

Key Findings

*USC Program for Environmental
and Regional Equity*

As part of the Building Healthy Communities (BHC) Initiative, the California Endowment has sought to support the healthy development of youth in 14 low-income communities across the state by providing financial support to programs that engage youth in civic activities. A primary goal of the California Endowment is to cultivate youth-led organizing and advocacy on health issues in California. This work is important given that youth make up a large share of the population in BHC communities. Investing in youth leadership and youth-led organizing could prove to be an important strategy in improving health outcomes in these communities by both encouraging individuals to adopt healthier practices and by building their skills to collectively advocate for policy and institutional changes.

This report features results from the Youth Program Inventory Survey, conducted as part of the BHC youth program evaluation led by Drs. Veronica Terriquez (USC), Stanley Huey (USC), and John Rogers (UCLA) through the USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity. The youth program evaluation aims to 1) examine the impact of BHC programs on the healthy development of youth participants, 2) assess how youth are contributing to positive health outcomes in their communities, and 3) inform cross-site learning among youth organizations. As part of the first phase of the youth program evaluation, this report relies on web survey data collected from the staff of 88 youth-serving organizations in 13 out of 14 BHC sites (see Table 1). It summarizes key characteristics of these organizations and the youth they serve.¹ Youth Program Inventory Survey results shared here also contains information regarding organizations' programming and campaign efforts as well as their staffs' interest in various training topics.

These survey results are being used to determine the target numbers of youth who will be invited to participate in future evaluation efforts at each of the BHC sites. Survey results are also helping the evaluation team, along with Youth Research Associates from each of the BHC sites, to define the content of survey and other

data that will be collected from youth who participate regularly in BHC activities. The report concludes with a discussion of the relevance of Youth Program Inventory Survey results to the broader youth program evaluation, as well as to youth programming on the ground.

TABLE 1 NUMBER OF ORGANIZATIONS COMPLETING SURVEYS BY BHC SITE

BHC SITE	ORGANIZATIONS
Boyle Heights	11
Central Santa Ana	5
City Heights	3
Coachella Valley	3
East Oakland	16
East Salinas	2
Fresno	5
Long Beach	10
Merced	6
Richmond	4
Sacramento	8
South Kern	3
South LA	8
Multiple Sites	4
TOTAL NUMBER	88

CHARACTERISTICS OF BHC YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR PARTICIPANTS

The BHC Initiative involves both newer organizations and those with a longer track record of working with youth. As shown in Figure 1 on the next page, over half of the organizations involved in this initiative have worked with adolescents for 10 or more years while nearly a quarter started working with this age group since 2010. This diversity suggests that more established organizations have an opportunity to share lessons learned with newer organizations while, simultaneously, newer organizations may be in a position to share innovative approaches to youth development.

BHC organizations vary widely in the number of youth that they involve in their efforts. In the average month,

¹TCE program managers determined which organizations were invited to participate in the Staff Inventory Survey. Data is in the process of being collected from Del Norte and Adjacent Tribal Lands.

FIGURE 1 NUMBER OF YEARS THAT BHC ORGANIZATIONS HAVE WORKED WITH ADOLESCENTS

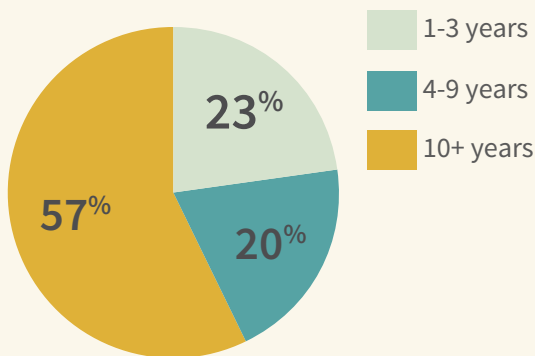


FIGURE 2 MONTHLY AVERAGE NUMBER OF YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

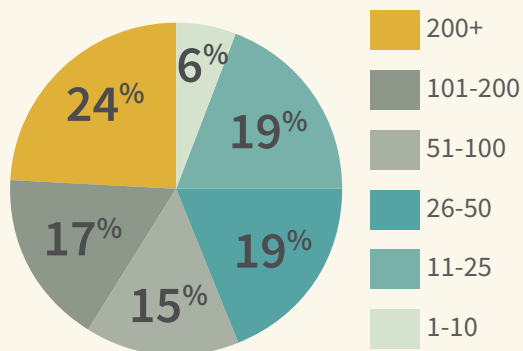
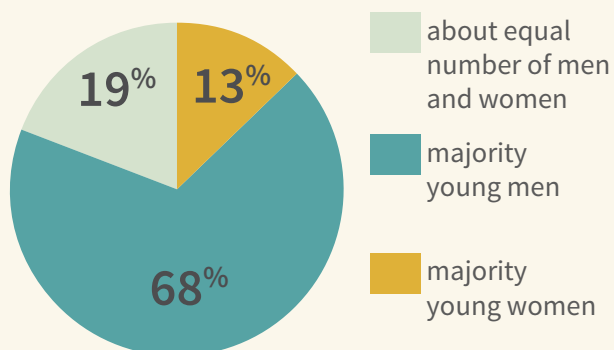


FIGURE 3 GENDER COMPOSITION OF YOUTH PARTICIPANTS



about a fourth of these organizations involve 25 students or fewer while nearly a quarter involve over 200 youth, as shown in Figure 2. The depth of youths’ participation is likely to vary within and across organizations. While some youth exercise leadership within these organizations, others are involved in a limited capacity as participants of workshops or other outreach efforts.

In recognition of the crisis in the health outcomes of young men of color, the California Endowment has invested specifically in supporting the healthy development of this segment of the population. Perhaps as a result of foundation support, approximately two-thirds of organizations reported that young men comprise the majority of youth involved in their work. This finding is impressive, considering that young women tend to be disproportionately involved in leadership and service organizations.

Most BHC organizations focus their resources on a limited number of youth members, who in some cases are responsible for outreaching to a broader base of youth or community members. Specifically, 79 out of 88 organizations surveyed work with a “core group” of young people on a regular basis. Together, these 79 organizations claim to regularly involve over 3,000 young people, including over 2,300 adolescents and 700 young adults. Because of their depth of involvement, these 3,000 young people are likely to reap greater benefits from their connection to BHC organizations than those who are marginally involved. Regular involvement potentially provides youth opportunities to develop leadership skills, engage in healthy behavior, and promote the well-being of their communities.

Because youth in BHC communities often encounter barriers to college access, it is worth noting that most organizations (72%) reported that the majority of their young adult participants are enrolled in some type of postsecondary educational program. College students tend to have access to more opportunities for civic engagement than young adults who do not pursue postsecondary education. As such, college-going BHC youth organizations may involve the most academically prepared and civically engaged young adults in their communities.

Most BHC organizations are inclusive of youth who come from particularly vulnerable communities.

Specifically, 69% of organizations reported that they involve LGBTQ-identified youth. This group of young people is disproportionately subject to bullying and must sometimes deal with families who are not accepting of their sexual identities. BHC organizations could potentially function as safe spaces for these young people. Additionally, 73% of organizations reported that they work with immigrant youth who lack citizenship or permanent residency in the U.S. The precarious legal status of these youth increases their risk of poverty and limits their access to health care. BHC youth organizations may provide these youth with the social connections and resources to overcome some of the challenges associated with their legal status.

DESCRIPTIONS OF YOUTH PROGRAMMING

BHC youth organizations offer a wide range of activities, many of which may promote community health. Awareness of the different types of programming offered by these organizations provides insights into the varying ways in which BHC organizations might contribute to youths' healthy development and their capacity to contribute to local health-related campaign efforts. Most obviously, organizations that focus on physical exercise may promote better individual health among participants. Meanwhile, organizations that regularly conduct political education workshops may motivate youth to work towards policy changes that alleviate health disparities on a broader, community-wide scale.

Table 2 lists the percentage of organizations that involve their core adolescent and young adult members in different types of activities one or more times a month. Almost all organizations offer leadership development for their members. Meanwhile, approximately two-thirds regularly offer political education, ethnic studies, and peer-to-peer education—activities that, along with leadership development efforts, have the potential to enhance youths' civic and political capacity. It is worth noting that 62% of organizations involve adolescents in youth-led grassroots organizing and 68% involve young adults in such efforts. Campaign work, in particular, can give young people on-the-ground experience in how to collectively advocate for policy and institutional changes that benefit community health conditions. This survey, however, does not measure the depth of youths' involvement in campaigns.

The emotional and social support offered in approximately two-thirds of organizations has the potential to promote positive mental health outcomes among participants.

A good number of organizations have an academic focus, providing academic or college counseling, while one-third offer time for homework or tutoring. We might expect that young people who participate in such activities are likely to benefit academically from their involvement.

Only one-third of organizations or fewer focus on physical education or gardening. Finally, a small number reported “other activities” such as arts activism (employing art for social change), journalism, and writing.

ACTIVITY	ADOLESCENTS	YOUNG ADULTS
leadership development	94%	90%
political education	69%	72%
ethnic studies/cultural awareness	68%	58%
peer-to-peer education	68%	70%
emotional/social support	65%	60%
youth-led grassroots organization	62%	68%
academic/college counseling	56%	38%
health education	55%	54%
community-based research	51%	52%
career exploration	49%	46%
conflict mediation	45%	44%
meeting with decision-makers	42%	52%
digital media training	41%	44%
anti-oppression trainings	37%	36%
tutoring/homework time	34%	24%
physical exercise	32%	26%
gardening	23%	16%
other	17%	12%

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN HEALTH-RELATED CAMPAIGNS

As part of the BHC Initiative, some organizations aim to change policies and augment resources that improve health outcomes in their communities. Survey results indicate that 68 out of the 88 organizations had engaged young people in campaign efforts. Organizations

most commonly involved young people in efforts to address concerns over school discipline policies and safety, with 25 reporting youth participation in such campaigns within the past year. Food justice, access to recreational facilities, and transportation issues were each the campaign foci of 7-10 organizations. Fewer organizations engaged in campaigns that addressed education funding, violence prevention, police abuse, and other issues.

TABLE 3 CAMPAIGN ISSUES COMMONLY REPORTED BY BHC YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS	
CAMPAIGN ISSUES	
School Discipline and Safety	
Food Justice	
Access to Recreational Facilities	
Transportation Access	

STAFF TRAINING NEEDS

The Youth Program Inventory asked staff members about their interests in various staff training workshops. Table 4 lists the trainings most in demand. The Movement Strategy Center, in collaboration with the Youth Steering Committee, will be responsible for providing these or other staff trainings across the state.

TABLE 4 STAFF TRAINING NEEDS	
TRAINING TOPIC	% OF ORGANIZATIONS
Using Culture and Creativity in Youth Engagement	74%
Personal Power, Empowerment and Youth Voice	66%
Engaging Youth in Policy Advocacy	62%
Introduction to Youth Organizing	50%

THE RELEVANCE OF YOUTH PROGRAM INVENTORY SURVEY RESULTS TO THE YOUTH PROGRAM EVALUATION AND SITE-LEVEL PROGRAMMING


The 2013 Youth Program Inventory Survey results provide baseline information on the number of youth that are being served and offer a broad overview of the types of activities and campaigns that youth participate in through BHC organizations. These survey results will

help the evaluation team make sense of the various ways in which BHC programs might impact the healthy development of youth participants, and also provide some indication as to how youth might contribute to positive health outcomes in their communities. Youth Program Inventory Survey results are being used to inform the analysis of survey data to be collected from youth members of BHC organizations.

These Youth Program Inventory Survey results have been disaggregated by BHC site and shared with TCE so that the Youth Steering Committee, hub managers, program managers, Learning & Evaluation teams, and other stakeholders can use findings to inform within-site and cross-site learning.

The Youth Program Inventory Survey will be conducted annually. Learning and Evaluation teams and other stakeholders will be invited to provide feedback on the content of the survey so that it maintains a connection to other evaluation and BHC efforts. ♦

USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE) is a research unit situated within the USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts & Sciences. PERE conducts research and facilitates discussions on issues of environmental justice, regional inclusion, and social movement building.



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