

Funding Housing Justice For Thriving Communities

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

Introduction

As more foundations deepen their work in racial justice and grassroots organizing, the Fund for an Inclusive California released a report sharing how we approached funding power-building efforts to achieve housing justice in California.

In the new report, *Funding Housing Justice for Thriving Communities: Reflections on the first three years of learning and funding in partnership with housing justice organizations*, we share our journey, including co-design and development of strategies, values-centered practices, lessons learned, and calls to action for philanthropy from our community partners. The report is a culmination of two years of learning and evaluation activities, including more than 70 one-on-one conversations, and six statewide and regional convenings.

Our hope is that it serves as 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. We hope you will explore this executive summary and see the full report for deeper insights, stories and reflections.



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 justice and local equitable 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 living 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.

A PHILANTHROPIC RESPONSE GROUNDED IN SOCIAL JUSTICE VALUES: 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 strategies and strengthening the organizing infrastructure in California, so that they have a voice, influence and power over equitable development and the way housing is protected, preserved and developed.

How we approach the work

Community leaders and organizers have helped shape the design of the Fund from the beginning. We center their leadership and expertise, and have developed deeply respectful and reciprocal relationships made tangible through co-creation practices, equitable grantmaking practices that further align resources with the priorities of the housing justice movements.



Key terms

On page 8 of the full report you will find definitions of key terms about housing justice, organizing and power building used throughout the report, informed by our partners and the 30 years of practice and perspective of the Common Counsel Foundation. By describing them, we hope to help forge a shared understanding of movement-building and power-building strategies.

“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 it 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

- Proactively seek input and listen to community needs and priorities.
- Align and mobilize resources to support their vision.
- Evaluate our accountability and fidelity to community partners and their priorities.
- Reflect and realign based on community feedback, and continue supporting their efforts.

While a growing number of foundations have supported efforts 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. 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 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 and partnership.



\$13M

Raised and committed



11

Funding partners



4

Regions + statewide organizing networks:
Bay Area
Central Valley
Inland Region
Los Angeles
Statewide



45

Community advisors and partners. Predominantly led by BIPOC, directing on-the-ground work and strategies of the fund

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.

“Having a strong public foundation partner that is so deeply aligned with our values around racial justice and power building is unique, because it’s an opportunity to partner on not just issue areas but to fund in a way that sometimes we can’t fund it, or to experiment in ways that we often are not able to experiment in our own foundation.”

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBER

“Things that we thought would take years to do, because the technology or movement building that is finally hitting a crest, are happening in a matter of months. The pressure we built in the first few years really got traction and came to a head during COVID. We were really able to move the needle in these four years.”

COMMUNITY ADVISOR

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 vision 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.



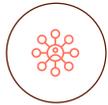
Strengthen organizational capacity

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.

Key Findings from Our Learning & Accountability Practices

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.



Our approach to Learning & Evaluation

We re-imagined learning and evaluation as a practice that holds funders accountable to the priorities of housing justice organizations and the communities they represent.

PRINCIPLES →

- ✓ Focus on learning about the work, not evaluating the performance of organizations
- ✓ Minimize the burden on nonprofit partners and maximize each touch point
- ✓ Honor many forms of knowledge production not just hard metrics
- ✓ Create spaces for co-learning creating and sharing findings for community ownership

"It was a lot of collaboration, and trying to figure out how to best get things done. This energy that was brought from this space, opened up the door for so many other campaigns that we were working on. This really opened the door for a lot of great things. We were able to move things so much faster."

COMMUNITY ADVISOR

FUND HALLMARK →

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 housing justice and equitable development. Through our learning and evaluation activities, we heard from community advisors that the Fund's approach added value in the following ways:

01

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

02

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

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, 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.

03

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

04

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



LESSONS LEARNED

The Fund for an Inclusive California's focus on aligning priorities with housing 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.

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.

KEY STRATEGIES →

Instrumental in building trusting and authentic relationships according to community advisors

- Lead with values
- Model transparency
- Center expertise of community leaders and directly impacted communities
- Move at the pace of trusting relationships with Community Advisors
- Shift accountability from grantee to funder
- Fund relationship building

02

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

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. We held ongoing one-on-one conversations to learn about their organizations, the role they played in the region, and where they could also provide feedback on what was needed from the Fund in that moment. This approach helped us stay connected to what was emerging in-real time on the ground, which was critical during the pandemic.

03

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. It was important to step into the context of the organizing we are supporting rather than direct with our outside ideas and perspectives on how to strengthen power building infrastructure in their regions.

04

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. 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

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

Community leaders are calling for a more explicit focus on how racist policies along with increasing racist rhetoric, are impacting communities of color - including power-building organizations that are being targeted by overt racist acts. This is urgently needed in regions that are experiencing a rise in racist rhetoric and intimidation tactics by both community members and elected officials.

ON THE HORIZON

As communities continue to grapple with growing pressures of housing insecurity, growing income inequality and deepened racial disparities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, they are reimagining what is possible 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 to advance housing justice and equitable development and for a just and equitable recovery.

01

Double down on tenant organizing.

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 demographics of racially and culturally diverse neighborhoods across the state.

02

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

The pandemic transformed and intensified the role of community-based organizations resulting in an all time high staff burnout, unprecedented staff turnover at all levels. Base-building organizations are actively calling for resources to support the leadership development of a new generation of leaders needed to grow and sustain the intergenerational housing justice movement.



Key terms

HOUSING JUSTICE: Our working definition of housing justice is guided by community partners, and is the understanding of housing as a human right. Where communities directly affected by unjust and racist housing policies 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.

03

Maximize funding for advocacy and civic engagement.

To expand their political power and influence, Community Advisors are leveraging their existing 501(c)3 advocacy capacity and growing their civic engagement capacity 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.

04

Resource collective community ownership models.

The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the importance of reconceptualizing housing as a basic human right, underscoring the urgency to focus on long term community ownership strategies that take land and housing out of the speculative market and place it in the hands and stewardship of communities. These include community land trusts, shared equity models and limited equity cooperatives, among others. 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.

WHAT IS AHEAD: A BOLD AND UNAPOLOGETIC VISION FOR HOUSING JUSTICE IN CALIFORNIA

Advancing a community-driven agenda for equitable development and housing justice requires long-term and sustained funding.

The learnings from the initial 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. 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.

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.

Learn more about this collective effort to support the movement for housing justice at FundforaninclusiveCA.org



Want to dive deeper?

Read more in depth insights, stories and connection points about each of these key findings sections in the full report.

About Our Organizations

Our Learning and Evaluation Partner

The learning and evaluation approach of the Fund and the 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 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 and equitable development. Since 2018 we have invested \$10 million in the leadership and vision of communities in California directly affected by unjust and racist housing policies. 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.

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.