

THE CALIFORNIA REGIONAL COALITION CAPACITY BUILDING INITIATIVE 2013-2016

Overview

California is a leader in progressive immigrant rights advocacy and protection because it is powered by a robust immigrant rights movement. This movement is diverse, is grassroots-oriented, and unwavering in its aspiration to make California a state that includes EVERYONE. The victories of the past few years are not only due to the movement's years of hard work, but also due to the stronger partnership and collaboration between regional and statewide advocates.

As federal immigration reform remains trapped in political limbo, the risks and challenges that immigrant communities face will remain, despite enormous policy gains in immigrant rights advocacy in the state. The need for robust regional coalitions that serve as their communities' *first social justice responders*, and can meet the immediate and future needs of immigrant communities is more important than ever. The slow progress of meaningful reforms at the national level indicate that state and regional advocacy efforts will continue to be significant for advancing immigrant rights, and essential to these efforts are the cultivation and sustenance of strong regional coalitions.

While immigrant rights coalitions have existed for decades in the state, with a long history and tradition of powerful grassroots movement building, funding specific to capacity building for these regional coalitions has not always been as streamlined and focused.

The California Immigrant Policy Center (CIPC) began the Capacity Building Project in July 2013. The project's premise, to strengthen regional infrastructure and build the capacity of regional coalitions with a grassroots-led, needs-responsive, and advocacy-oriented approach, was made possible by the leadership and commitment of CIPC, and by a consortium of funders from California.

The project is a multi-year initiative with broad yearly goals identified with the input and participation of grantees. Year One involved 16 grantees that included regional coalitions as well as anchor organizations, with goals focused on identifying growth areas, developing relationships between grantees and with state advocacy initiatives, and strengthening the capacity of coalitions to engage in campaigns and organizational development. Based on evaluations and reflections from Year One, refinements were made so that Year Two involved nine more or less established coalitions, with goals created out of a more defined framework based on common elements of capacity building. They include: aspirations, strategy, systems and infrastructure, organizational structure, and cultural and political power.

The present cohort/grantees represent various regions throughout California, covering northern, the central valley, and southern parts of the state. Given the grantees' diverse regional contexts, needs, and stages of coalition development, the Capacity Building Project was designed to set realistic and measurable goals, with the ability to adapt and adjust as necessary. The project is a collaborative endeavor that provides capacity support in two areas: grant making and customized training and technical assistance on growth areas identified by grantees. CIPC also convenes twice-yearly gatherings of the cohort, as well as tailored consultations and trainings that address targeted needs of individual or smaller groups of grantees.

Rationale

- Strengthening regional coalitions is vital to the long-term health and effectiveness of our regions and state. Investing in regional and local coalitions is crucial to making sure that local realities and issues are truly represented in decisions and negotiations being made at the state level.
- Given the disparity in the growth, resources and capacity of coalitions in the state, the ideal framework calls for each region in California to eventually sustaining strong coalitions that truly represent their communities in local and statewide campaigns.

- Supporting and maintaining coalitions (as opposed to organizations) that represent various regions in the state, and developing their capacity is a meaningful way to increase long-term social impact.

Capacity Building Outcomes/Accomplishments To Date

- Increased political clout of these coalitions in their regions. Examples: The Central Coast Immigrant Rights Coalition, ACUDIR, Justice for Immigrants Coalition of Inland Empire, and FREE-San Francisco are all planning to mount local campaigns against DHS' Priority Enforcement Program (PEP) with their local law enforcement agencies, as well improving collaboration with criminal and racial justice advocates in their regions.
- Greater input and alignment with CIPCs statewide goals and legislative agenda, and increased collaboration and sharing between CIPC and the regional coalitions.
- Growing collaboration between coalitions that work on common issues and experience similar challenges, such as the Southern California Border Coordination Initiative started by three coalitions last year.
- Strong commitment by coalitions to develop infrastructure and staffing capacity for their coalitions. Except for two regions, seven of the nine coalitions now have part-time or full time coalition staff.
- Greater capacity in relation to membership development, campaign planning and leadership development borne out of targeted and customized training opportunities provided by the project.
- The capacity building project is responsible for setting up the Central Coast Immigrant Rights Coalition (CCIRC), which covers San Luis Obispo, Ventura and Santa Barbara counties.

Lessons Learned and A Way Forward

- Working towards a more coherent, strong coalition identity and narrative in a context where most coalitions rely on key anchor organizations to drive and sustain the broader coalitions.
- Seeking sustainable staffing that is coalition-specific to alleviate the turnover and over-stretched environment of relying solely on volunteers and staff from member organizations.
- Integrating tracking, accountability and evaluation systems to assess and articulate effectiveness of coalition activities and programs, which could guide coalition decision-making, as well as attract additional resources.
- Helping regional coalitions become more diverse and represent their immigrant and refugee communities.
- Diversifying funding sources beyond the project and existing scope, which is predominantly foundations-based, for a sustainable resource strategy.
- Seek continued support from existing and interested funders for an additional two years (2016-2018)
- Explore direct funding support/relationships between funders and regional coalitions.

These considerations provide a snapshot of the project's evolution and accomplishments during the first two years. While grantees have made significant progress, much remains to be done. There are also areas that require longer investment and deeper resources so they can be adequately addressed. It is therefore critical that initiatives such as the Capacity Building Project continue, and provide the necessary space for coalitions to grow, and become the powerful, sustainable, and truly grassroots resource their communities need.

The Regional Capacity Building Project demonstrates the unique nature of developing capacity in a coalition context, adding to a framework and discussion of capacity building that is in flux and will continue to evolve. The project adds to the discourse in capacity building, by leveling the playing field for regional coalitions' access to resources in a crowded, highly competitive environment. As demographic changes and political clout shift inland, and immigrant communities move to areas outside of gateway cities like Los Angeles and San Francisco, strategies towards winning legislation in Sacramento also needs to shift. Harnessing the political power and promise of these coalitions towards a renewed, progressive statewide agenda is a great place to start.