

Fund for an Inclusive California

Learning Brief: *Paving a Path Forward for Housing Justice*

ABOUT THIS LEARNING BRIEF

This learning brief shares key findings from interviews conducted with F4ICA- funded Community Advisors (grantees) in April - June of 2020. The interviews captured the real-time impact of COVID-19 on Community Advisors and the communities they represent and gathered Community Advisors' insights about the path forward. More specifically, interview questions addressed the following topics:

1. The most critical needs emerging among communities and the organizations that support them.
2. The short- and long-term support communities and organizations need to rebuild and move forward.
3. Perspectives on philanthropy's role and responsibility [philanthropy's call to action] during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Learning Brief also incorporates, as appropriate, information gathered from prior data collection efforts including:

- **Regional Alignment and Coordination Survey** administered to Community Advisors in the first quarter of 2020. The survey collected data about the regional and statewide alignment and coordination structures, capacities, and systems; cross-regional collaborations; and anticipated opportunities and challenges.
- **Interviews with Community Advisors** during the Exploratory and Learning Phase in 2019 that informed the evaluation design. The interviews focused on changes to the housing affordability and equitable development landscape and regional and cross-regional infrastructure needs.



KEY FINDINGS – At a Glance

Immediate Impacts of COVID-19

- Rent and mortgage forgiveness is a short-term need to prevent residents in communities of color and low-income communities from losing their homes and ultimately becoming homeless; more sustainable structures are vital.
- Organizations that once primarily focused on building people-power and were already stretched thin in resources are now “frontline responders” providing basic needs to the community and their base-members.
- Organizations are working around the clock to share information with impacted communities about their rights and eligibility for relief funds.
- “Frontline” staff at community-based organizations need support for their mental well-being.

Collective Efforts are Paving a Path Forward

- Relationships, now more than ever, are pivotal to advance housing justice.
- The pandemic reinforces the need to focus on long-term structural change.
- Democratic systems and structures are being jeopardized in this moment.
- Base-building organizations are resiliently pioneering a new phase of virtual organizing strategies and infrastructure building.

A Call to Action for Philanthropy

- Build a bridge that intentionally links direct service provision and organizing/advocacy to advance long-term structural change.
- Do not re-direct funding from base-building organizations to support direct service provision, instead augment the funding.
- Amplify philanthropy's role as a convener and thought partner to base-building organizations to create and sustain transformative relationships.
- Exert philanthropy's influence to validate community-driven solutions to the housing affordability and equitable development crisis.
- Employ intersectional funding strategies that unify not silo movements.

ABOUT INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

A total of 13 Community Advisors participated in interviews. The majority of participating Community Advisors represented a cohort of F4ICA grantees that were up for funding renewal. The Common Counsel Foundation (CCF), in its role as a funding host for the F4ICA, took an innovative approach to funding requirements to ease the burden on Community Advisors, particularly considering the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead of having Community Advisors labor over a year-end funding report and subsequent renewal application, CCF replaced the funding report and renewal application with a video/phone interview that lasted 30 to 60 minutes.

Interviewed Community Advisors represented all regions currently funded by the F4ICA. Below is the list of Community Advisors that participated in the interviews and according to their geographic regions as part of the F4ICA.

Bay Area

- East Side Arts Alliance
- Filipino Advocates for Justice
- Regional Tenant Organizing Network

Central Valley

- California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc.
- Faith in the Valley
- Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability

Greater Los Angeles

- Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA)
- Little Tokyo Service Center Community
- Public Counsel
- The Alliance for Community Transit – Los Angeles (ACT-LA)

Inland Region

- ACLU of Southern California
- Congregations Organized for Prophetic Engagement

Statewide

- PICO National Network

The information gathered from interviews with Community Advisors is intended to inform and catalyze further discussion and action among key audiences of the F4ICA including CCF staff, Steering Committee members, and Community Advisors. CCF staff is organizing Learning Communities to provide a vehicle to extend conversations initiated in the interviews to the broader group of F4ICA-funded Community Advisors and support further learning and sharing.

ABOUT THE FUND FOR AN INCLUSIVE CALIFORNIA

The **Fund for an Inclusive California (F4ICA)** is a collaborative funding initiative created in 2017 to advance racial and economic equity and community health across California by amplifying the voice and civic engagement of historically disinvested communities. The initiative supports and uplifts community-driven solutions that ameliorate displacement and gentrification and advances equitable development strategies that create opportunities for community members to have an equal voice and decision-making power in how their neighborhoods are developed.

The F4ICA supports work statewide and in three California regions: Bay Area, Central Valley, Greater Los Angeles, and the Inland Region. These regions were identified based on their accelerated rates of community displacement and gentrification, historical disinvestment, and rapid growth in development, and as places where coordinated efforts could help spur breakthroughs in policy outcomes and in equalizing the balance of power.

A Moment in Time for Housing Justice

The information gathered and shared through this Learning Brief come at a time of great social and economic unrest. COVID-19 is amplifying the stark inequities that exist and are embedded throughout our interrelated structures and systems. An abundance of external data clearly documents the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on communities of color and low-income communities. The pandemic has sharpened the inequities social justice organizations have been campaigning against and vocalizing for years.

The murder of George Floyd and a myriad of other Black men and women at the hands of police officers further sparked a massive awakening in the US. Anti-racist and anti-police brutality protests arose across the nation. This moment in time presents a pivotal point for the philanthropic field – an opportunity to focus on long-term structural and systemic changes needed to address the racial and economic inequities that persist and are continuously reinforced by the structures, policies and practices in place. As it relates to the information shared through this Learning Brief, there is an opening to advance the housing justice movement to advance transformative housing and equitable development resolutions.

IMMEDIATE IMPACTS OF COVID-19

Community Advisors shared their perspectives on the devastation unfolding in communities already impacted by the housing affordability and equitable development crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic and the effects on organizations serving these communities.

Rent and mortgage forgiveness is a short-term need to prevent residents in communities of color and low-income communities from losing their homes and ultimately becoming homeless; more sustainable structures are vital.

According to Community Advisors interviewed, many residents in communities of color and low-income communities are on the precipice of losing their homes and becoming homeless. The statewide mandate to shelter-in-place issued by Governor Newsom on March 19th to decrease the spread of COVID-19 translates to a loss of vital income for many families already living paycheck to paycheck and for small, family-owned businesses. Undocumented immigrants and low-wage workers are among the groups most impacted by the loss of income from the pandemic and the most in need of financial support. Yet, immigrants were excluded from the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and are not eligible for unemployment benefits. California responded by setting up the COVID-19 Disaster Relief Assistance for Immigrants Project to provide financial relief for undocumented adults who are otherwise not eligible for other financial resources. While the Disaster Relief Assistance for Immigrants Project is a step in the right direction, it is grossly limited, providing one-time

cash aid of \$500 per adult with a maximum of \$1,000 per household.

The loss of income for the most impacted families has immediate implications on their ability to stay housed, increases their food insecurity, and limits their ability to pay for other essentials such as prescriptions. Families fear looming evictions, and ultimately the possibility of finding themselves homeless. One Community Advisor captured the anxiety of communities, “we are anticipating a huge influx of people coming in with their eviction court summons. There are a lot of protections for landlords that have a mortgage backed by the federal government.” External experts corroborate this fear and predict the economic impact of the pandemic will hit communities the hardest in late summer and early fall as eviction moratoriums are lifted, mortgage payment relief expires, weekly \$600 federal unemployment payments end (for those who qualified), and individuals use their one-time stimulus checks (if they haven’t already).

While many housing advocates believe the eviction moratorium set in place by the governor was a good start, it does not fully address the needs of impacted residents. Community Advisors, along with other housing advocates, are collectively calling for rent and mortgage relief and forgiveness for those most impacted by loss of income from COVID-19. Many Community Advisors uplifted the collaborations and coalitions coordinating efforts to address this issue collectively with the governor and the state legislature.

Beyond rent and mortgage relief, Community Advisors identified opportunities to adopt alternative housing models to protect the most impacted communities into the future. Prior to COVID-19, Community Advisors voiced a need 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 continue to unfold, Community Advisors are increasingly discussing these models as critical strategies to support long-term structural changes. And, most importantly, these conversations create an imminent opportunity for philanthropy to get involved and support transformative shifts in how communities create and sustain equitable housing.

Organizations that once primarily focused on building people-power and were already stretched thin in resources are now “frontline responders” providing basic needs to the community and their base-members.

These organizations are now part of the critical lifeline for their communities by providing food aid, economic assistance, and, in some cases, personal protective equipment. At a time of great need, communities most impacted

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“We jumped headfirst in the types of services we hadn’t done before like food aid and economic assistance and [have] gone turbo on organizing community and policy.”

–Community Advisor

by the pandemic are turning to community organizers with whom they have long-standing relationships and trust not only for information but for the basic services. Base-building organizations are answering the call of their communities by tapping into reserves and partnering with other organizations and foundations. For example, Community Advisors are working with local foundations to distribute “rapid-response” cash-aid, organizing food banks, and coordinating food delivery for isolated individuals, particularly low-income seniors.

Rural communities are also absorbing the impact of the pandemic and, according to Community Advisors serving the Central Valley, the limited service provision and advocacy infrastructures in rural communities increases their vulnerability. Rural areas often lack community pillars such as churches, food banks, and other charitable organizations that can provide necessities for residents in need. Community Advisors shared that many rural community residents are driving to larger cities to obtain those basic necessities. But that also poses challenges as there is a lower car ownership in rural communities and transportation is not reliable and, in some areas, non-existent.

Community Advisors are also helping distribute resources coming from the California Immigrant Resilience Fund,¹ including isolated rural communities. The California Immigrant Resilience Fund was set up as a public-private partnership with Governor Newsom and serves as a model for other states seeking to support undocumented immigrants and their families who are severely impacted by the pandemic. As captured by a Community Advisor, “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 Advisors recognize that they are well positioned to be “frontline” responders for the communities they work alongside. But, as base-building organizations become anchor organizations for communities during the pandemic, some fear that local and state governments and philanthropy will not provide sufficient resources to support this dual role. Consequently, organizations are calling for a reimagining of the role that base-building organizations can play in communities of color and low-income communities into the future, especially during economic recessions and social unrest.

While most Community Advisors interviewed indicated they were financially stable for the remainder of the year, some were worried about future cash flow. This was particularly true for organizations that had to cancel

“[We are] trying to make sure our clients are as informed and able to take advantage of the funds coming out. It is confusing with all the relief funds coming out that have different qualifications. We have expanded to doing more information sharing to make sure the word gets out to all impacted communities in addition to our regular services.”

–Community Advisor

¹ <https://www.immigrantfundca.org/about-us>

fundraising events. Concerned with the long-term financial implications that the pandemic could have, many Community Advisors shared they have taken steps to revisit their financial projections to assess the full impact of the pandemic on their organization. Regardless of their financial projections, Community Advisors all voiced a need for continued and augmented general operating support to be able to respond quickly to the evolving context and landscape of COVID-19.

Organizations are working around the clock to share information with impacted communities about their rights and eligibility for relief funds.

As the spread of COVID-19 increases, so too does the misinformation going out to impacted communities. Organizations, especially legal entities that support community-based organizations, are ramping up their education campaigns to share legitimate information and resources with community members combating illegal tactics used by landlords who attempt to carry out evictions and instill fear in tenants. Along with education campaigns, organizations are persistently petitioning local governments for eviction moratorium renewals and extensions as the executive order issued by the governor expired on May 31st. According to Community Advisors, the eviction moratoriums have “loopholes” and “expire every 30 days.” Organizations are spread thin working across multiple city and county governments to extend the localized eviction moratorium expiration dates trying to understand the details and restrictions of the myriad policies. As one Community Advisor expressed, “you get one [eviction moratorium] extended and then you start fighting for the next extension with petitions and meetings with the Board of Supervisors. Community groups at this time are doing endless lobbying for these short extensions.” Groups are calling for a statewide “long-term eviction moratorium” to protect vulnerable residents into the future.

Community Advisors serving communities in the Central Valley highlighted a need to expand tenant protections to mobile home park residents. Noting that “mobile parks are not regulated and rely on state agencies for oversight.” This is a vital need because mobile home parks are often the last form of affordable housing for the most impacted communities.

Similarly, organizations are working to counter multiple types of fraud circulating in communities. Isolated seniors are one group vulnerable to fraud tactics and “misinformation” obtained online, according to one Community Advisor. Another Community Advisor shared, “Information and enforcement campaigns are needed right now.” Immigrants are also a vulnerable community that needs information about benefits they are eligible to access. For example, undocumented immigrants are not eligible for unemployment benefits, but they are eligible for state benefits such as paid family leave and

Statewide Policies Being Advanced by Community Advisors

- Immediate Protections to Keep Renters Housed and Manage Debt (AB 1436 - Chiu)
- Stabilize Renters Who are Precariously Housed Due to Linger Economic Impacts
- Protect and Expand the Supply of Affordable Housing
- Promoting Production in High-Opportunity Areas (AB 1279 - Bloom)
- Mobile Home Parks: Anti-Rent Gouging (AB 2895 – Quirk Silva)
- Court Filing Data: Evictions (AB 2271 – Gabriel)
- Tenant Stabilization for Victims of Violent Crimes (SB 1190 – Durazo)

**The list above does not represent an exhaustive list of policies advanced by Community Advisors. And, importantly, does not capture local policies, ordinances, and efforts being advanced by Community Advisors.*

state disability insurance. Information about the benefits and support they are eligible for is limited.

“Frontline” staff at community-based organizations need support for their mental well-being.

With the transformed and intensified role community-based organizations are now taking on, supporting the emotional and mental well-being of their staff is a critical need. Organizations increasingly need counseling and mental health support for their staff. A few of the Community Advisors pointed out that staff are overwhelmed with the needs of the community and trying to navigate through constantly evolving information. One Community Advisor shared their perspective, “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.” It is important to note that previous conversations with Community Advisors also touched on the emotional toll that organizing takes on staff and the emotional exhaustion staff experience that in turn creates high turn over rates among community organizers. The pandemic has amplified the need to support the emotional well-being of staff. One Community Advisor surveyed before the pandemic voiced, “[Staff] are overextended and organizations are working at or above capacity. We need to strengthen the ‘bench’ and work on retention of younger staff.”

Community Advisors noted that isolation from the communities they work with is a contributing to the stress many organizers and staff are feeling. Organization leaders are trying to mitigate the added stress and burden placed on staff by increasing the frequency of staff meetings, initiating social events/meetings via virtual platforms, reminding staff to take time off to unplug, and adjust schedules as needed. Community Advisors also disclosed economic hardships their staff are experiencing. Especially staff who are taking on more of the financial household burden because family members were furloughed or laid off. One organization shared that their Board issued one-time \$500 emergency stipend for staff. This organization echoed the sentiment of nearly all Community Advisors interviewed, “there is a lot of staff burn out and need to address vicarious trauma.”

For those organizations interviewed in the wake of the massive protests brought on by the extreme police brutality communities of color experience, the stress was further magnified. Base-building organizations work directly with the communities most impacted by police violence and are once again rushing to the frontlines. Community Advisors working primarily with Latino and immigrant communities noted that they are responding by standing with the Black/African American communities they work alongside as allies. A Community Advisor conveyed their perspective, “The last two weeks have been rough, and we are trying to figure out how to show up as allies for the

Black community.” This Community Advisor also recognized the existing “bad sentiments” held by some within the Latino community against the Black/African American community. This surfaced an added layer of complexity that staff are now dealing with even as the ramifications of the pandemic are still unfolding.

COLLECTIVE EFFORTS ARE PAVING A PATH FORWARD

Relationships, now more than ever, are pivotal to advance housing justice.

Long established partnerships and relationships are key assets helping organizations collectively navigate the impacts of COVID-19. Existing local and statewide collaborative structures, as well as collaboration tables like the F4ICA, are needed to respond quickly to the impact of the pandemic. As stated by one Community Advisor, “It is important to have these relationships because in moments like this, this is how we get the work done.”

In a survey administered to Community Advisors before the pandemic struck California, nearly all Community Advisors pointed to strong pre-existing relationships as a key ingredient for the success of housing justice. As one Community Advisor affirmed, “The current collaboration structures are built upon existing relationships and make [our partnerships] stronger.” Community Advisors in the Los Angeles region that participated in the survey noted that as a region they were “aligned on priority issues and had high degrees of trust among partnerships.” They placed equal importance on the “collective institutional knowledge” of the group to advance housing justice. Because of their pre-existing relationships they are able to respond swiftly to opportunities and challenges. As foreshadowed by one Community Advisor from the Los Angeles region, “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 Advisors as essential partners.”

Community Advisors pointed to the Healthy LA coalition in Los Angeles as a clear example of how to leverage established partnerships and relationships to support those most affected by the pandemic without losing sight of the larger impact the coalition wants to achieve. One Community Advisor that is part of Healthy LA articulated, “Our general framework is the same – working on immediate policy change and building a long-term movement. [We are] staying grounded in grassroots community needs and working towards the ‘north star’ around housing and transit justice.”

“A lot of the conversations we had at the ‘cabin retreat’ still stand, but they are now more urgent. Policy conversations are changing because we are focusing on eviction, but it is still important to think in the long-term and how we are grouping and messaging all of this to get to the ‘north star’. We want to be in this moment building out our movement and working in partnership with other coalition partners.”

–Community Advisor

Community Advisors working in the Los Angeles (LA) region referenced the in-person convening held by the F4ICA in December of 2019 as a pivotal opportunity that helped the organizations coalesce around the region’s “north star” – decommodification of housing². One Community Advisor exemplified the sentiment of the group, “The conversations that took place at the regional retreat set us up to be more successful because we identified the ‘north star’ for the organizations.” The organizations appreciated the support they receive from the F4ICA to engage in uninterrupted thought partnership with like-minded organizations to identify a joint approach to long-term structural and systemic change.

Los Angeles-based Community Advisors are now focused on “building [the groups’] organizing and communication capacity” to move in unison and advance strategies that promote the decommodification of housing. These organizations are working collectively to support the Just Recovery³ work focused on communities impacted by COVID-19. They aim for their collective efforts on Just Recovery to “enhance organizing and communications capacity for member organizations” and to “leverage future efforts to decommodify housing in the LA Region.”

Community Advisors across other California regions are also reimagining long-term alternatives and approaches to land and housing that benefit communities. The pandemic augmented the urgency for alternative pathways and strategies that emphasize long-term structural solutions. For example, Right to the City Alliance and their partners including Urban Habitat are leading statewide campaigns calling for a cancellation of rents “for the duration of the crisis and for a limited period of time afterwards, by passing laws to reduce all rent payments to zero”⁴ through the Beyond Recovery Campaign. Similarly, organizations are identifying opportunities of intersection with other movements such as immigration and environmental justice. By doing so, organizations work in unison to address the rooted structural and systemic barriers movements want to eradicate.

“Just Recovery resists disaster capitalism at every step – from the disaster collectivism that models people-powered, heart-centered, socially just relief to the long-term organizing and actions that reclaim the right of peoples to define their economics and govern their communities.”

Just Recovery core principles include:

- Creating root cause remedies
- Practicing revolutionary self-governance
- Asserting rights-based organizing
- Demanding reparations; and
- Advancing ecological restoration for resiliency.

² In the report, *Rooted in Home: Community-Based Alternatives to the Bay Area Housing Crisis*, Urban Habitat in partnership with East Bay Community Law Center define decommodification of housing as replacing the commodification of housing and land “with a moral economy that is attuned to what people need and is shaped by [...] stable, healthy democratically controlled communities.”

³ <https://movementgeneration.org/transition-is-inevitable-justice-is-not-a-critical-framework-for-just-recovery/>

⁴ <https://ourhomesourhealth.org/cancel-rent-reclaim-homes?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=3fb657d4-6a17-46c5-b67d-b406dd8dc540>

The pandemic reinforces the need to focus on long-term structural change.

Community Advisors recognized the need for short-term relief while strongly emphasizing the importance of working toward long-term structural change. While playing an active role in supporting their local communities with short-term relief efforts, they understand that long-term structural change is the only way to eradicate the root causes of the inequities impacting communities of color and low-income communities. One Community Advisor articulated the sentiment of others interviewed, “It would be easy to spend all my time getting food for people, but I can’t do that because I know that in the longer term we need structural and policy changes.” Across their conversations Community Advisors advocated for “not going back to business as normal” during and post the COVID-19 recovery. The status quo of “business as normal” was not working for communities of color and low-income communities and would continue to deepen existing inequities.

Base-building organizations are bracing for further economic hardships and are particularly worried about the devastation a recession can bring to communities already bearing the burden of the pandemic. As one Community Advisor shared, “The core needs are going to be similar just intensified. The work we’ve been doing around gentrification could look different depending on the economic consequences of the pandemic.” A few Community Advisors referenced the 2008 recession when “speculative forces” took advantage of plummeting real estate prices and were concerned that land could once again be acquired by “Wall Street.” Community Advisors in the Central Valley underscored the impact of the 2008 recession, sharing that the “economic downturn was felt longer in rural areas” across California. And noted they “are anticipating the rental prices in the Central Valley will continue to go up and expect to see more foreclosures. That will attract outside investors who will snatch up [foreclosed] houses and will decrease homeownership.”

Facing this fear, several Community Advisors interviewed are simultaneously focusing on short-term housing stability efforts and advancing long-term policies such as “right of purchase models” and community land trusts that give communities collective purchasing power, and identifying opportunities to connect with other movements. Base-building organizations and their partners are advancing long-term policies that existed before the pandemic, but the need for such strategies is now magnified. Community Advisors that participated in the Regional Alignment survey administered at the beginning of the year highlighted several strategies and models of land and housing including “buy[ing] land by partnering with CDC’s [community development corporations], land trusts, and identifying alternative ways to secure land

“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 much more profound. We have to plan for a long period of recovery.”

–Community Advisor

“Minority communities and low-income residents didn’t actually recover in the way that higher income areas did [from the recession in 2008]. I can see the same thing happening [with the pandemic]. The wealth assets of our communities were extremely low [before the pandemic] and having that wiped out again just after 10 years is devastating.”

–Community Advisor

such as East Bay Permanent Real Estate Collective.” Other survey respondents shared they were actively working on such alternative strategies and models prior to the pandemic. As one Community Advisor reported, “One of our housing strategies has been ‘community control & ownership’ and removing homes from the private market and thus market-rate development.”

For some Community Advisors the devastating impact of the pandemic sped up their timeline for action and results. For example, Community Advisors in the Central Valley underscored that the pandemic helped them “realize that all [their] work is reactive, and [they] had been putting band aids” on the structural challenges their communities face. They are now shifting to “housing justice work” and their understanding of the “urgency of housing justice shifted” because of both the pandemic’s impact on communities and the slow and inadequate response of local governments.

Advocacy at the federal level is now emerging as an added need of capacity building for both statewide and local organizations. Many organizations now find themselves advocating at the federal level in addition to state and local advocacy efforts, and they need capacity building support. Organizations’ federal advocacy activities have stretched their capacity to be involved with and support local organizations at the city and county levels. Despite the added burden, Community Advisors are hopeful that trainings and organizing with residents is “helping people connect the dots between emergency relief needed to the policy response and local priorities to what the state and federal government is able to do.” The work of base-building organizations continues on the ground helping impacted residents advocate locally, but now with added pressure of advocacy at the federal level and substantial need for added resources and capacity to meet this call for action.

Democratic systems and structures are being jeopardized in this moment.

An unintended outcome of the shelter-in-place brought on by COVID-19, is a shift in local and statewide democratic civic engagement processes where government is limiting public participation in local and state government public meetings. Community Advisors were concerned that the exclusion of community voices in decision making democratic systems and structures are weakening. Communities are grappling with how to advocate for the ability to re-engage in civic processes. The restrictions on public gatherings and increased bureaucracy is limiting the ability of Community Advisors to track and advocate against budget cuts. Equally as concerning is not being part of local budget allocation discussions when “local governments are receiving millions of dollars” for their communities.

Statewide groups were particularly concerned about the lack of transparency

in the state budget process. Statewide groups have had to engage in state budget advocacy because they are concerned about significant budget cuts to safety net programs. However, it has been difficult to engage under restrictive processes. They have activated alternative ways of providing meaningful input to mitigate the lack of transparency.

Base-building organizations are resiliently pioneering a new phase of virtual organizing strategies and infrastructure building.

While many base-building organizations were in the early stages of exploring and incorporating digital platforms to expand and inform their base-members, none were fully prepared for the digital leap they were forced to take as the pandemic took hold. Overnight, base-building organizations were forced to migrate their organizing toolkits to digital platforms. The challenges of this rapid migration were plentiful – lack of financial resources to purchase hardware and software, lack of internet access and connectivity issues, and limited knowledge and understanding of available digital platforms and technology.

Community Advisors are responding to the digital divide challenge by building their technological infrastructure and expanding the capacity of their staff and base-members to effectively engage with and use digital platforms. They are also, if available, loaning Chrome-books and laptops to keep their base connected and active. The F4ICA is a critical partner in meeting this need through their Emergency Opportunity grants that helps Community Advisors transition into virtual partners. A total of 12 grants have been issued to date ranging from \$12,000 to \$25,000. Community Advisors noted that, despite the multiple challenges of the pandemic, there are opportunities for leadership development of staff and base-members. Understanding the importance of being able to swiftly pivot, Community Advisors are simultaneously increasing the movement's understanding of how to use technology to reimagine digital organizing strategies and keeping the movement's energy focused.

“If we [can] build in some technological infrastructure [for our organizations] it will be good for the emergency period, but also an incredible leadership development and capacity building process if we exit this process with our leaders able to use this technology.”

–Community Advisor

A Call to Action for PHILANTHROPY

Following the principles of the F4ICA and CCF, Community Advisors were asked to share their perspective on the role and responsibility of the larger philanthropy field during and post the COVID-19 pandemic. It is notable that Community Advisors appreciated and were surprised by this question. A few commented that philanthropy rarely, if ever, asks them to give input on what the field's role should be in supporting base-building organizations. A Community Advisor stated that this was another process set forth by the F4ICA that should serve as an example to philanthropy as a best practice. In their conversations, several Community Advisors reflected on the response of the philanthropic field to the 2008 recession. Lessons learned from philanthropy's response to the 2008 recession and new perspectives given the context of the pandemic are offered below.

Build a bridge that intentionally links direct service provision and organizing/advocacy to advance long-term structural changes.

Community Advisors called for the need to break down the distinction between direct service provision and organizing/advocacy. The pandemic is elevating the importance of organizing groups as lifelines for many residents as they transform to serve communities as direct service providers. Statewide government is now also recognizing – at least temporarily – the important role that organizers play as many of these organizations now receive state funding to distribute resources to local communities.

Community Advisors believe philanthropy has a key role to play in understanding the importance of direct service provision in the context of movement building. There is an opportunity to ensure communities meet basic needs while also empowering them to change the structures and systems that generate and perpetuate inequities in their communities. Instead of having direct service providers and organizing/advocacy organizations compete for limited resources, philanthropy can help build a bridge that unites both and helps create a symbiotic relationship that brings in a racial equity lens and analysis to the conditions communities are grappling with.

“I think there will be a lot of need for advocacy and organizing. Other than F4ICA there is just not much funding for organizing. What are going to be policies and where are the dollars going to be spent? Will we see a repeat from the Great Recession?”

–Community Advisor

Do not *re-direct* funding from base-building organizations to support direct service provision, instead augment the funding.

As the aftershocks of COVID-19 continue to hit, especially in communities of color and low-income communities, Community Advisors forecasted an increased need for organizing and advocacy efforts to ensure that “resources that come down for the recovery efforts are distributed equitably” to those most in need. For base-building organizations and their partners this directly translates to a need for increased general operating support to stay nimble and responsive to the emerging needs of the community. Many Community Advisors were anxious about foundations redirecting organizing and advocacy funding to direct service organizations that are not connected to movement building and engage with communities in a transactional way. While they recognized the importance of addressing short-term needs, they asked that philanthropy not lose sight of the long-term struggle ahead. Ensuring that general operating support continues to flow and potentially increases for base-building organizations sends a clear signal of the critical contribution that organizing and advocacy make to advance the long-term structural changes beyond recovery from COVID-19.

Similarly, Community Advisors elevated the need for long-term commitments to funding. Long-term funding is critical to advancing the long-term structural and systemic changes needed to advance housing justice and equitable development. This is a sentiment echoed in previous data gathering efforts with Community Advisors but is a more pronounced need during this time. According to Community Advisors not having a clear sense of funder’s financial commitment to their organizations reduces their ability for long-term planning. Knowing that the full impact of the pandemic is yet to come Community Advisors are calling not only for increased funding but a transparent long-term commitment from funders.

Amplify philanthropy’s role as a convener and thought partner to base-building organizations to build transformative relationships.

Convening diverse stakeholders requires significant resources that most base-building organizations do not have at their disposal. Yet, convening mission-driven groups to address complex issues is central to building the relationships and connections that spark creative solutions. Following the example set by the F4ICA, Community Advisors expressed interest in seeing philanthropy take a more prominent role as a convener – without diverting resources from the movement. Community Advisors that participated in the Regional Alignment survey administered before the pandemic also emphasized a need for philanthropy to step into this space as convener to bring base-building organizations together. In speaking about challenges to

“In-person meetings, though difficult to schedule, have usually made for creative collaboration. All of us sharing our independent goals has been healthy in strategizing our collective objectives.”

–Community Advisor

collaboration among base-building groups, one Community Advisor shared the need for philanthropy to bring groups together to “plan together for the long-term regional vision and plan.” Reinforcing this sentiment another Community Advisor added, “there is little time for dialogue across organizations so more opportunity for this is valuable.”

Beyond the convener role, Community Advisors want to see philanthropy enter the space as thought partners not simply as sources of funding. It is important to note that this does not negate the need and urgency for funding but amplifies the evolution of the movement and Community Advisor leading it. There is a recognition that building transformational relationships between funders and grantees is vital to opposing entrenched structural and systemic systems of oppression. Community Advisors also raised the importance of finding opportunities to build genuine thought partnership relationships with philanthropy. A starting point suggested was a collective effort to “sharpen the analysis and potential solutions” of the affordable housing and equitable development crisis.

Exert philanthropy's *influence* to validate community-driven solutions to the housing affordability and equitable development crisis.

Philanthropy exerts influence in myriad ways but most prominently through the allocation of financial support to organizations. Over the last decade more progressive philanthropic entities have taken the leap to work in the policy and advocacy arenas. Building on the efforts of these progressive foundations, Community Advisors urged philanthropy to step up as a “courageous partner” to grassroot organizations and support local and state policy campaigns that are focused on long-term systemic change. For example, foundations can take candid steps to advance long-term systems change by putting out statements in direct support of local and statewide policy campaigns such as “rent and mortgage forgiveness.” As one Community Advisor expressed, “Some of the folks that need to be convinced about a debt free movement will listen to the philanthropic institutions. Philanthropy can and should be courageous in being that kind of partner.”

Similarly, Community Advisors asked that more progressive foundations communicate to their peers the importance of organizing and advocacy to bring about long-term systems change. Community Advisors fear that the work of more progressive foundations will be diluted if the larger philanthropic community does not move in unison to support organizing and advocacy.

Employ intersectional funding strategies that unify not silo movements.

As base-building organizations identify how overlapping systems interact to oppress communities and generate inequities, they asked that philanthropy take a similar analytical lens to their funding approaches. Community Advisors noted that foundations tend to fund based on issue areas, creating competition for resources and further siloing issue areas and organizations. Community Advisors called on foundations to “fund cross pollination work or intersectional work to start addressing institutional barriers and gaps and not pitting campaigns and issues against each other.” Philanthropy can play pivotal role by creating a new approach to funding that thinks beyond this moment in time. A new funding approach that seeks to connect issue areas such as housing, immigration, and environmental justice. Community Advisors are primed to engage in genuine thought partnership with philanthropy to innovate a new approach to funding the connects groups and supports comprehensive intersectional issues and efforts.

“We do our work in the movement space in a very siloed way [...] because philanthropy is organized that way. Foundations don’t fund the deeper systemic issues. We need to do more cross pollinating across these issues.”

–Community Advisor
