



Learning, Equity, and Power (LEaP) is an initiative of the Center for the Study of Policy (CSSP) to help turn "ideas into action." LEaP highlights and encourages learning about what it takes to advance equity and power in communities.

Supporting the Power Ecosystem

There are many ways that funders can support building community power:

- Act as an ecosystem partner
- Build long-term capacity
- Accelerate learning for strategy
- Champion grassroots and youth organizing
- Use an ecosystem approach to break down issue silos and address root causes of inequities

Barsoum, G. and Farrow, F. "An Ecosystem to Build Power and Advance Health and Racial Equity: A Report for the California Endowment." Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Social Policy. 2020. [Source found here.](#)

“ TCE reports that BHC advocacy ultimately contributed to more than 1,200 policy changes, systems changes, and tangible benefits for BHC communities. These wins obviously are and will continue to be important to health equity progress. But achieving wins that sustain and equitably meet the needs of impacted communities—who are best positioned to continue advocating for wins after they are achieved—requires an orientation to advocacy that is focused on more than just what it takes to achieve a win. It requires advocacy that builds power.”

Coffman, J., Barsoum, G., Lopez, A., Brothe Gantz, M. Advocacy that Builds Power Transforming Policies and Systems For Health and Racial Equity. Center For Evaluation Innovation. 2021. [Source found here.](#)

This LEaP highlights lessons and insights from selected research and evaluation of The California Endowment's (TCE) decade-long Building Healthy Communities (BHC) initiative. BHC is a \$1 billion initiative launched in 2010 that reached 14 communities devastated by health inequities. With various local campaigns, core strategies, and the

efforts of thousands of adults and youth, BHC took a broad approach to health equity and building community power. BHC learned many lessons along the way about what it takes to transform communities into places where all people have an opportunity to thrive. This LEaP features information from a collection of research that can be found [here](#).



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Power Building Ecosystem

It is critical to understand the many organizations and capacities needed to build power.

“ Organizing and base-building alone are insufficient to influence those who have the authority, resources, and power to make the kinds of decisions that will improve the lives of historically excluded people and reduce inequities. A broader ecosystem of organizations with diverse capacities, skills, an expertise—and with reach from the local to regional to the state levels—is required to get to the big goal of health and justice for all. ”

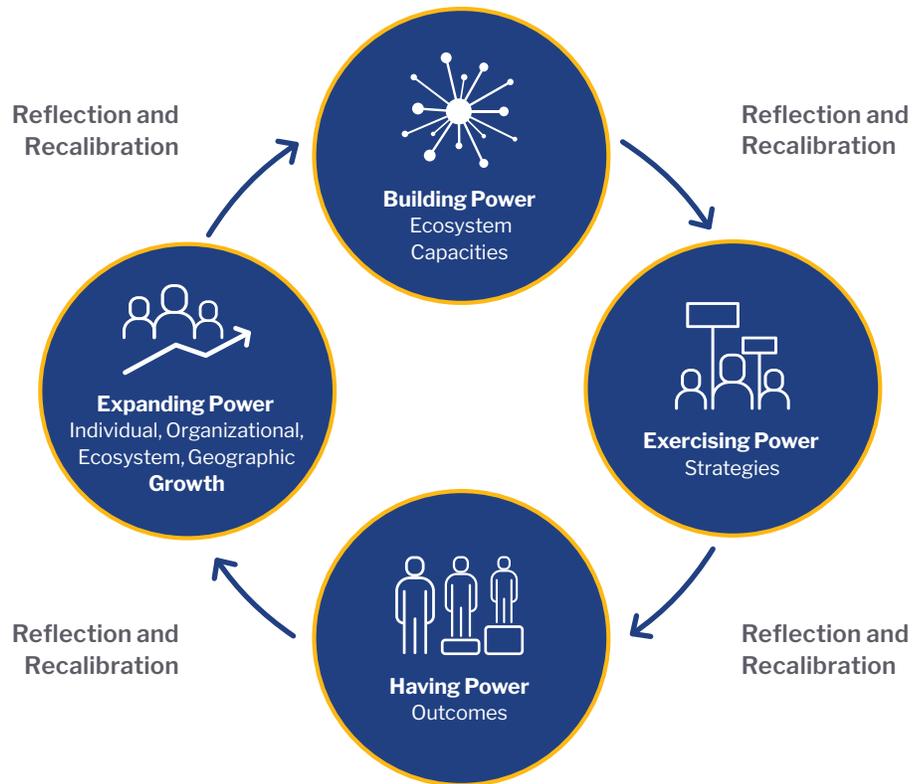
Farrow, F., Rogers, C., Henderson-Frakes, J. (2020) "Toward Health and Racial Equity: Findings and Lessons from Building Healthy Communities." Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Social Policy. 2020. [Source found here.](#)



Jlto, J., Pastor, M. A Pivot To Power: Lessons from The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities about Place, Health, and Philanthropy. USC ERI. 2018. [Source found here.](#)

Power Building Framework

It is important to understand that the ecosystem builds power through advocacy activities and campaigns with each cycle and over time.



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“ The power building framework describes how power is built when impacted communities are centered in an ecosystem of actors that use advocacy to achieve policy, systems, and electoral wins that ultimately address long-term structural inequities and transform systems of oppression. Over the 10 years of BHC, 77 percent of TCE’s total \$1.75 billion investment in BHC were for grants that were directed in whole or in part to power building.”

Advocacy that Builds Power

In order to support power building it is important to understand who makes up ecosystems, how power is built, and how advocacy can be shifted into a means for building power:

Advocacy to Achieve a Win

A “win” is the **goal**.

Advocacy is done **on behalf of or for** impacted communities.

The policy solution **may or may not be** informed by impacted communities.

Base building organizations and organizing **may or may not** be part of the strategy.

Strategy is based on a shared analysis **driven by politics** and the window of opportunity.

The advocacy campaign is the strategy and organizing may be a tactic through which a win is achieved.

Advocacy mobilizes **pundits, policy entrepreneurs, and other influentials** as the drivers of change.

The work is organized into a series of **time-bound** campaigns that may not relate or add up.

Specific/time bound capacity building is provided for purpose of getting to the win.

Others drive narratives that tell stories of impacted communities, often within the dominant frame.

Advocacy that Builds Power

A “win” is a **means**.

Advocacy is done **by and with** impacted communities.

The policy solution is **developed or informed** by impacted communities.

Base building organizations and organizing **are centered** in the strategy.

Strategy is based on a shared analysis **grounded in root causes** and inequity.

Organizing (a participant-centered power-building approach to deal with upstream changes) is the strategy/approach and advocacy is the tactic/method through which power is built.

Advocacy based on organizing pays attention to the role of an **authentic organized base** as the primary driver of change.

The work is **continuous**, and a series of campaigns expands the power and influence of participants within a field of action.

Advocacy and campaigns are a **leadership development opportunity** to build power in a defined area.

Impacted communities drive narratives that tell their stories and challenge dominant frames.

“When you make the time to build relationships and build trust—and this goes for both organizing community leaders, but also with other community based organizations and other non-profit leaders—the work is more seamless. Everything just flows better and the power and impact is just that much greater because then you’re working together, you’re developing strategies together, you’re thinking through working backwards from the goal.”

– BHC Organizing Grante

Ito, J., Pastor, M. A Pivot To Power: Lessons from The California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities about Place, Health, and Philanthropy. USC ERI. 2018. [Source found here.](#)

“Residents play a pivotal role in the BHC initiative because they are valued through organizing. There is trust among residents, and they see the end goals of their campaigns. With the wins that have come about, residents are more confident and feel powerful in bringing about change in their community.”

– BHC Organizing Grantee



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Special thanks to evaluation partners Gigi Barsoum, Center for Evaluation Innovation, and USC Equity Research Institute. Their work, along with other research on BHC, can be found [here](#).



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