



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.

The Power Ecosystem

“ Achieving health and justice for all Californians is beyond the reach of any single organization, strategy, or approach. In fact, it requires an ecosystem of diverse organizations that can collectively influence the broad terrain where ideas, policies, and power are contested. Central to the ecosystem are organizations developing an active and aligned base of leaders and members (whether community, students, faith, or labor) that can engage decision makers and hold them accountable. Yet an organized base alone is insufficient to challenging the systems and structures that produce inequality. Through alliances, coalitions, and informal networks, they work with organizations that bring research and legal support, advocacy and policy expertise, communications and cultural change, and leadership development support. And they need the individuals, intermediaries, and institutions that provide funding, training and technical assistance, technology, and other supports for establishing and sustaining strong organizations.”

Ito, J., Pastor, M. California Health and Justice for All: Power-Building Landscape: Defining the Ecosystem. 2019. [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](#).



**Center for the
Study of
Social Policy**
Ideas into Action

The Power Ecosystem



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How Funders Can Support the Ecosystem

Funders should...

- Center racial equity, combat anti-Black racism, and work to dismantle White supremacy
- Commit to the internal work necessary for building and sharing power with communities
- Make a long-term commitment to grantees and communities



The Ecosystem Requires Infrastructure

Capacity building will be required at multiple levels, with partners prioritizing additional support in leadership development, strategic communications and narrative change, data development and usage, and policy advocacy. The ecosystem will also require infrastructure support and general operating support that allow organizations to operate together and at scale.

“ In terms of capacity building, you need at least two pieces. First, high level strategy work, so the groups doing this big work can come together around both a statewide and local agenda. Then, you need organizational capacity at the very tiny grassroots level. If we want to support those organizations to bring more people to the table and build a bigger strategy, then we must also support them to be stronger organizations that pay above poverty wages and have career paths. I call this soil reclamation. Some strategists are trying to get all the grass to move in the same direction, but some of the dirt is funky, not very conducive to growing things. With support, those smaller groups can connect with each other in deeper ways.”

– Tia Martinez, CEO, Forward Change

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.](#)

The Power Ecosystem

Foundation Continuum of Directiveness

This continuum reflects the variable roles a foundation can play. There is no value judgement in the continuum; rather, a foundation's role on a given issue, and at a point in time, can depend on the circumstances, ecosystem capacities, and windows of opportunity that present themselves. However, within the context of a power ecosystem, the use of foundation led strategies should be weighed carefully.



Adapted from 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.](#)