

Central Valley: Building a Powerful Regional Coalition for Housing Justice



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 Central Valley, 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 legacy of persistent disinvestment in the Central Valley has created high rates of poverty and income inequality in the region. While the Valley is known for its agriculturally-rich land, the region also faces some of the most severe inequities in the nation. The regional economy and politics of the Valley are dominated by big agriculture, big oil, big real estate developers and big prisons, which perpetuate discriminatory policies and contribute to widespread poverty, criminalization of immigrants and communities of color, and displacement.

The pandemic exacerbated these conditions with the region seeing the highest eviction rates in the nation making it extremely difficult for families and farmworkers living on low wages to stay in the region, and forcing others to live in dangerous substandard housing with little to no tenant protections in place. Despite the realities, the lack of affordable housing was seen as a non-issue to local decision makers. As organizers mobilized their communities to demand basic tenant protections, they encountered local officials who favored bringing market-driven development to the region that exacerbates the risk of displacing local residents. Local decision makers are failing to address the lack of affordable housing particularly in the rental market, even though 50% of Fresno County residents are renters.

To address the growing affordability crisis, Central Valley organizations work across an expansive geography, and on many fronts from immigration to climate justice to housing justice. In a politically conservative region, these predominantly Latinx and Black-led organizations are challenging local policies and demanding accountability of local elected officials.

FUNDING SNAPSHOT



7

Community Advisors and grantees



8

Focus area counties

San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare, Kern



\$1.95M

in grants

71% Core operating

5% Rapid response

24% Capacity building

"In the first convening, I dreamed about so many projects and in the four years since those dreams have come to life. We didn't have a regional housing team and now have a team and are working across five counties, we have a coordinated approach, and coalition. We have a north star vision and are developing deep knowledge to create sustainable work. We have an internal regional housing team to know what is going on across all counties and learning from each other. In 2018 we were only doing housing organizing in Fresno. Because of this fund we have been able to expand how we serve the northern valley and expand to new areas."

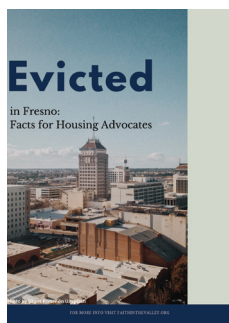
**FAITH IN THE VALLEY,
CENTRAL VALLEY
COMMUNITY ADVISOR**

Impact Toward Community-Driven Priorities

In 2019, the Fund for an Inclusive California partnered with Central Valley community organizations to hold a convening of organizations from across the state in Stockton to raise the visibility of organizing efforts in the region and to strengthen relationships with organizers from across California. At the convening, leaders from cities and counties along the Highway 99 corridor connected how each struggled with common housing injustices. The convening was a catalyst for Central Valley organizations to continue building political power together, and their lessons have informed F4ICA's regional capacity building efforts.

ELEVATING COMMUNITY-DRIVEN NARRATIVE OF HOUSING IN THE CENTRAL VALLEY

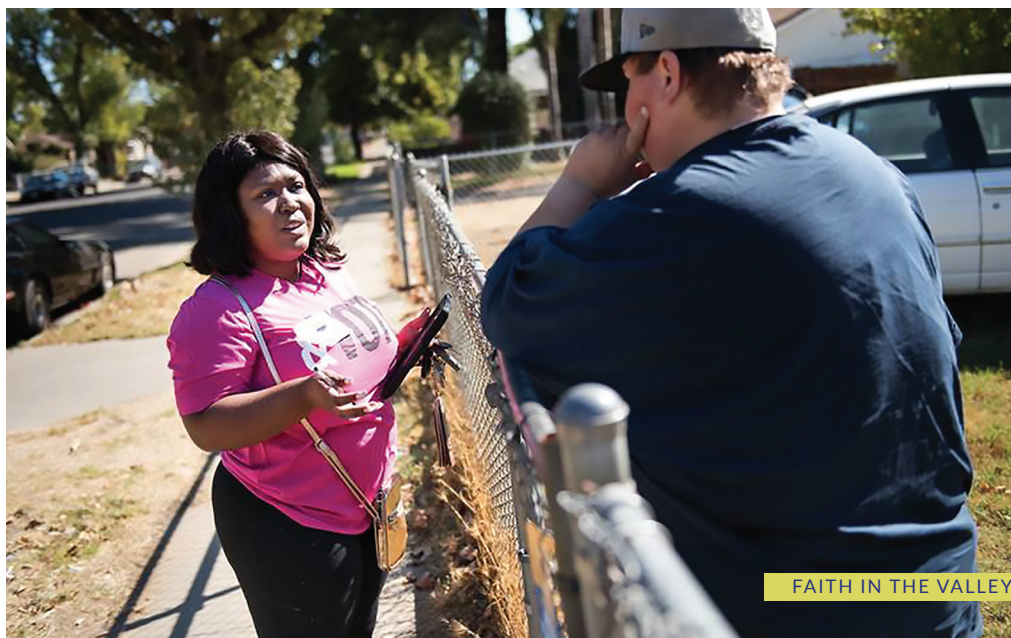
The Central Valley organizations wanted to build the local political will required to pass rent control, but they faced a narrative challenge when talking to elected officials about the region's housing problems: officials didn't believe housing was an issue. There was limited research, evidence or organizing infrastructure to back up community leaders' proposed policy changes.



The groups set the strategy to shift the narrative through community-driven research and a robust political education campaign to organize tenants. Through the Fund's flexible support, Faith in the Valley partnered with Fresno State to expose the real challenges Central Valley residents were facing with new research and alternative narratives that highlight the effects of gentrification and displacement on Central Valley's low-income communities and communities of color. Through a coordinated communications strategy, organizations shared "Evicted", the resulting report, with the *Fresno* and *Stockton Bees*, landing stories that helped shift the narrative locally about housing affordability. Their coverage elevated the issue, putting pressure on elected officials to respond to the calls of organizers.

75%

of Community Advisors in the Central Valley state that they strengthened relationships with public officials, are recognized as a trusted organization by other philanthropic institutions and are shifting the narrative about housing justice and equitable development.



FAITH IN THE VALLEY

Photo from Fresno Bee coverage of Faith in the Valley's report "Evicted."

75%

of Community Advisors report that the funds increased the advocacy skills of their base members and allowed for the expansion of leadership roles to advance the organization's work.



"[The Fund] helped us to build the first ever housing coalition in the Central Valley. Their support also helped us to engage new leaders, research and endorse a long-term housing justice theory of change and move into new campaign areas."

**CENTRAL VALLEY
COMMUNITY ADVISOR**

"The [F4ICA funding] has helped build more internal capacity to take on a lot more housing issues. It has also helped us connect with partners and work together to move policies forward at the local and state level. One example is AB 1487, we were able to work together to advocate for a 25% rural set aside for the eviction prevention fund."

**CENTRAL VALLEY
COMMUNITY ADVISOR**

ORGANIZING A MULTIFACETED REGIONAL COALITION

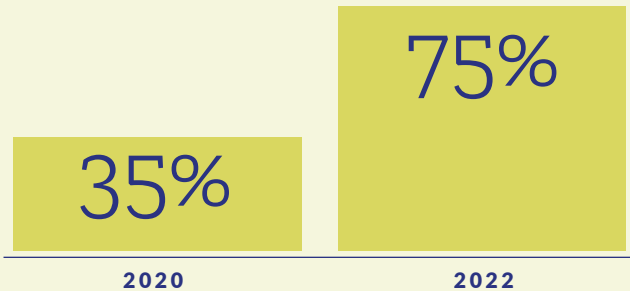
When we first connected with Community Advisors in the Central Valley, they were organizing for people to have basic housing amenities and buildings with safe construction that was up to code. This issue required deep technical knowledge to ensure that their advocacy would not have unintended consequences like triggering more evictions because of code violations. This was a new area for organizations that focused on intersections of immigration, environmental justice and criminal justice work. Further, it was difficult to organize renters who didn't know their rights and feared landlord retaliation, particularly if they were undocumented or vulnerable due to previous interactions with the justice system.

Through the Fund's support, the Community Advisors built on the relationships made in Stockton in 2019 and developed the Central Valley People's Housing Coalition, creating a strong formal collaborative of organizers, legal services and policy advocates. Together, they have secured multiple renter protections across counties, protected tenants from unjust evictions, rent increases and deplorable living conditions – with a particular focus on serving undocumented and mixed-status immigrant families.

The Central Valley community partners are now pushing for policy and program changes they initially hoped to win prior to the pandemic. Their successful Right to Counsel campaign would have been unimaginable before the pandemic. They have now leveraged their regional efforts into statewide and even national civic engagement, participating in briefings with the White House Housing Summit on the crucial importance of eviction prevention.

STRENGTHENING COLLABORATION

Community Advisors in the Central Valley report having deeper interaction at the collaboration, coalition and coordination levels of connection.



CENTRAL VALLEY COMMUNITY ADVISORS AND GRANTEE PARTNERS



California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc.

Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Stockton

Faith in the Valley

Fresno Barrios Unidos

Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability

LOUD for Tomorrow

Power California

Priorities Going Forward

The Fund is learning and applying lessons from the past four years to ensure organizations can sustain their progress and power for the long-haul.

Looking ahead, Community Advisors in the Central Valley have emphasized the need for F4ICA's continued support to maintain and expand the powerful cross-discipline coalition and intersectional work that connects the issues of housing, clean water, environmental justice, education and public safety. Additionally, groups have shared that organizing and civic engagement capacity must be built among low-income communities of color in the rapidly growing region to change the balance of power at the local, regional and state levels toward policies that support economic opportunity and racial justice.

Community Advisors have made it clear that funders need to make a sustained, long-term commitment that matches the pace of organizing power in order to protect and expand wins. Groups like Faith in the Valley have adopted the Homes Guarantee, a 10-year framework to guarantee that every Central Valley resident has safe, accessible, sustainable and permanently affordable housing, a framework which will guide the Central Valley strategy for housing justice.

To ensure our continued responsiveness to the needs of the Central Valley 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.



LOUD FOR TOMORROW



CATHOLIC CHARITIES OF THE DIOCESE OF STOCKTON