

Inland Region: Powerful Multi-Racial Organizing for Housing Justice



INLAND CONGREGATIONS UNITED FOR CHANGE (ICUC)

2020

About the Fund

The Fund for an Inclusive California (F4ICA) is a collaborative philanthropic effort that centers community-driven solutions to the urgent need for housing justice that will create vibrant neighborhoods across California. Over the last four years we set out to grow philanthropic support for community power building for equitable development, focusing on four regions and statewide efforts. This brief highlights F4ICA's efforts and learnings in the Inland Region*, while uplifting the work of our partners. We aim to share what is possible with sustained, flexible funding driven by community priorities.

Regional Context

The Inland Region's relatively low housing costs drew tens of thousands of people and families from Los Angeles and Orange Counties to San Bernardino and Riverside over the past decade or more. The geographically vast region is now home to over 5 million people, the third most populated area in the state and also the area with the largest increase in rental prices in the U.S. in 2021. The majority of people in the region are living on low incomes, and are predominantly communities of color with 65-75% Latinx, 15-18% Black and 8-10% Asian residents.

The region's infrastructure is not equipped to accommodate the recent influx of residents. Public funds have not been directed toward strengthening infrastructure, which limits community access to safe, clean drinking water. High commute times to jobs coupled with little public transportation results in widespread public exposure to polluted air and other environmental contaminants. Little media or external public attention on the Inland Region's challenges has resulted in limited philanthropic resources focused on the region as well.

The Inland Region's longstanding history of white hate groups and racism coupled with little economic opportunity contribute to housing discrimination and unequal access. Harmful "crime-free housing" policies developed by law enforcement and property owners deny housing to people of color and their families by preventing anyone with a history of interaction with the criminal legal system from accessing housing. The rich history of powerful organizing in a heavily racist environment has made the Inland Region a unique place where leaders continue to develop innovative and inspiring strategies.

*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.

FUNDING SNAPSHOT



9

Community Advisors and grantees



2

Focus area counties

Riverside
San Bernardino



\$1.73M

in grants

60% Core operating

14% Rapid response

26% Capacity building

Impact Toward Community-Driven Priorities

The coalition of groups in the Inland Region work with communities that are vastly underrepresented when considering housing remedies that meet their needs. They include immigrants, farmworkers, young people, formerly incarcerated people and their families, and people who are unhoused. This multi-racial coalition is deeply committed to leveraging their long-term relationships and history of organizing to establish a shared vision for the region: a place for people of all races, faiths and backgrounds to safely and comfortably call home.

“The Funding from F4ICA and others made it possible to engage in rapid response. We’re moving housing advocacy at the state and regional levels and focus locally on direct services, to be able to stop evictions, utility shut offs, and other denial of rights and services.”

CONGREGATIONS ORGANIZED FOR PROPHETIC ENGAGEMENT (COPE), INLAND REGION COMMUNITY ADVISOR

A CALL FOR SUSTAINED, LONG-TERM INVESTMENTS

With a long history of underinvestment, organizations have been calling for sustained investments in the Inland Region, not only for public infrastructure but investments in the residents who are organizing and building community power for the long-haul.

Housing justice groups are establishing lasting organizing infrastructure such as forming 501c3 nonprofits to ensure their work is sustained beyond the short- and medium-term. Establishing nonprofit structures enables community members who have been organizing on a volunteer basis for the safety and health of their families to develop quality jobs in organizing and advocacy, and to accept funding from foundations to support their efforts.

Targeted funding made it possible for organizers to identify and engage in critical local campaigns responding to worsening housing conditions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the first half of 2020, groups secured eviction moratoriums at the local and county levels. Leaders built off these efforts as well as the momentum of the racial uprising in response to George Floyd’s murder to push San Bernardino County to become the first in California to declare racism a public health crisis.



A MULTI-RACIAL, MULTI-ISSUE COALITION

The Inland Region groups are responding to multiple, intersecting challenges including displaced families, communities emerging from incarceration and undocumented immigrants who face unique problems with housing access. Community Advisors in the Inland Region predominantly work with unhoused individuals (86%), formerly incarcerated individuals and their families (57%) and Indigenous peoples (57%).

Community Advisors credited F4ICA with helping leverage and bring in more housing resources to the Inland Region:

“Thanks to F4ICA our organization is expanding to tap into the private sector including financial institutions, corporations, and donors.”

When we first came to the region, we learned that the ACLU Foundation of Southern California was facilitating a coalition of organizations to share their experiences, affordable housing development strategies, and possible fundraising sources as most organizations were organizing with unpaid volunteers.

F4ICA invested in the regional collaborative’s organizing and advocacy infrastructure to ensure its ability to fight for housing justice, including community and regional planning that happens over several years and decades. This deep investment supports the Inland Region collaborative to actively engage with state-level advocacy, to scale their impact and to draw wider attention to the region’s priorities and long-term vision for housing justice.

**INNOVATIVE COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP MODEL:
ORGANIZING POLANCO RESIDENTS**



The Inland Region is home to a specific model of mobile home parks owned and governed by residents, called polancos. Polancos have been home to many immigrant residents, though oftentimes these communities lack safe, clean drinking water and are exposed to environmental contaminants.

Community Advisors such as Pueblo Unido Community Development Corporation have been organizing tenants in polancos to fight back against contaminated water supply and pursue collective ownership of these properties to prevent callous landlords from continuing to neglect residents. This work requires an understanding of cultural dynamics, and

extensive investment in building trusting and lasting relationships with the polanco mobile home park communities. One key component of this model was the establishment of the Union de Polancos Association, made up of polanco park residents and owners, with the goal of creating greater organizational structure to expand outreach and organizing, leadership development, political representation, and training and education.

Our support to Pueblo Unido CDC aimed to find viable community-driven solutions to improve residents’ quality of life and expand affordable housing production for farmworkers. Ultimately, partners were able to connect with legal expertise and funds that allowed them to purchase the polanco land, putting it in the hands of residents to steward in perpetuity.

POWER BUILDING AND HOUSING JUSTICE EFFORTS

Community Advisors cited F4ICA’s support as being beneficial to their power building and housing justice efforts in the Inland Region.

86% | responded that the Fund’s support increased their membership base
100% | cited the Fund’s support in helping increase the advocacy skills of base members and credited the Fund for helping increase the organizing capacity of the local communities they work with

100% | responded that the Fund’s support increased their capacity to effectively develop, pass and implement policy changes that expand housing justice and equitable development strategies

86% | cited the Fund’s support in establishing new or deepened relationships with funding institutions

INLAND REGION COMMUNITY ADVISORS AND GRANTEE PARTNERS



ACLU Foundation of Southern California for the Inland Empire Housing Justice Coalition

California Institute for Rural Studies

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 Corporation

Starting Over, Inc.

Time for Change Foundation

TODEC (Training Occupational Development Educating Communities) Legal Center

"We've benefited from the collaborative funding efforts of our region including through F4ICA. Looking ahead, we hope the collective foundation support for the Inland Region will sustain collaborative investments and enable groups to go deep in our efforts to realize long-term housing and economic justice."

INLAND CONGREGATIONS UNITED FOR CHANGE (ICUC), INLAND REGION COMMUNITY ADVISOR

Priorities Going Forward

The Fund is learning and applying lessons of the last four years to ensure leaders and residents can sustain organizing and community engagement for the long-haul. For F4ICA, investment and lessons from the Inland Region have shown us that coastal and inland challenges are interconnected, as are opportunities for building toward our collective vision for housing justice and thriving, equitable communities.

Looking ahead, Community Advisors have emphasized the need for F4ICA's continued role to maintain and deepen organizing infrastructure for housing justice across the Inland Region. Groups cited "leadership development," "statewide cross-learning," "insight and connections," "help with capacity," "thought partner and executor," as examples of how F4ICA has contributed to their success in power building for housing justice.

To ensure our continued responsiveness to the needs of the Inland Region and its communities, we must affirm, deepen and expand our commitment and call on others in the public, private and philanthropic sectors to join us.

LEARN MORE



Reach out to us at F4ICA@commoncounsel.org and visit fundforaninclusiveca.org to learn more about our work, partners, and how to get involved.



CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE FOR RURAL STUDIES



TIME FOR CHANGE FOUNDATION