



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.

Embracing Youth Power

Focusing on the power and agency of young people was not a specific part of the initial BHC initiative. During the very earliest years, youth were more likely to be one-among-many voices in community meetings rather than featured speakers who articulated their own concerns and devised their own solutions. But very soon this would change in exciting ways that would become one of BHC's key contributions to a richer power-building understanding. The change began as local BHC leaders started talking to young people about their priorities. For youth, the most common areas of focus and achievement were creating a school climate conducive to learning, banning inappropriate and harmful school discipline policies, implementing restorative justice programs, and reforming juvenile justice policies. These issues—which young people had been pushing for years—became part of local BHC agendas in large measure because of youth advocacy. Young people, some not even old enough to vote, successfully took action that contributed to significant change in their communities and at the state capitol.

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.](#)

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
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Social Policy**
Ideas into Action

Levels of Youth Power

Today's low-income youth of color face many challenges to their health and well-being. Systemic racism, economic inequality, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia have contributed to disproportionately high rates of trauma, criminalization, violence, asthma, housing displacement, poor academic outcomes, and other health-related inequalities among youth of color. These health-related challenges manifest at the individual, community, regional, and state levels.



Individual Youth Power

TCE-supported youth organizations have helped low-income youth confront challenges related to poverty, racism, and other systemic inequalities by offering programming that comprehensively builds up their leadership skills. To date, many youth serving organizations have provided their young memberships with meaningful opportunities to develop basic civic skills such as the ability to speak in public, develop agendas, run meetings, and plan events.

Community Youth Power

Community-level youth power exists when there is an informed base of individual youth ready to take action and trained to engage their peers and adults in organizing, advocacy, and/or media outreach.

Regional/State Youth Power

Youth power can also help tackle regional and statewide health disparities. TCE's investments at these broader levels have created platforms for young leaders to work with others outside their immediate communities to achieve policy changes, increase voter turnout, and enhance public understandings of health and related social issues.

Terriquez, V. TCE's Youth Power Infrastructure: An Overview of Youth-Serving Organizations and Intermediaries It Supports. December 2019. [Source found here.](#)

Youth Power Building Activities



“ We set out to transform communities, but we were the ones who ended up being transformed.”

– Dr. Robert K. Ross, President & CEO,
The California Endowment

David, T., Brown, P. "Foundation Role and Practice: Building Healthy Communities, 2010-2020." Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Social Policy. 2020. [Source found here.](#)

Findings suggest that TCE-funded youth-serving organizations are providing their members with the civic knowledge, skills, and experience that lead to individual empowerment. This empowerment, in turn, allows them to collectively exercise power within their communities or at broader geographic scales. The list below shows the percent of TCE youth-serving organizations offering key activities at least once a month.

Peer-to-peer education (71%)

Healing and self-care (66%)

Youth-led grassroots organizing (64%)

Political education (64%)

Ethnic studies/cultural awareness (64%)

Digital media training (56%)

Restorative justice/conflict mediation (49%)

Community-based research (44%)

Meeting with adult decision makers (39%)

Terriquez, V. TCE's Youth Power Infrastructure: An Overview of Youth-Serving Organizations and Intermediaries It Supports. December 2019. [Source found here.](#)