

no.
05

OCCASIONAL PAPERS SERIES ON YOUTH ORGANIZING

The West Coast Story

The Emergence of Youth
Organizing in California

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The Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing (FCYO) is a collective of national, regional and local foundations and youth organizing practitioners dedicated to advancing youth organizing as a strategy for youth development and social justice. The mission of the FCYO is to substantially increase the philanthropic investment in and strengthen the organizational capacities of youth organizing groups across the country.

The main goals of the FCYO are to:

- Increase the level of funding directed towards youth organizing groups;
- Support youth organizing groups to develop stable and sustainable organizations; and
- Increase the awareness and understanding of youth organizing among funders and community organizations.

For more information about the FCYO, visit <http://www.fcyo.org>.

ABOUT THE OCCASIONAL PAPERS SERIES ON YOUTH ORGANIZING

The Occasional Papers Series is edited and published by the Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing, and conceived and developed in close partnership with a Committee of funders, intermediaries and youth organizing practitioners. Critical editing support was provided by Neil Carlson. The Committee for this paper included:

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The Emergence of Youth
Organizing in California

BY RYAN PINTADO-VERTNER

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SERIES PREFACE

In 2003, the Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing released the first installment of Occasional Papers to chart the terrain of youth organizing—its core definitions, theoretical underpinnings and common practices. These papers helped provoke greater discussion about the efforts of low-income youth and youth of color to change the schools and institutions that adversely impact their communities. But our work had only just begun. While the field shares many principles and approaches, a one-size-fits-all approach does not adequately convey the dynamism and variation found within youth organizing.

This next installment takes us on a tour of youth organizing in different regions of the country, beginning with California and the Southeast. We examine the work in the context of the elements, conditions and environment that seeded, nurtured and arrested its growth and evolution. Thus, two primary questions drive these papers: What conditions spurred the emergence and growth of youth organizing in the region? And how did this context shape the region's particular breed of youth organizing?

In *The West Coast Story: The Emergence of Youth Organizing in California*, Ryan Pintado-Vertner analyzes the emergence and practice of youth organizing amidst California's bellwether politics and culture, and the immense geopolitical and cultural diversity of its subregions—Los Angeles, San Diego, the San Francisco Bay Area, and the Central Valley.

In *A New Generation of Southerners: Youth Organizing in the South*, Charles Price and Kim Diehl illuminate the physical isolation, entrenched fear and patterns of discrimination that have stalled community-building in the South, alongside the region's growing diversity, cross-generational bonds and rich resistance traditions on which youth organizing is now building.

For the FCYO, the necessity and urgency of supporting these efforts are clear. For too many youth and their families, the American ideals of security, prosperity and opportunity have faded into rhetoric. Amidst grim circumstances, young people across the nation have found spaces in the burgeoning field of youth organizing to engage in truth-telling and action, working not out of mere anger and protest, but enduring hope in the promise of fairness and equity. The youth and adults behind youth organizing firmly believe that the heritage and everyday experience of their communities, much of it untold or even distorted, comprise a priceless manual for their future. These papers bring us closer to their experiences. They acknowledge the ample challenges confronting youth organizing, and the critical support needed to overcome the obstacles. But more importantly, they stand as a tribute to the incredible feats, dedication and sacrifice of youth and their allies in imagining a better world is possible.

*Patricia Soung, Program Director, Outreach and Education
Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing
August 2004*

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INTRODUCTION

Perhaps more than any other state in the union, California functions as America's political and cultural bellwether. The sheer size and scope of California's economy (the world's fifth largest), its population (America's biggest), and its geographic, ethnic, and cultural diversity, are a microcosm of the nation as a whole. In politics, culture, and economics, trends that begin in California often migrate eastward, foreshadowing events in the rest of the country. From rural areas and migrant communities, to militarized border regions and conservative strongholds, to sprawling cities and suburbs—as California goes, so goes America.

It is for these reasons that youth-led social change efforts in California warrant special attention. In the nascent field of youth organizing¹, nowhere else in the nation has the density of local efforts, depth of intermediary support, and emergence of effective statewide activity that California has. The notion of a distinct and united youth movement is especially strong in California, due in large part to a rich history of multi-racial activism and an intricate statewide ballot initiative system that has allowed young people to connect their local struggles to a broadly felt experience. Many youth organizers thus view themselves as part of a multi-issue, multi-racial youth movement that is, in turn, part of a larger social and racial justice movement. These connections are especially important as organizers in other regions of the country look to California for lessons, strategies, and models.

California is, and has always been, an awkward amalgam of different regions. While the state shares many unifying elements, youth organizing is ultimately shaped by regional dynamics. This paper begins with an overview of statewide trends affecting youth organizing. It is followed by a closer examination of the political and

¹ By youth organizing, this paper means the visible field engaging young people in systemic change efforts through community organizing, which largely emerged in the 1990s in California and works through formal organizational structures. The paper does not focus on activism taking place in other spaces, including college campuses.

economic histories that shaped youth organizing in four regions across the state: Los Angeles (primarily Los Angeles County); San Diego; the San Francisco Bay Area (including San Francisco, Silicon Valley, and the East Bay); and the Central Valley (primarily the Sacramento area and the San Joaquin Valley). Through a cross-regional analysis, the paper then explores how these regional forces shaped youth organizing approaches statewide. It concludes with some recommendations to funders on how to invest in youth organizing in California.

YOUTH ORGANIZING IN CALIFORNIA: A STATEWIDE PREVIEW

California is a study of extremes and contradictions. America's most populous state, California has 9.4 million young people under the age of 18, the largest youth population in the country as well. By wide margins, California is also the most racially and ethnically diverse state. Home to the nation's largest Native American, Asian, Pacific Islander, and Latino populations, California was the first state to have a majority minority population. California has the fifth largest economy in the world, yet the gap between its rich and poor is the fourth highest in the nation.

4 Despite its purportedly liberal reputation, California has contributed mightily to Conservative politics in America. Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan were both Californians, and California was the birthplace of policies like "zero tolerance" and "three strikes" that have traveled to other parts of the country. But it is California's statewide ballot initiative system that has truly transformed the local economy and politics—for better and for worse. Originally developed as a Progressive Era instrument to circumvent corrupt political practices, the ballot initiative process allowed citizens to put legislation to a direct vote by gathering petitions representing at least five percent of the state's electorate. Over the past thirty years, however, some of California's most damaging and divisive public policies have emerged from this system.

In 1978, Proposition 13 emerged as one of the most significant social protests in modern California history, touching off a nationwide tax revolt and catapulting Ronald Reagan into a second run for the Presidency. Prop 13, as it came to be known, cut California's notoriously high property taxes by thirty percent and capped future increases. Virtually overnight, the measure reduced local tax revenues by fifty-three percent. By handing control over property tax allocation to the state legislature, Prop 13 effectively gutted revenue for local school districts that depended heavily on property taxes. The effects were devastating. In the early 1970s, California ranked number one among the states in education innovation, test scores, and per-student spending; by 2003, California was 37th in the nation in per-pupil spending and 43rd in performance. Nevertheless, Prop 13 was popular with voters: Within five years of its pas-

sage, nearly half the states in the country had passed similar legislation.

In the 1990s, the ballot initiative was used to promulgate a slate of public policies widely deemed harmful to young people, immigrants, and people of color. Fanned by reactionary responses to the state's increasing diversity and the "superpredator" image of violent, amoral youth perpetuated by the media and politicians, four ballot initiatives spread in rapid succession:

PROPOSITION 187: Passed in 1994, Prop 187 attempted to deny undocumented immigrants access to most government programs, including public education. Many considered the initiative, which was eventually thrown out in court, to be openly racist.

PROPOSITION 209: Passed in 1996, Prop 209 successfully outlawed the use of affirmative action in admission policies for University of California colleges. Following its passage, admissions for minority students dropped immediately.

PROPOSITION 227: Passed in 1998, the so-called "English Only" initiative attempted to outlaw bilingual education.

PROPOSITION 21: Passed in 2001, Prop 21 sought to maximize prison time for youth defendants. Prop 21, among other things, relaxed requirements to send youth to adult prison. It also made the California Youth Authority—now embroiled in abuse scandals—the largest youth offender agency in the nation. Critics widely condemned the initiative, arguing that it disproportionately affected youth of color.

In response to these initiatives and an increasingly repressive political climate, young people across California rose to challenge injustices that unevenly disturbed the lives of youth of color. As the field of youth organizing emerged, organizers focused on two areas: fighting the criminalization and incarceration of young people, and ensuring educational equity and adequate investment in schools. As the field developed, youth organizers set their sights on other issues as well—globalization, sweatshops, gentrification, and environmental pollution. Maria Brenes of United Students/InnerCity Struggle, a youth organizing group in Los Angeles focused on education reform, explains, "We're really trying not just to build an organizing culture, but also to influence policies *and* culture in this community to value young people between the ages of 14 and 19, and see it as a priority to invest in that age group."

THE EMERGENCE OF YOUTH ORGANIZING: A REGIONAL EXAMINATION

With approximately forty-two groups, the concentration of youth organizing in California is unparalleled. Today's youth organizing, however, did not emerge spontaneously. As the following section will delineate, a number of conditions clearly contributed to and encouraged the emergence and growth of youth organizing at the regional level. These include:

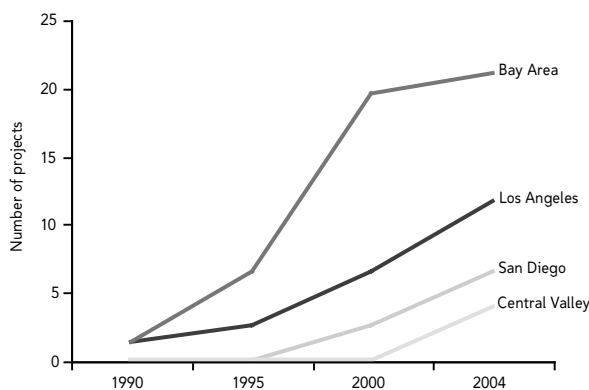
- A strong local tradition of community organizing, with models applicable to youth.
- Supportive local institutions willing to incubate new youth organizing projects, train their leadership, or offer in-kind resources to support start-ups.

- A youth development and services infrastructure addressing some baseline needs of young people.
- A locally focused network dedicated to strengthening the youth organizing field.
- Local colleges and universities with a cadre of progressive students and faculty whose activism crosses campus boundaries.
- A steady supply of talented and entrepreneurial leadership who have picked up skills in building viable non-profit organizations.

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CHART 1

APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF YOUTH ORGANIZING
PROJECTS FROM 1990 TO 2004



While youth organizing has grown rapidly in all parts of the state, growth has been uneven. The San Francisco Bay Area—due to its strong activist history, more liberal political climate, longstanding and developed philanthropic sector and relatively strong web of youth service agencies—has the strongest infrastructure and most youth organizing projects, members, and funding. By contrast, the Central Valley has the youngest groups, the weakest infrastructure, and the fewest resources.

Youth organizing in California also emerged from local conditions endemic to four core regions—Los Angeles, San Diego, the Bay Area, and the Central Valley. However, these regional histories and contexts share some commonalities, including:

- Demographic shifts triggered by World War II and immigration.
- Destructive impacts of deindustrialization on communities of color in urban areas.
- Destabilization of public education triggered by Proposition 13.
- Dramatic increase in cost of living, especially housing.
- Rise of a new economy dominated by low-wage retail and service jobs.
- Catalyzing effects of ballot initiatives aimed at youth of color in the 1990s.
- Increased criminalization of youth and communities of color alongside accelerated prison construction.

In attempt to understand how youth organizing ascended across California, the following section examines in more detail the distinct economic and political histories and social movements that gave birth to youth organizing in each region.

LOS ANGELES

Already the largest city on the West Coast, L.A. County's population quadrupled between 1920 and 1950 due to the World War II economic boom. Its diversity was extraordinary, but race relations were tense as immigration, largely from Central America and Southeast Asia, altered the face and dynamics of local neighborhoods. As one writer put it, "Nowhere on the Pacific coast, not even in cosmopolitan San Francisco, was there so diverse a mixture of racial groups, so visible a contrast and so pronounced a separation among people, in the 1920s."

Sprawl and suburban development were born in L.A., and the region's politics is defined in large part by the geography of suburbia that emerged in the 1920s. During this era, the region's intra-urban electric rail system was dismantled in favor

of a culture and transportation infrastructure that revolved around the automobile. By 1960, almost 60 suburbs became separately incorporated cities. As L.A. became the nation's second largest metropolis in the 1970s, residential real estate values skyrocketed, creating a new class of wealthy suburban whites. This constituency used its growing economic and political clout to oppose taxes and eliminate social programs. According to historian Mike Davis, "[T]ax protestors frequently resorted to the inflammatory image of the family homestead taxed to extinction in order to finance the integration of public education and other social programs obnoxious to white suburbanites." This powerful combination helped to fuel Proposition 13, the taxpayer revolt in 1978.

As land became increasingly scarce and expensive near the coast, industries and residents moved inland. Unable to follow the outward migration of jobs and real estate, poverty and unemployment rose in the African-American and Latino communities that were left behind. L.A.'s urban core went into a tailspin. As manufacturing declined in the 1980s, abandoned industries left behind polluted water and land. The service and retail businesses that replaced manufacturing—fast food chains, liquor stores, and cheap motels—brought little value to the community. Competition for scarce low-wage jobs was fierce among African-Americans and immigrants, and the crack cocaine epidemic added a touch of insanity to the situation. Meanwhile, the L.A. Police Department under Chief Darryl Gates turned to tactics that resembled urban warfare, enacting curfews and gang injunctions to deter many youth from leaving their homes or neighborhoods. Gates also oversaw the Red Guard, a surveillance unit that infiltrated community groups, including even the Parent Teacher Association. Overall, writes Davis, these tactics "kept dissent off the streets and radicals in jail."

To many observers, Gates' tactics were part of a historical trend. Throughout the County's history, pervasive police corruption and brutality directly fueled civic unrest, including the Chinese Massacre in 1871, the Zoot Suit riots in 1943, the Watts riots in 1965, and the L.A. uprisings of 1992. The LAPD's own website admits, "Starting in 1920 and for the better part of the next 20 years, varying levels of corruption tainted local government and the Department . . . The City was all but in the hands of bosses who controlled elected officials, dictated police appointments and promotions, while garnering huge sums from booze, gambling and vice."

From the beginning, L.A.'s governmental structure consolidated political power in a small County Board of Supervisors, keeping the mayoralty and City Council weak and dispersing governance across a sprawling expanse of over 90 incorporated cities and 60 police jurisdictions. Today, for example, the County

Board of Supervisors has just five appointed representatives (San Francisco, though smaller in both size and population, has eleven.). “The politics of L.A. is hard to navigate,” says Kim McGillicuddy, an organizer for Youth Justice Coalition. “If you want to impact just one policy about policing or gang injunctions, you have to try to navigate all those jurisdictions. So they can duck and dodge. It makes it harder to hold elected officials accountable here. They’re like kings. You have to mobilize thousands of people.”

In the 1990s, youth of color in L.A. faced a brutal landscape: significant race and class divisions, continued police corruption and abuse, and a legacy of having more race riots and racially motivated lynchings than any county in America. Urban sprawl and the paucity of public transportation worsened these problems. The suburbs, too, had similar problems, often exacerbated by isolation and sometimes even shoddier infrastructure. Fueled by unemployment, poverty, and police violence, the youth gangs that emerged in the 1950s as self-defense organizations continued to grow. Meanwhile, the crack cocaine industry seemed to employ more youth than any other sector. L.A. did its part to support the prison construction boom, incarcerating more youth than any other county in the state. Gutted by Prop 13, public schools were unable to counteract the sense of impending doom that stung the city’s growing youth population.

Given this context, it is perhaps not surprising that only six youth organizing groups currently exist in a city of ten million people, thirty percent of which are youth. Recognizing that social change requires massive numbers and determination, The Community Coalition emerged in 1990, hoping to build a social movement that would reverse South L.A.’s deterioration. From the beginning, The Coalition organized young people as a part of its overall goal. The youth organizing arm was eventually called South Central Youth Empowered Through Action (SCYEA).

SCYEA led efforts to redirect \$153 million in public funding to low-income schools for basic facilities such as bathrooms, lighting, and water fountains.

Thereafter, the momentum around youth organizing began to build. Founded in 1989, the Labor/Community Strategy Center soon recognized the need for youth organizing in the face of rising unemployment and deindustrialization. Acknowledging the impact of the region’s declining economy on young people, the organization hired its first youth organizer in 1991 to work with ethnic identity groups like Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA), the Black Student Union, and the Asian-Pacific Islander Club at a local high school. In subsequent years, its efforts to recruit new members and build a base of support for local campaigns were folded into the group’s multigenerational Bus Riders Union.

Youth Justice
Coalition blocked the
transfer of 300 youth to
adult jails and is
fighting against gang
injunctions that often
lock up youth for
nonviolent offenses.

Yet once these two models of youth organizing had emerged, it would be another ten years before the youth organizing field in L.A. reached critical mass. Youth organizers found themselves hamstrung by police harassment, an abysmal transportation infrastructure, inadequate philanthropic investment, and other significant challenges to sustainable organizational development. In the 1990s, however, a new generation of young activists was galvanized by the draconian ballot initiatives targeting youth, immigrants, and the poor. Youth organizing in L.A. expanded considerably from 1997 to 2002, focusing on three main issues: education, policing and prisons, and environmental justice. Today, momentum continues to gather as existing groups strengthen and network, and several more groups consider entering youth organizing work.

SAN DIEGO

When White settlers colonized the region trapped behind nearly impassable terrain, they quickly learned that its physical beauty masked major obstacles to urban development. While other regions in California had surplus goods and easy access to markets outside of the state, San Diego in its early days had mainly surpluses of boredom and beauty. In the early 1900s, savvy developers began advertising San Diego as the elite place to vacation or retire in the West. This economic strategy was effectively marketed as “clean growth” in sharp contrast to the smokestacks and soot of industrialized East Coast cities. But clean growth created other byproducts as well: elitism, high real estate prices, and low-wage service jobs.

As a counterbalance to tourism, politicians doggedly pursued the Navy as the region’s economic anchor. By 1919, significant portions of the Pacific fleet were based in San Diego, and the military’s presence expanded significantly under Franklin Roosevelt’s administration. The overwhelming presence of service personnel and defense contractors cemented the region’s now-infamous conservatism.

The war economy and the lucrative military industrial complex transformed San Diego into the sixth largest metropolis in the state with one of its strongest conservative power bases. As the Cold War wound down in the early 1990s, the region lost thousands of jobs in defense-related industries. “Diversification of the economy was a big push,” explains Donald Cohen, director of Center on Policy Initiatives, a local policy organization that promotes higher standards of living for poor and moderate-income families. As military bases closed, a bigger economic

With nine member organizations, San Diego's growing Youth Action Network offers a youth organizing training series and is developing a long-range plan to strength local youth organizing efforts.

shift was also underway. Globalization and Wal-Mart, the largest company in the U.S., had produced a "New Economy" in which retail and service sectors replaced higher wage industrial sectors. While the wealthy were enjoying the boom, stagnant wages and sky-rocketing living costs further squeezed the region's working poor and middle-income residents.

In the 1990s, young people witnessed the creation of a new city, driven by one of the nation's fastest immigration rates. White students are now the minority in the San Diego Unified School District. In the early grades, Latinos alone outnumber whites, without factoring in other minority groups. The influx of immigrants triggered extreme reactions by residents and government officials at all levels. In October 1994, Operation Gatekeeper was launched to tighten border crossing points, starting with San Diego/Tijuana. To date, hundreds of migrant deaths are blamed on this policy. "So many of our people are afraid to take transportation, or even afraid to just go out for fear that they might be deported," said Blanca Romero, a youth leader with Environmental Health Coalition. Sandra Diaz, a youth organizer at American Friends Service Committee, explains, "The border patrol raids are very intense right now . . . Within June, with just two operations, there have been over 700 detentions in San Diego."

Gatekeeper Coordinator Alan Bersin was later appointed Superintendent of San Diego City Schools, blurring the line between military, police, and educational institutions. Under the No Child Left Behind Act, school officials are now required to provide military recruiters with students' contact information unless parents explicitly refuse disclosure of their child's personal information. Young people recount how military recruiters spin stories of honor and patriotism, as well as dangle money and college tuition, especially to low-income youth who often lack economic and educational alternatives.

The demographic shifts and backlash against immigrants and youth of color—including Propositions 187, 209, and 227—both catalyzed and hampered youth organizing. The proposition fights were an inspiration and training ground for future youth organizers. Genoveva Aguilar, who is helping to initiate youth organizing at the Sherman Heights Community Center, says that by participating in protests against Prop 227, "I just learned not to be afraid of organizing."

In response to a climate of economic stagnation for low-income people, gentrification, and racially charged policymaking, a coalition comprising the local central labor council and social justice organizations mobilized for the 2000 elections.

One of the lead organizations in this effort, the Center on Policy Initiatives, housed staffer Alex Tom, a rising star who made sure that local college activists accessed training opportunities through the Center's campaign. Many of these activists became youth organizers.

By the time Prop 21 emerged in the following year, two organizations already existed to galvanize and educate residents about how the initiative's emphasis on punishment and incarceration would further undermine education and youth development. In 1998, a cadre of well-trained organizers had created the first youth organizing project in the region, San Diego Youth Organizing Communities (SDYOC), to advocate for improvements in public education. Californians for Justice (CFJ), a statewide organization, opened a San Diego office in 1999. Both organizations connected to projects in other areas—CFJ with its four other offices, and SDYOC with its former affiliate in L.A., Youth Organizing Communities (now called United Students/InnerCity Struggle). In the years following Prop 21, several other youth organizing projects emerged to take on a wide range of social justice issues: pollution by the military and other industries, gentrification and renter's rights, and Operation Gatekeeper.

SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA

One of the Bay Area's defining historical epochs was the Gold Rush of 1849, which attracted wealthy investors and pioneers like James Irvine and Levi Strauss, whose wealth would help create San Francisco's extraordinary philanthropic infrastructure. The construction of the transcontinental railroad, which began in 1863, also transformed the local political and economic landscape. Chinese immigrants were the principal source of labor for railroad construction in California. By 1870, twenty percent of California's workforce was Chinese, and many more Japanese, Korean, Filipino, and South Asian Indian laborers soon joined them.

YMAC secured \$1.4 million in city funding to create seven health centers in high schools throughout San Francisco, and won a \$150,000 annual allocation for a youth-run, citywide youth leadership center.

San Francisco's economic opportunities also drew two other groups who were especially influential in establishing San Francisco's early reputation as an uncommonly progressive city—African-Americans, who were welcomed by several large Bay Area unions (unions in other parts of the state discriminated against Blacks); and a small community of socially liberal, turn-of-the-century finance capitalists who shaped the West's economic landscape.

When World War II began, San Francisco was the only strong union city in the state. The Longshoremen's Union, in particular, was a racially integrated organizing force whose commitment to solidarity heavily influenced the region's political culture.

Meanwhile, San Jose in the Santa Clara Valley was the largest commercial center between San Francisco and Los Angeles, and the first political capital of the state. Nearby Stanford University quickly became a regional and national powerhouse after it was founded in 1885. Although San Jose lost its political primacy when the capital moved to Sacramento, Santa Clara Valley soon became one of California's principal economic engines—the Silicon Valley. On the other side of the Bay, Oakland came of age during the Second World War. The city's business elite developed an ambitious and successful strategy to create an interconnected East Bay that would attract White workers and investors to Oakland and other nearby cities. During this era, Oakland's African-American population surged as well. Soon, Oakland had the only majority-minority African-American population of any major West Coast city. As a result, the politics of all social change work in the region would be heavily shaped by figures like local civil rights leader C.L. Dellums (father of famous Black Congressman Ron Dellums) and by the Black Panther Party.

Fueled in part by this racial shift, the symbiotic relationship between Oakland and its neighboring cities did not last. Blue-collar jobs left Oakland in large numbers as suburban areas competed successfully for factories. Whites followed the jobs, subsidized by federal housing loans that discriminated against African-Americans and most Latinos. As in Los Angeles, most communities of color were left behind with contaminated land and few well-paying jobs. By 1964, unemployment rates in the region were so high that the federal government designated Oakland a "depressed area." Prop 13 was the knock-out punch. By 1980, Oakland had an African-American population of nearly fifty percent, major economic problems, and inadequate capital to resolve them.

Unlike other regions, which often lost veteran activists, the Bay Area was a magnet, especially for activists of color. Every major political struggle in modern American history—from war resisters, to women's rights, to anti-apartheid, to gay rights—found some of its leadership here. Meanwhile, the University of California at Berkeley, with its famously radical faculty, attracted activists from around the nation. From the 1970s through the 1990s, these activists built an array of social justice institutions, including Oakland-based Center for Third World Organizing (CTWO). Founded in 1980, CTWO sought to teach a new model of community organizing that was specific to cities where people of color had achieved critical mass. In 1990, CTWO graduates introduced youth organizing to the Bay Area at People United for

YUCA blocked construction of a hazardous waste facility, curbing additional adverse health effects from toxic pollution.

a Better Oakland to involve youth in its campaign to combat lead poisoning.

Youth organizing in the Bay Area has grown dramatically since then, fueled in part by the statewide ballot initiatives, but also by preexisting youth activism. Unlike other regions of the state, a strong constellation of positive youth development agencies, such as the Beacon Centers, also supported youth organizing by providing some basic services and academic supports to young people across the region. This youth development infrastructure not only provided complementary services to youth, but it also created a springboard from which other groups were able to emphasize youth leadership, and gather quicker momentum for creating the density and numbers of youth organizing efforts that exist today.

By 2000, when campaigns erupted in response to Prop 21, there were approximately 20 youth organizing projects in the region—double the number of projects in every other region combined. “Once there were models in place, then you had people who started to copy the model, rather than try to generate a new model spontaneously,” explains Taj James, founder and director of the Movement Strategy Center, an intermediary that helps youth organizing groups think strategically about movement-building. A flurry of other groups subsequently emerged, many spilling out of college-based organizing at Berkeley and Stanford. Stanford graduates built some of the most celebrated youth organizing projects in the Bay Area, including Youth Making a Change (YMAC, a project of Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth), Youth United for Community Action (YUCA), and Gay-Straight Alliance Network. Berkeley graduates were instrumental in founding groups such as the School of Unity and Liberation, and United Students in L.A.

CENTRAL VALLEY

During the 1820s, the Mexican government carved its fertile northern territory into enormous *ranchos*, dividing tens of thousands of acres among a handful of feudal lords who demanded an army of cheap laborers. This became the dominant model for agriculture in the Central Valley when the United States took California from Mexico. Since the early 1900s, California agriculture has been defined by industrial farms that need thousands of cheap workers during harvest time. Tied to narrow windows for the harvest and delivery of perishable crops, farming is an industry subject to conditions beyond farmers’ control. As a result, growers controlled what they could,

especially fresh water sources, agricultural regulations, and local politicians—as well as labor availability and wages. When the harvest ended, workers were expelled as quickly as they had arrived. As writer John Steinbeck eloquently wrote about migrant workers in 1936, “Wanderers in fact, they are never allowed to feel at home in the communities that demand their services.”

World War II planted seeds of change. After the war, many White families followed better-paid manufacturing jobs that resided in coastal areas, leaving the Central Valley bereft of cheap labor. In response, growers created the *Bracero* program, which brought thousands of workers up from Mexico on temporary visas. Through the United Farm Workers union, under the leadership of Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, farm workers were eventually able to organize for better wages and working conditions. Three factors contributed to the success of these efforts. First, access to automobiles gave workers greater mobility and allowed communities to form on the unincorporated outskirts of the Central Valley. Second, towns increasingly tolerated farm worker settlements, decreasing the predominance of migrant labor and greatly improving organizing conditions. Finally, the emerging Civil Rights movement made it difficult for growers to use the same bare-fisted union-busting tactics they had deployed before.

Just as important, the UFW organized entire families, including children. Steeped in union consciousness, farm worker children thus became a pioneering generation for youth organizing in California. They created MEChA (a forebear of contemporary youth organizing institutions that emerged in the 90s), gave birth to the mural arts movement, and pioneered the use of “blow-outs”—mass school walk-outs—as a direct action tactic. The sons and daughters of the farm worker movement also demanded ethnic studies curricula on college and high school campuses.

As California’s growing cities sprawled outwards, many farmers capitalized on the trend by selling or leasing arable land to real estate developers. Between 1970 and 2002, every southern county in the Central Valley doubled in population. Land values increased dramatically, prompting even more growers to sell. Today, the Central Valley’s old agricultural landscape is increasingly dominated by master-planned housing developments, prisons, and low-wage retail giants like Wal-Mart.

Entering the 1990s, the problems facing youth of color in the Central Valley—especially immigrant youth—were acute. The declining agriculture industry and the rise of the new retail-and-service economy further aggravated poverty. Today, the Central Valley is home to more than 5.5 million residents and many of the poorest communities and most impoverished children in the state. (At the same time, Tulare County’s \$3.5-billion agricultural sector is the nation’s largest.) Meanwhile, schools across the region are under-funded and lack even rudimentary after-school programs

for youth. Migration between L.A. and the Central Valley also imported L.A.-style youth gangs, which emerged in the vacuum of scant opportunity. “That ended up bringing a sort of disease into our community, where we were no longer able to leave our doors open or sleep on the front lawn,” explained Maggie Navarro, a board member of Barrios Unidos, which offers services and political engagement opportunities to youth in Fresno. “Nothing was sacred anymore, not even the Church.”

Two dominant responses to these problems emerged. On one hand, law enforcement began using aggressive policing practices. On the other hand, many veteran activists moved into social service agencies and public schools, using government resources and grants to build youth programs. But few veteran activists created independent institutions that directly challenged government policies and practices. Consequently, the farm worker and Chicano Power movements—with the exception of MEChA—did not produce the infrastructure of lasting organizations needed to sustain social justice work.

Nevertheless, youth organizing found a foothold in the Central Valley around 2001, when a handful of organizers, building upon the region’s social services sector, imported the Bay Area’s organizing frameworks and strategies. Youth in Focus (YIF), an action research, evaluation and movement-building intermediary, served as the main conduit. With offices in both Sacramento and Oakland, YIF was heavily networked with Bay Area youth organizing projects, and its staff promoted youth organizing in the Central Valley. With the leadership and backing of a San Francisco-based

foundation, a network called Central Valley Partnership for Citizenship (CVP) also catalyzed organizing and capacity-building within immigrant communities.

In a brief span of time, three Bay Area-based organizations expanded into the Central Valley. In 2001, Gay Straight Alliance Network opened a Fresno office to fight homophobia in local high schools, and Greenaction began helping youth and adults in Stanislaus County organize against a local incinerator. Two years later, Californians for Justice opened a Fresno office as part of its statewide campaign for educational justice. In 2003, CVP and YIF joined forces to create Escuelas Si! Pintas No! (ESPINO), a network to promote youth organizing in the region. Although the Central Valley is home to some of the youngest and most underfunded youth organizing groups in the state, the field has grown quickly and with surprising strength.

Students with
Blacks for Effective
Community Action
(with Youth in Focus)
are addressing racial
and ethnic disparities in
academic achievement,
class placement,
and discipline patterns
at a local high
school.

CONTEMPORARY YOUTH ORGANIZING: PRIORITIES AND APPROACHES

Contemporary youth organizing in California takes its inspiration, strategies, and models from countless local struggles throughout history, including the 1968 high school blow-outs in East Los Angeles in response to educational inequities; the Black Power and Brown Beret movements; local demonstrations challenging police brutality and corruption; and immigrant and farm worker organizing that confronted labor abuses and environmental racism. For many years, youth organizing groups have explicitly described and sought to build an economic and racial justice movement with youth as vital participants and leaders. While the language of “youth power” and “youth movement” pervades the field of youth organizing in California, groups themselves also realize that definitions of these terms vary widely from group to group and region to region.

Nearly everyone, however, agrees that the slew of ballot initiatives in the 1990s, which were widely deemed anti-youth and anti-people-of-color, jump-started contemporary youth organizing. The struggle against these initiatives assumed a movement mentality as youth and their communities felt the effects locally—but recognized that countering them required a statewide strategy. Yet organizers’ desire for a statewide youth movement far exceeded the capacity of their organizations. “We really learned our lesson during Prop 21 because we were organizing a statewide network called Schools Not Jails, and we ended up not being able to do it, even though people in theory were committed,” explains Maria Brenes of InnerCity Struggle in L.A. “People were at different levels of capacity with different levels of resources to really be able to do local work and larger statewide work.” Youth organizing groups later agreed to dissolve Schools Not Jails into an Internet information portal.

Since the struggles over Prop 21, many organizers have come to question what statewide work really requires. They learned that organizing communities to vote, while important, would not defeat well-financed, well-connected, and organized opposition, nor hold elected officials accountable *between* elections. As longstanding targets of repressive law enforcement, immigration officials, and policymakers, communities of color were especially wary of organized politics. And young people under

the age of eighteen could not vote. Activists therefore saw the need to educate, persuade and organize communities in a sustained, deliberate way to accumulate the power and political clout necessary to make change.

Groups now recognize three urgent necessities *as a foundation* for advancing statewide policy goals and achieving broader influence. First, youth organizers need to build strong, sustainable *local organizations and networks* that have the capacity to recruit and develop youth as effective social change agents. Second, youth organizers need to be committed to *expanding membership bases* to amplify their voices and sustain and deepen the influence of their organizations on policymaking. Kei Nagao of Southern Californians for Youth explains that this focus emerged from “seeing the rise and fall of organizations because they didn’t really build membership.” Third, organizations underscore the need to *develop youth leaders indigenous to the local area*. Sammy Nunez of Father Matters asserts, “Our overall desire is to strengthen and develop the community from within. That means developing the folks that are here, their leadership. That’s sustainable, long-term impact . . . If we get kids that were traditionally wreaking havoc on the community, and turn them around and be protectors of the community, I just think that’s powerful.”

BUILDING STRONG, YOUTH-LED INSTITUTIONS

Groups across all regions are extremely conscious of and deliberate about being youth-led—in the staffing structure as well as integrating youth members and leaders in everything from conducting research and leading political education workshops, to facilitating meetings and writing grant proposals. Jann Murray-Garcia of Blacks for Effective Community Action in the Central Valley, recounted how a skeptical, older Latina found renewed hope upon youth leaders being at the forefront of contemporary struggles. “She called herself jaded. She just said, ‘We’ve done all this.’ But she said to me, ‘The difference in what I see you doing this time around as opposed to the 60s and 70s when we did it, is that you’ve involved the young people at all levels.’”

Building strong youth-led institutions has largely fallen to the first generation of staff leaders, most of whom are young themselves, typically under the age of thirty. Three experiences are common to these staff members: finding inspiration and political consciousness in high school; engaging in college activism; and getting involved through internships where they learned from veteran organizers. In San Diego, Los Angeles, and the Bay Area, virtually all youth organizing staff had some or significant organizing training before entering the field. Internship programs like the Center for Third World Organizing’s Minority Activist Apprenticeship Program, School of

TABLE 1. ORGANIZATIONAL BUDGETS ACROSS REGIONS

	BAY AREA	LOS ANGELES	SAN DIEGO	CENTRAL VALLEY
NUMBER OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS*	12	7	2	3
AVERAGE BUDGET PER GROUP	\$381,394	\$169,857	\$115,000	\$31,333
AVERAGE FOUNDATION REVENUE	69%	74%	95%	50%
AVERAGE GOVERNMENT REVENUE	15%	4%	0%	0%
AVERAGE EARNED REVENUE	12%	5%	5%	3%
COMBINED TOTAL OPERATIONAL BUDGETS FOR ALL GROUPS	\$4,576,726	\$1,189,000	\$230,000	\$94,000

* Inclusive of youth organizing groups and intermediaries

Unity and Liberation’s Summer School and the FIRE Fellowship Program run by East Palo Alto-based Youth United for Community Action, have generated a steady stream of young organizers of color who have staffed projects throughout the state.

Central Valley organizers are the exception to this rule. They are typically born and raised in the region and are, on average, much older in age than their counterparts elsewhere. By and large, Central Valley organizers emerged from radical crevices of the local social service sector, often those that focused on gang prevention. Central Valley leaders rarely receive formal organizing training, many having gleaned lessons instead from Brown Berets and other elders in the community. A 2003 report by Youth in Focus notes the qualitative difference in current youth-serving efforts in the Central Valley, “Even among programs determined to have a youth action component, most emphasize leadership training and youth representation in adult-run institutions as opposed to either direct youth engagement in community issues or youth-led initiatives.”

Formally or informally trained in community organizing, the staff members of youth organizing groups find themselves drawn into areas where they do not have expertise—fundraising and nonprofit management, for example—and which are the necessary byproducts of their nonprofit structure. For many small, under-resourced, and over-committed nonprofits, growth and sustainability are challenging as leaders

are developing these skills on the job.

In this nascent field, projects in California have low budgets. Some, especially those in the Central Valley, have no official budget at all. Central Valley organizer Baldwin Moy of Madera Youth Leaders explains, “. . . all of these groups rose out of need without the money.” In response to California’s rising cost of living, businesses are able to relocate elsewhere to economize. But youth organizing projects are place-based. Serving specific communities, they must remain in those communities regardless of local economics.

The demands of place-based organizing have created serious financial challenges as the costs of living, especially in housing and transportation, have escalated. Youth organizing projects are under pressure to find people willing to accept an organizer’s modest salary, which most organizations report are still difficult to afford. Rising real estate prices, in many cases associated with gentrification, have also reduced the number and quality of spaces that organizers can use.

The paucity of after school programs, academic supports, and basic services for young people stretch staff time, skills and organizational resources even thinner. Kim McGillicuddy of L.A.’s Youth Justice Coalition explains the predicament in densely populated L.A. “From here all the way to Watts, to almost Compton and Long Beach area, there are, like, five youth centers,” she says. “If a young person comes to you for youth organizing, you also become their after-school program, their court support center, and their crisis management center because there isn’t that kind of infrastructure in L.A.” The sprawling geography and lack of public transportation have further constrained the capacity of youth organizing groups. “In the two years I’ve been here, I’ve put 72,000 miles on my car,” McGillicuddy continues. “It takes you four hours to drive from one area of the county to the other.” Youth members are swift in recognizing staff members’ extraordinary commitment to the work as many of them pay for gas out-of-pocket.

All of the groups are surviving with a combination of smarts, sacrifice, donations, and creativity. However, serious sacrifices have become dangerously routine. It simply cannot form the basis for long-term sustainability and growth of these efforts.

STRESSING COLLABORATION, CONVENING AND NETWORKING

Collaboration—a hallmark of youth organizing throughout California—is a key mechanism to building stronger local organizations while expanding their collective ability to influence policymakers and institutions. In places where like-minded allies are sparse, especially outside of the Bay Area, youth organizing groups say that collaboration is not an option, but an imperative. In order to mobilize significant numbers

of youth in Los Angeles, for example, groups draw on a modest-sized community of like-minded organizations. “So we’re always kind of recycling the outreach. You come to this meeting. I’ll go to your meeting,” says Que Dang of Khmer Girls in Action, a Long Beach group battling mass deportations of Southeast Asian immigrants.

To facilitate local work and strengthen local organizations, every region has at least one formal network and/or convening body charged with capacity building: ESPINO in the Central Valley; Southern Californians for Youth in Los Angeles; Youth Organizing Training Exchange (YOTE) in the Bay Area; and Youth Action Network in San Diego. Even when the obstacles are extraordinary, organizations emphasize the importance of collaboration. In the Central Valley, for example, ESPINO has excellent turnout for their regular network meetings despite the fact that most people must drive at least an hour to attend.

Nevertheless, local collaboration is ambitious. Finite staff time, stretched organizational capacities, along with traffic and transportation problems—especially in Los Angeles and the Central Valley—have challenged sustained collaboration. Even the Bay Area, with its rich network of organizations, has struggled to sustain significant region-wide collaboration despite sincere intentions. During the 2003 Youth Organizing Training Exchange, a gathering of Bay Area youth organizing groups convened by intermediaries, groups discussed a different type of collaboration—focusing on their respective strengths, for example, in base building, leadership development or political education—as a complement to one another given their relatively compact geographic region.

Youth organizing in California now boasts a cohort of intermediaries, each of which focuses on different facets of youth organizing, including: Movement Strategy Center (strategic planning and coalition-building), DataCenter (campaign research and strategy), Youth In Focus (research and evaluation), School of Unity and Liberation (organizer training and political education), and Youth Media Council (communications and media strategy). Many of these intermediaries have promoted a movement-building framework and helped organizations build strong, connected local infrastructures. Nevertheless, because these intermediaries are all in the Bay Area, groups in other parts of the state often rely solely on each other, or seek out alliances with social service agencies, youth development centers, legal centers, and universities.

In 2001, several philanthropic institutions joined their resources to further link and strengthen youth organizing across all regions. The California Fund for Youth Organizing was launched to channel grants to youth organizing under the leadership of practitioners from across the four regions of the state. In addition to elevating support and attention to regions outside of the Bay Area, the California Fund has been

GOING STATEWIDE

Californians for Justice (CFJ) and the Gay-Straight Alliance Network (GSAN) have been the primary movers of statewide campaign work. With five offices across California, CFJ has joined students, parents, and other community members in waging their Campaign for Quality Education, which won a significant victory in 2003 halting implementation of a mandatory statewide high school exit exam, convincing state officials to acknowledge unequal school conditions. GSAN, which works to

create safe school environments for GLBTQ youth, has two offices and over 150 high school chapters across the state. They have implemented teacher sensitivity training curriculum and won state legislation protecting youth from discrimination based on sexual orientation in schools. Recently, a new statewide network has emerged to address poor conditions and treatment at the California Youth Authority, and to devise effective juvenile justice reform and rehabilitation measures.

instrumental in facilitating cross-regional dialogue about movement building. Its resources provided the impetus for the creation of ESPINO, and the first youth organizing conferences in the Central Valley and San Diego. Together, these developments have helped organizers spell out clearer regional visions for youth organizing. At the same time, groups are also identifying with a broader statewide, national and even international social justice agenda. “People are really beginning to forfeit their individual and organizational identities in order to have a movement identity,” says Youth Justice Coalition’s Kim McGillicuddy, adding that competition and name recognition are losing their weight in the face of a collective, movement-based mentality.

AT ITS HEART: YOUTH IN YOUTH ORGANIZING

Youth organizing efforts, strong local organizations, networks, and movements would be meaningless without young people. Many groups realize that recruiting and developing greater numbers of young leaders will ensure a talent stream of current and future leaders of social justice movements.

What motivates youth to participate in youth organizing? While individual contexts may vary, young people across California consistently cite their desire for social change and justice as a primary motive. Young people attend high schools where military recruiters, police officers, and security guards often outnumber academic counselors. On the streets, gang injunctions, racial profiling, and a lack of youth development opportunities limit their options for the future. Faced with poverty, pollution, unfair housing practices, prisons, and poor quality education, youth are deeply frustrated by the declining conditions of their schools and communities.

TABLE 2. APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF YOUTH INVOLVED

	Data on youth membership and involvement based on self-reporting by 22 survey respondents. Numbers may reflect involvement over time, and may not account for duplication across organizations.			
	BAY AREA	LOS ANGELES	SAN DIEGO [†]	CENTRAL VALLEY
NUMBER OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS	11	6	2	3
AVERAGE MEMBERS PER ORGANIZATION	428	256	44	66
AVERAGE ENGAGED MEMBERS PER ORGANIZATION*	74	33	22	20
AVERAGE MOBILIZATION TURNOUT PER ORGANIZATION	122	131	75	85
TOTAL MEMBERS REPORTED FOR ALL	4705	1536	88	197

* Engaged typically means youth more deeply involved in leadership development, political education, or campaign development.

[†] Only two organizations responded to surveys in San Diego, which artificially decreased its figures in each of these tables. Even adjusting for this decrease, San Diego would still have a much smaller number than the Bay Area and L.A.

Given these conditions, cynicism and fatalism are easy traps for young people who have all but given up. Youth organizing, however, provides the very space and social cohesion that many gangs across California afforded. Sammy Nunez, a former gang leader who now directs Father Matters in the Central Valley, explains the critical difference. “Gangs were motivated more by the love of each other than by the hate of other people,” he says. “We felt very powerless growing up as a young person in the neighborhood we grew up in. And this was the only way we could generate power, by organizing ourselves, albeit it was a very misguided, very misdirected way. We were all broke. We were all poor. We were all very angry young men. So obviously we all rallied around each other.” Youth organizing, he argues, channels that anger and sense of injustice into something powerful and productive, not self-destructive.

TABLE 3. AGE RANGE OF YOUTH MEMBERS ACROSS REGIONS

"YOUTH" DEFINED AS . . .	NUMBER OF GROUPS				TOTAL RESPONDENTS
	BAY AREA	LOS ANGELES	SAN DIEGO	CENTRAL VALLEY	
AGES 13-19	6	4	1	1	12
13-21	5	1	1	0	7
13-25	0	1	0	1	2
13-30	0	0	0	1	1

Young people's desire to have an impact is closely connected to—and in fact drives—their desire to learn. For many youth, learning is often the basis of their initial political awakening. Educational epiphanies speak to an existing thirst for knowledge about their communities and surroundings and instill in them a new sense of power. Politically inspiring books are rarely a part of high school curriculum, and youth often bemoan the omission of facts and history that resonate with their daily experiences. Noe Orgaz, a youth leader at Youth Justice Coalition in L.A., described how he became politicized and energized by books that resonated with his background and everyday reality:

I got tired of reading the same classroom books and they were boring to me. So one day, I just came across this book at school. The title of it just got me. *The History of Latino Americans*. It was actually a teacher's guide. And I got in trouble for reading it, but I convinced the teacher to let me keep the book. So that's when I started reading a little here and there [about movement history and politics]. In the back of the book there were references, so I went through those.

Soon after, Orgaz joined Youth Justice Coalition in L.A., and now works to help change the bleak path to prison faced by many of his community members, including close relatives. He explains how organizing creates a productive space for youth to be heard: "Organizations, especially youth-led organizations and youth-run organizations, give young people the discipline to speak out for themselves on whatever issue they're organizing on."

Even when young people are inspired, staying involved in youth organizing work is difficult for many youth. Not only are barriers to change seemingly intractable at times, but youth must also balance schoolwork, extracurricular activities, and other responsibilities and personal needs. Since many would-be organizers come from low-income households, they often have to work to support their families, and unless youth organizing groups can offer them paid internships or staff positions, young people simply have to take other jobs—even menial, low-wage jobs. “We can’t give them the thirty or forty hours a week that they need to sustain themselves and support their families,” explains Que Dang of Khmer Girls in Action. Most organizations are committed to providing stipends to core youth leaders as both support and incentive. Overwhelmingly, they want to be able to pay higher wages, and offer more hours, to their core youth members.

But with new consciousness and self-purpose, many youth consider it their duty to share their newfound knowledge. And their reasons are often simple and idealistic: they see their work as an avenue to wider community transformation. Arjelia Garica, a youth leader at United Students, explains: “Have you guys seen the movie, *The Matrix*? They give you the blue or red pill, and if you take a certain pill, you can never go back to how you were. It’s like the world is an invention, but if you take the pill, you can never go back to the world that you were in. That’s how I see it. I already know what’s going on. If I stop organizing, or if I stop educating myself or other people, that would be bad for me and for everyone else. It would be an injustice.” Youth are also quick to remind others that although the work is hard and the issues serious, youth organizing projects have made activism fun and provided a sense of belonging and space for camaraderie. “This is the most fun I’ve had in my life,” proclaimed Erica Tomas, a youth leader at Californians for Justice in Long Beach.

As organizations and networks around the state solidify, increasing numbers of youth and organizing groups are becoming energized across all regions. A distinctive political identity around youth is taking hold. Salvador Vera of Community Organization Promoting Advancement in Leadership (COPAL) in the Central Valley conveys his excitement. “What I see now is youth picking up. Picking up the baton and jumping on the next wave that’s coming,” he says. “I feel yes, we have a youth movement. It’s not a Chicano youth movement, it’s not a Black youth movement. We were in Sacramento pushing on an issue and we had White activists, and Black activists, and Raza activists altogether. And this one young brother said, ‘We are the next wave of the Civil Rights movement.’”

MOVING TO THE NEXT LEVEL: RESOURCES FOR YOUTH ORGANIZING

The field of youth organizing in California is a national rarity—large, diverse, and vibrant. Existing organizations are training newcomers, local networks are emerging to articulate more explicit visions and long-term agendas, and statewide coalition work is becoming increasingly feasible. In the next phase of development, the field must develop the infrastructure and leadership necessary to achieve long-term stability, greater scale, and sustained impact.

The philanthropic infrastructure, especially the Bay Area's, has already played a significant role in supporting the emergence and growth of youth leadership and youth organizing work. With sophisticated political analysis, strategic foresight, and a truly collaborative spirit, organizations will need the requisite resources as they move into their next stage. Most organizations are still relatively small and young, and funders should focus on helping them stabilize and develop. In particular, these nascent organizations need to move away from their dependence on individual leadership and self-sacrifice. Deliberate, generous support may well develop and galvanize an unprecedented number of youth as leaders, decision-makers, and change agents. Key avenues of support to consider include the following:

- **Give larger grants and structure grants as general support.** Skyrocketing overhead costs are virtually impossible to address with program-specific funds. Youth organizers need better salaries, better (and thus more expensive) office and program space, and greater capacity to build relationships and collaborations. All of this requires flexible capital and more of it. Funders often assume youth organizing groups can only absorb small grants, but the increasing efficacy, scale, and collaborative power of organizations demonstrates that they can do more with more.
- **Do not reduce funding to the Bay Area.** While more resource-rich than its regional counterparts throughout the state, it would be self-defeating to reverse the Bay Area's momentum now. Having a thriving youth organizing

sector in the Bay Area is strategically important in fueling the growth of youth organizing in other parts of the state—and even the country as a whole.

- **Focus more attention on the most under-resourced regions—Los Angeles, the Central Valley, and San Diego.** Youth organizing is in a position to blossom in each of these areas. Existing groups are maturing, and new interest is rising quickly.
- **Support the California Fund for Youth Organizing.** The California Fund for Youth Organizing leverages investments and supports coordination of youth organizing projects, both regionally and statewide. Consider contributing to this important pool of funds, especially as a cost-effective way to reach and learn about small, under-the-radar organizations.
- **Support local networks and intermediary organizations that provide leadership development, training, and support.** Intermediaries have been critical in cultivating a generation of organizers of color to build stronger institutions. Likewise, regional networks are connecting organizations that help individual groups build their local capacities.
- **Support cross-regional and statewide dialogue and networking to facilitate collaboration.** Groups need space, time, and the resources necessary to facilitate exchange and collaboration given the pressing demands of their day-to-day organizational work.

RESOURCES AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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Research and numerical data was based on interviews and surveys conducted statewide, in addition to focus groups in the Central Valley, Los Angeles and San Diego. For more information about organizations participating in the research and mentioned in this paper, contact:

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**Environmental Health
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**Literacy for Environmental
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**Madera Youth
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Movement Strategy Center

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* Groups with youth and staff participating in-person focus groups

** Groups with youth and staff participating in teleconference focus group

† Survey respondents

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