

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth Organizing Groups Are Engaging in Systems Transformation and Youth Development in California

In this research-based series, we share findings from a multi-year study of California's youth organizing groups and how they are building sustainable movements for long-term systems transformation. These groups build on youth issues to address community-wide concerns, combining holistic youth development practices with complex social change strategies. They call on partners in philanthropy to meet this moment by providing flexible and sustainable resources and learning alongside and from the field.

California boasts a rich youth organizing ecosystem. Going back to the founding of the Black Panthers in 1966 and the LA Walkouts of 1968, youth of color in the Golden State have created new forms of political power and catalyzed movements for rights and equality. Today's youth organizers continue these traditions and take them in new directions. By prioritizing holistic youth development alongside complex social change strategies, youth organizing groups are building movements that will be sustained for the long haul.

They call on partners in philanthropy to meet this moment by offering flexible and sustainable resources and joining authentic opportunities to learn alongside and from the field.

This series shares the findings of our study of the California youth organizing ecosystem with funders, youth organizers and the broader public. Through interviews and focus groups with leaders of 34 youth organizing groups in 2022 to 2023, we learned how organizing groups prioritize young people's healing and mental health alongside leadership development and academic success.

This section is part of the Developing Youth Power Series, based on a study of youth organizing groups in California that was conducted by the [CU Boulder Research Hub](#) between 2021 and 2024.



We heard about their pragmatic embrace of insider and outsider strategies, such as building community coalitions that put pressure on school boards while collaborating with school leaders to design and implement new programs. They describe creative outreach to alumni to connect high school youth to mentors and build new pathways in social justice leadership. They explained how keeping a sharp focus on a mission to create justice in their communities allows their work to span the traditional silos of education, health care, housing, and transportation.

These promising experiments in youth development and political power call for a new approach from allies in philanthropy. Emerging from the stressors of the COVID pandemic, California organizing groups are poised to level up their base-building,

leadership development, and political impact from coastal cities to inland agricultural communities. Organizers call on philanthropists to recognize the multifaceted, and often unrecognized, roles they play in communities, from mutual aid for struggling families to youth employment to holding diverse political coalitions together. They ask funders to work in partnership with their vision of long-term movement building for systemic change. They invite foundation leaders to join them in on-going, real time learning to intentionally bridge the fields of philanthropy and practice.

We share our findings by theme in **seven** interconnected sections, which can be accessed separately and in any order by clicking on the tabs to the right, or returning to the table of contents.

