had raised concerns about staff burnout and the need to support the mental wellbeing of frontline organizers. One community leader surveyed before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic shared that “[staff] are overextended and organizations are working at or above capacity. We need to strengthen the ‘bench’ and work on retention of younger staff.” Simply put, the pandemic exacerbated years of “working around the clock” and accumulated stress.

Additionally, base-building organizations are actively calling for resources to support the leadership development of a new generation of activists so they in turn become long-term organizers. To fully support and integrate this new generation of activists, community leaders need added resources to build the capacity of their organizations to adequately train and support young leaders.

03

RECOMMENDATIONS

Maximize funding for advocacy and civic engagement.

Community Advisors are eager to build and grow their capacity to deepen their advocacy and civic engagement efforts to advance ballot initiatives and policy campaigns. Community Advisors agreed that there is a need to hold elected officials “accountable to communities’ needs and not the status quo of developers.” Yet the 501(c)3 designation of the Community Advisors’ organizations limit their ability to engage in more direct advocacy and civic engagement efforts.

To expand their political power and influence, Community Advisors are leveraging their existing 501(c)3 advocacy capacity and growing their civic engagement infrastructure through 501(c)4 infrastructures. The 501(c)4 infrastructures give organizations the power to co-govern, hold elected officials accountable, advance policies and adopt ballot measures and propositions that address their needs.

Recognizing the need for this type of infrastructure, a handful of funded groups have moved forward and established complimentary 501(c)4 infrastructures that “are [now] informing [their] electoral planning for 2022.”

04

RECOMMENDATIONS

Resource collective community ownership models.

Community leaders are unrelenting in their efforts to reimagine long-term alternatives and approaches to land use and housing that benefit communities of color who have historically and continue to be uprooted and displaced by speculative market-driven practices. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the urgency to focus on long-term social housing strategies that transform and “counteract the financialization of the housing sector;”¹¹ these include community land trusts, shared equity models and limited equity cooperatives, among others. In conversations with community leaders before the pandemic, nearly all agreed on the need to push for “community control and ownership and alternative models to housing by removing homes from the private market and market-rate development.” As the impacts of the pandemic continued to unfold, community leaders increasingly uplifted these models as critical strategies to address housing inequities and advance a transformative vision for housing justice and equitable development.

A Community Advisor echoed this sentiment, “you are seeing more and more people calling attention to decommodifying housing, community land trusts, more affordable housing and all the suite of solutions that are [rooted in community ownership] because ultimately it is going to take that in order to solve the housing crisis; developers are not just going to build a lot of housing for people who do not have a lot of money.”

The pandemic reinforced the importance of reconceptualizing housing as a basic human right. As stated in a recent report by Urban Habitat and East Bay Community Law Center, there is a need to “replace this market economy with a moral economy that is attuned to what people need and is shaped by our vision for stable, healthy, democratically controlled communities.”¹² This statement exemplifies the advancement of strategies to take housing out of the speculative market, ensure permanent affordability and place communities as owners and stewards of land and housing.

“There is a growing consensus among groups large and small in California around pushing for social housing. It’s always been out there but it’s getting a lot more traction in a variety of ways. We’ve all long asked the questions connected to scale, but I think what’s so great right now is that the land trust movement in my mind is successfully playing a role, it’s not just about [land trusts], it’s about the role its playing in getting people to realize there’s a different way to look at ownership. And there are paths to decommodifying housing.”

COMMUNITY ADVISOR

Community Land Trusts are among the “suite” of collective community ownership models that are being actively explored by community leaders. The potential of community land trusts as a model that counters market-driven practices is supported by a recent report: *Increasing Community Power and Health Through Community Land Trusts: A Report From Five Movement-Driven California CLTs*, where the authors offer that “CLTs hold several important functions in the larger movement for economic and racial justice.”¹³ The report outlines four guiding principles that make community land trusts economically and socially sustainable¹⁴:

- Accountability to community residents.
- Retention of public subsidy to benefit future families.
- Creation of permanent affordable housing.
- Protection of land from real estate speculation.

As observed by Community Advisors, the pandemic increased the receptiveness of private and public entities to consider the community land trusts model as a viable and alternative approach to market-driven housing practices. While “the concept and practice of collective ownership is not new,” Community Advisors understand there is a big learning curve and a significant infusion of resources is needed to build the capacity of organizations to develop, implement and finance collective community ownership models.

Moving Forward

SYSTEMS CHANGE REQUIRES LONG-TERM COMMITMENT AND INVESTMENT

In the past three years we have developed relationships with local and statewide community leaders that have allowed us and our funding partners to learn about what it takes for philanthropy to work together to invest in and support power-building strategies.

While we are in the early stages of building strong, trusting, lasting relationships with community leaders, organizing efforts are calling for bold structural and transformative approaches now. It is clear now more than ever that advancing a community-driven agenda for equitable development and housing justice requires long-term and sustained funding.

The learnings from the initiative phase of the Fund are the impetus for forging ahead to evolve this work. Today, **Common Counsel Foundation is ready to make a long-term commitment to mobilize and grow resources to deepen and evolve this work across the state.**



"The Fund for an Inclusive California is the expression of our commitment to communities most affected by social and economic injustice, and housing injustice specifically. The Common Counsel Foundation is committed to supporting bold and ambitious measures that build, strengthen and sustain community power in California. Building this practice is an open invitation to our friends, colleagues and peers in the philanthropic community to join in expanding the progress F4ICA has achieved."

PEGGY SAIKA
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
COMMON COUNSEL
FOUNDATION

WHAT'S NEXT? A BOLD AND UNAPOLOGETIC VISION FOR HOUSING JUSTICE IN CALIFORNIA

We are launching a collaborative process that centers local leaders to develop a bold vision for the next phase of work.

Our intentions for the year ahead are to affirm our commitment to power-building strategies as key drivers for housing justice and equitable development, align our collective efforts and amplify the leadership of Community Advisors – the Black, Indigenous and people of color movement leaders – who have guided the strategy of the Fund for an Inclusive California since its inception, and plan a formal recommitment and relaunch of our work.

JOIN US

We look forward to sharing more learnings from this next season of our journey. If you're interested in learning more about the Fund for an Inclusive California, please reach us at F4ICA@commoncounsel.org.



END NOTES

1 We followed the guidance of Community Advisors to develop the framework, goals and grantmaking priorities of the Fund for an Inclusive California. Community Advisors engaged in a collaborative design process to develop grantmaking strategies and had decision-making power over resources in each region.

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4 Right to Counsel Project, Impact Center for Public Interest Law, <https://www.nyls.edu/academics/specialty-areas/centers-and-institutes/impact-center-for-public-interest-law/>

5 Right to Counsel Proposal, December 2020. The Fresno Right to Counsel Coalition. <https://leadershipcounsel.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Fresno-Right-to-Counsel-Coalition-Community-Proposal.pdf>

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8 Cheryl Dorsey, Jeff Bradach, and Peter Kim. The Problem with "Color-Blind" Philanthropy. (2020) Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2020/06/the-problem-with-color-blind-philanthropy>

9 Matsuoka, M. (2017, May) Democratic Development for Thriving Communities: Framing the Issues, Solutions, and Funding Strategies to Address Gentrification and Displacement (Urban & Environmental Policy Institute, Occidental College, and Neighborhood Funders Group).

10 <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2020/08/31/governor-newsom-signs-statewide-covid-19-tenant-and-landlord-protection-legislation/>

11 Urban Habitat and East Bay Community Law Center (2020?). Rooted in Home: Community-Based Alternatives to the Bay Area Housing Crisis. <https://urbanhabitat.org/sites/default/files/Rooted%20in%20Home.pdf>

12 Ibid.

13 Hernandez, A.C; McNeil, S.; Tong, Y. (December 2020). Increasing Community Power and Health Through Community Land Trusts: A Report From Five Movement-Driven California CLTs. <https://trustsouthla.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Increasing-Community-Power-Thru-CLTs-REPORT-TCE-BHC-Dec2020.pdf>

14 Ibid.

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