

POWER-BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR HEALTH:

Key Impacts 2018-2019

Overview

Between December 2018 and November 2019, Human Impact Partners, the Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative, and the Public Health Alliance of Southern California, with support from The California Endowment, piloted a project to develop and support powerful partnerships between five pairs of California local health departments (LHDs) and community organizing groups (COGs). These partnerships focused on building community power to advance systems and/or policy changes to improve health equity.

Partnerships

Project Focus

Alameda County Public Health Department & Congregations Organizing for Renewal (FIA East Bay)



Building tenant power and expanding housing access for low-income tenants in Union City, CA

Contra Costa County Health Services & Ensuring Opportunity



Increasing housing access amidst rising displacement of low-income residents

Riverside County Department of Public Health & Starting Over, Inc. / Riverside All of Us or None



Building power of people who are formerly incarcerated, removing barriers to housing access

Santa Barbara County Public Health Department & Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy



Building farmworker power and access to field sanitation

Solano Public Health Department & Club Stride, Inc.



Building community power through youth civic engagement in Vallejo, CA

Main Activities

- Monthly meetings between local partners to build relationships and support project development
- Additional relationship-building and other campaign activities
- 2 statewide in-person convenings: relationship-building, training, and reflection across projects
- 6 statewide webinars: 3 presentations on public health and organizing from field leaders; 3 peer-to-peer learning sessions

Project Outcome Highlights

- Joint development of surveys and data collection/analysis to present health rationale for campaigns and decision makers
- Joint hosting of community forums to raise visibility of campaign issues and center community voice in decisions
- Establishment of new stakeholder bodies to convene community organizing groups and other government agencies for shared power in decision-making
- Creation of new and expanded forms of community member engagement in power-building work



GOAL:

Shared understanding of health equity framework, community organizing work, and power-building strategies

Impacts

- **Deeper understanding of each others' fields**

Partners developed a deeper understanding of each others' fields, including the unique value, roles, and challenges within each.

- **Inside/outside approach is strategic, value-added, and challenging**

Participants built a deeper belief in the value-added of "inside/outside" partnerships between government agencies and COGs, which created a container for partners to strategically leverage each side's unique strengths and roles, especially to engage a range of key decision makers and stakeholders.

- **Partnerships lend institutional access and "credibility" for COGs**

LHDs can play an important role in opening access to governmental decision-makers, spaces, and data that COGs otherwise may not have, or have previously had to fight hard for.

- **Public health can leverage role as "neutral convener" and "power broker"**

LHDs are often perceived as "neutral conveners" by other government agencies, which facilitated LHDs' ability to open institutional access to COGs and convene stakeholders to increase buy-in with campaign goals.

- **LHDs developed increased awareness of their own power**

LHD participants gained deeper insight into their own power as government agencies, given their access to institutional resources. COGs pushed LHDs to consider their own power more within government, be more accountable to the community, confront their risk aversion, and examine what power means.



"What was unique about this project was the public health focus...The public health angle brought a new angle, compelling stories, and also addressed a trust barrier with government that needs to be broken."

— Community organizing group participant

"I am realizing our power as public health in a whole new way. We have a responsibility to the community and to being more reflective and responsive to needs."

— Local health department participant

GOAL: Build community power and influence

Impacts

- **"Access to the table and the agenda" for COGs and their members**

Participants saw the project, and specifically the inside/outside model, as a first step towards the larger goal of power-building for health equity.

- **LHDs centered community needs more authentically and intentionally**

For some LHDs, the partnership was a significant step in building more meaningful relationships with COGs and strengthening how they relate to and center community needs and voices.

- **Community members see partnerships with government are possible**

Partners have already observed positive impacts in their broader communities, particularly as those most impacted by health inequities see partnerships are possible and can expand access to decision-making.



"[Building a strategic relationship meant] positioning the project so that the outcome empowers those who are most disadvantaged and elevates those who are most connected with the community that is impacted by whatever policies we are working on."

— Community organizing group participant

"It's meaningful to the community to see the Department of Public Health associated with a community organization in a true and genuine partnership...The community can see that these partnerships do exist. That community voice is heard."

— Community organizing group participant

GOAL:

Develop new deep and trusting relationships between community organizing groups and local health departments

Impacts

- **Stretching beyond comfort zones**

For almost all who participated, the project was the first formal partnership between a LHD and a COG.

- **"Seeing each other up close"**

Participants built strong ties, both within their own teams and across LHDs and COGs. Learning peoples' histories and experiences laid a foundation for understanding each others' personal motivations and investments in their work.

- **Strong relationships helped partners be strategic — together**

The depth of trust in the relationships opened up possibilities for strategically-oriented partnerships. Getting to the point where candid internal communication was possible was critical and led to clearer, more strategic joint public messaging in campaigns, which showed external stakeholders their unity and commitment to the partnership.

- **Overcoming structural challenges and committing to ongoing work together**

Participants saw that relationships and joint work could withstand challenges, internally and externally, because of the ability to return to shared goals and work through rockier points.

"This project has helped us develop a more strategic relationship. We might have had similar goals and philosophies but without understanding each others' interests ...So it's in being partners in getting each others' work."

— Community organizing group participant

"When you don't know a group you have assumptions. This project has really allowed me to hear their heart and concerns or see or witness how they've been misunderstood. I know that they have the same value."

— Local health department participant

