

On the Road to Equity

A Statewide Agenda
for Women and Girls



**ROAD to
EQUITY Tour**

Women and Girls Driving the California Agenda



ABOUT THE WOMEN'S FOUNDATION OF CALIFORNIA

Since 1979, the Women's Foundation of California has delivered more than \$19 million in grants and capacity-building support to more than 1,000 organizations that work to address women's economic security, women's reproductive health, environmental health and justice, domestic and sexual violence and the leadership development of women and girls throughout California. For more than two decades, the Women's Foundation has been actively engaged in promoting public dialogue on issues that affect the lives of women and girls, bringing their voices and experiences to the forefront. This funding has improved the lives of hundreds of thousands of women and girls throughout the state. Central to our commitment to build a more just and equitable society for all is focusing the public's attention on issues of specific concern to women and girls, their families and communities in California.

Human rights provide an overarching context for our work, because we know that the fundamental rights of all people are linked. The rights to adequate housing, employment, education, health care, sexual choice, to be free from violence, give birth to healthy babies, and to enjoy religious and cultural freedom do not exist separate from one another. We also recognize that ethnic and cultural distinctions affect people's lives on a daily basis and that those characteristics must inform how we design and implement strategies for change in order for real change to occur.

The Women's Foundation of California prioritizes **low-income women and girls and communities of color, applying a gender lens to all aspects of our work.** By keeping these priorities at the fore, and working in tandem with our grant partners, we believe we can achieve long-term, systemic social change.

The Women's Foundation is often the first funder to provide resources to emerging and controversial issues affecting women and girls and has provided seed funding at a critical stage for organizations that are just beginning to develop their capacity for social change. Our investment in programs that address issues like trafficking, toxins in cosmetics, living wages and responsible community development have created state and national models for social change.

For more information about the Women's Foundation of California, please visit our website at www.womensfoundca.org or call 415-837-1113.

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A Statewide Agenda for Women and Girls

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Foreword

On the Road to Equity Tour in May 2005, I personally met hundreds of women from every region of California, of every ethnicity, from every walk of life and political persuasion. Some of these women knew of our work, and others were drawn to the Tour for the unique opportunity to engage in dialogue with other women in their community. However, what struck me the most was that although these women were different in many ways, they were galvanized by their common bonds and passionate about taking action to create real, long-term change.



Why did we spend 23 days traveling to ten cities across the state?

We embarked on this journey to understand the needs, issues and solutions for women and girls in their communities throughout California. In 2000, we conducted a statewide survey to inform our funding areas and grantmaking. Over the past five years, research conducted by the Foundation has proven critical to the formulation of the goals, alliances and strategies that have guided our grantmaking. The need to reach out again to women throughout the state was made increasingly more important when we became a statewide foundation.

Why are we publishing this report?

This report reflects the wisdom, leadership and hopes of thousands of women in all regions of this diverse state who seized the opportunity of the Tour to contribute to an honest dialogue about the means to progress. We present the insight of the participants through a framework that addresses their priority issue areas, combining proven strategies with new approaches for social change. The content and the solutions of this report directly reflect what we heard from women and girls across the state. The five recommendations in the statewide agenda respond to the five issue areas that were prioritized by the Road to Equity Tour participants. Our work will be guided by these recommendations. We encourage our colleagues in philanthropy, government, community development and the non-profit and advocacy arenas to do the same.

Why are we focused on women and girls?

As the primary caregivers for families and frequently the central organizers of community, women are the backbone of our society. There is no question that the welfare of the women of this state — their health, their economic security, their opportunities to thrive — are directly linked to the realization of a healthy, just and equitable California for all.

We are grateful to the women and girls of California, policymakers, funders, community leaders and elected officials who shared their experience and knowledge on the Road to Equity Tour and in the creation of this report. It is our hope that the agenda put forth in this report will serve as a valuable tool in your work to build the healthy, equitable and just California that we all envision.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Patti Chang". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Patti Chang
President and CEO
Women's Foundation of California

Executive Summary

In May 2005, the Women’s Foundation of California embarked on the Road to Equity Tour, an ambitious project to identify the issues, needs and solutions for women and girls in California. Over a period of 23 days, our staff traveled more than 2,500 miles to 10 cities — San Francisco, San Jose, Fort Bragg, Redding, San Diego, Riverside, Santa Ana, Bakersfield, Fresno and Los Angeles. We met more than 1,000 women and girls who shared their insights, heartfelt testimony, hunger for action and incredible enthusiasm about the power of women and girls to change the world for the better.



Toward Gender Equity

The movements to advance women’s rights have reaped many rewards. Today, for example, women play a stronger role than ever before in California’s economic and political life:

- Women own 30.1 percent of all privately held businesses in the state, generating more than \$406 billion in sales.¹
- Thanks in large part to Title IX, the participation of girls and women in sports in California schools and colleges has skyrocketed.²
- The number of girls enrolled in some Advanced Placement math and science courses is roughly equal to the number of boys.³
- Nationally, more women than ever are graduating from advanced degree programs: 46 percent of medical school graduates are women,⁴ and 44 percent of all doctoral degrees are earned by women.⁵
- California is home to two female United States senators and a woman serving as house minority leader in Congress.

Despite important changes such as these in women’s lives, women’s choices and opportunities are still constrained by unequal treatment and limited opportunities. Moreover, California demographics are changing; today, Latina, Asian and African American women make up half of the state’s female population,⁶ and these “minority” groups will become the “new majority” as the state’s population grows to more than 50 million by 2030. Multifaceted strategies will be required to ensure that the women who comprise California’s new majority today and in the future have the opportunities necessary to achieve their highest potential and make their fullest contribution to a stronger and healthier California.

A Statewide Agenda for Women and Girls: Five Recommendations

Reflecting the information gathered from Tour participants (see next section about key issues), the Women's Foundation of California has identified five recommendations for developing a statewide agenda for women and girls. These recommendations are built around four core strategies of community-organizing for movement building, leadership development for women and girls, policy advocacy and increasing investments in programs that benefit women and girls.

1. THE NEED FOR UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE HAS REACHED CRITICAL PROPORTIONS.

All Californians have the right to reliable and affordable health care. The Women's Foundation of California believes that addressing the concern around access to such health care involves strategies that look at both improving health care systems and closing the gaps on health disparities. Broadly, the Foundation recommends that we work toward universal health care in order to eliminate the complexity and administrative expense of the current health care system. We recommend that policymakers and community advocates support universal health care coverage for all Californians (Senate Bill 840).

We must also work to improve the health of California's women, girls and families by addressing the root causes of health disparities, especially as they affect low-income communities of color and rural communities. It is necessary to consider how economics, geography, race, genetics, gender and environmental factors contribute to health inequities. We recommend creating coalitions that involve parents, community health organizations and health care providers who together can examine the links between chronic disease and illness and environmental triggers to identify the conditions that contribute to disparities and potential public policy solutions to address those conditions.



2. END EPIDEMIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS.

We recommend increasing the focus on violence-prevention strategies, including the development, funding and institutionalization of programs whose goal is primary prevention of domestic violence and sexual assault. These programs should include changing the social norms and working with men and boys as well as women and girls. It is also necessary to develop strategies specifically for immigrant and low-income populations and those who interact with them. These strategies should include language-appropriate education of immigrant communities about their rights and available services and educating service providers, law enforcement officials and the legal system about the laws and the specific needs of immigrant communities and low-income communities in relation to domestic and sexual violence.

3. ENSURE A PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY FOR ALL.

All Californians should have the opportunity to participate in the democratic process and the knowledge to advocate for their basic human rights. The Women's Foundation of California believes that the most effective solutions arise from people who are most affected by the issues. We recommend funding and supporting grassroots organizing that links voting and civic participation with community organizing around specific issues of concern. Linkages should be fostered between efforts that target broader engagement of communities of color and low-income communities in the political process with efforts promoting the political leadership of women as advocates and policymakers.

4. END POVERTY AND CLOSE THE ECONOMIC GAP.

Statistics show that education is a key strategy in developing economic security. Therefore, we recommend that policymakers adopt an "education first" approach to reducing poverty. California's economic development and workforce development systems should align their job training goals and fund and deliver effective education and training services for the lowest-income and no-income individuals. In particular, the CalWORKs systems should prioritize education and training, not work. California should also increase funding for local Workforce Investment Boards and other job training and job placement resources specifically for jobs in higher-wage growth industries with opportunities for career advancement.

Private funders and the State of California can leverage each other's financial strengths to adequately fund economic and workforce development programs to both train workers and develop sustainable jobs. Funders should fund programs that link specialized education and training with living-wage employment in job growth sectors.

Cost of living statistics prove that the current minimum wage is not adequate for women and families living in California. We recommend that policymakers increase the minimum wage to \$8.75 per hour and index it annually. We also encourage the state to adopt a statewide Living Wage Ordinance that applies to all state employees and contractors.

5. NEXT GENERATION LEADERSHIP IS IMPERATIVE.

Young women and girls need leadership opportunities and critical thinking skills to be healthy and thrive. The Foundation recommends that community organizers and funders invest in the continued leadership development of young women and women of color. Funders should also strengthen community-based organizations by investing in capacity building and internal development of staff, board members and volunteers so they can act as community leaders and peer mentors to other organizations and leaders. It is critical that we continue to invest in movement building, including developing skills in advocacy, sharing and deepening critical political, social and economic analysis, building our base of support and working in coalitions.

Key Issues for Women and Girls in California

How did we create the statewide agenda? Tour participants were led through a process to discuss the key issues facing women and girls and to identify the strategies they believed were most likely to help women and girls become full participants in their communities and achieve gender equity. Consistently — at each listening session, in every city — Tour participants suggested that the social, political, economic, community and family issues that affect women and girls are linked and that any recommendations or solutions developed to redress these concerns must acknowledge and build upon these connections. The inextricable links between basic human rights are supported and framed in the following five categories identified as key issues:

1. Improving Access to Affordable, Quality Healthcare

Today, the average annual cost of health insurance for a family of four in California is more than \$10,800 — exceeding the annual income of a minimum wage earner.⁷ A report released in February 2005 found that half of the people who filed for bankruptcy did so because they lacked the means to pay their medical bills.⁸ Most of these people were middle-class workers with health insurance.⁹ Tour participants throughout the state identified a need to expand access to health clinics that provide free and low-cost prevention, diagnostic and treatment services. They also stressed the need for hospitals and clinics to provide both multicultural and multilingual care — a particular concern in California, where people of color make up more than half of the state's population and one in every six residents is not a US citizen.¹⁰

2. Reducing Violence Against Women and Girls

At each Tour stop participants discussed the violence women and girls face at school and at home. Mothers and adolescent girls described school climates where young people fear for their own safety and where administrators do not do enough to enforce sexual harassment policies. Throughout the state, domestic and sexual violence is an escalating problem. Nearly 10,000 forcible rapes were reported to law enforcement in California in 2003.¹¹ In addition to finding ways to prevent violence from occurring, Tour participants emphasized the need for law enforcement agencies to improve how they respond to the victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. For example, it is well recognized that a batterer can be prosecuted for violating a Family Court restraining order.¹² Yet, according to a statewide database, in some counties up to 50 percent of these orders have never been served by law enforcement.¹³ Women also emphasized the need for outreach to undocumented residents about available domestic violence services and for family violence prevention programs that teach adolescent boys and girls.





3. *Ensuring Women's Economic Security*

The problems California women face in making ends meet were a recurring theme in every city. Tour participants focused on the need for a living wage, economic equity and access to jobs that pay higher wages. They have a solid grasp of the causes of the slow, steady decline in earning power experienced by a large population of women who are identified as “working poor.” The need for a living wage is driven, in part, by the high cost of living in California. A nationally developed Self-Sufficiency Standard estimates that in California a single parent with a preschooler must earn \$12.50 an hour to be economically self-sufficient — almost double the state minimum wage of \$6.75.¹⁴ In one-third of California counties, these families require an hourly wage above \$15 per hour to make ends meet.¹⁵

The fact that many women are in low-paying, dead-end jobs compounds the problems they face meeting a higher cost of living. Among poor women between the ages of 25 and 59, 36 percent work, 25 percent have a working husband and 25 percent rely on public assistance as their main income source.¹⁶

Tour participants identified the need to enforce the 1963 Equal Pay Act, which requires women and men to be paid equal wages for equal or comparable work. Enforcement of this Act is one step towards ensuring economic equity. Also stressed was the need for girls to be encouraged to take science and math classes and pursue career tracks that will set them on the road to higher-paying jobs. Young women also need access to the higher education and specialized training that can help women achieve economic equity and security. Currently, a woman with a bachelor's degree earns 75 percent more than one with only a high school education.¹⁷

4. Improving Access to Safe, Affordable Housing

The high cost of living in California is reflected in the difficulties families face in trying to buy a home. Throughout the state, housing costs have skyrocketed. In Los Angeles, housing prices are so high that more than 80 percent of families are unable to buy a median-priced home.¹⁸ While middle-class families struggle to buy homes, low-income families struggle to find any safe, affordable housing. Many participants noted that the only areas where low- or no-income women can afford to live have poor schools, high crime rates, no neighborhood grocery stores that stock fresh fruits and vegetables and few job opportunities. Additionally, low-income housing is often located near polluting facilities or in areas that are mixed zones, allowing industrial businesses to operate in the same area as residential housing.

5. Nurturing the Personal Development of Young Women and Girls

Repeatedly, conversations returned to the societal pressures on young women and girls, particularly the increasingly highly sexualized culture. In every Tour city, we heard stories of how gender stereotypes, especially in the media, affect young women's self esteem, body image and personal development. In the face of these societal pressures, Tour participants believe that it was more necessary than ever to increase opportunities for young women to develop leadership skills and the capacity for critical thinking. Participants cited the need for new forums for educating girls on a range of issues from sexual health to financial literacy and leadership development.



Introduction

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We are the ones we've
been waiting for.

— June Jordan

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California's New Majority

Looking across the landscape of California today, we see a population that has experienced vast demographic changes over the last half-century. No longer does any single ethnic group form a majority here. Shifts in the state's population due to immigration have infused California with a wave of women who bring a new set of sociocultural perspectives in their pursuit of personal and community goals. But will their aspirations be met with opportunity? Will they find the safety and security needed to pursue happiness? How prepared is California to meet the needs of this new demographic — the women of California's new majority? And how will women whose family histories are rooted here work together with immigrant and first-generation women to expand economic opportunity and strengthen civic involvement for all California women?

California's population more than tripled between 1950 and 2004 to over 35 million people.¹⁹ Looking ahead, more than 50 million people are expected to reside here by 2030, a population boom fueled mainly by the rapid growth of Latino and Asian and Pacific Islander communities.²⁰ Immigrant women and their families arriving from Mexico, the Philippines, Vietnam, El Salvador, Guatemala, Taiwan and Iran are at the forefront of the boom; they have helped raise the proportion of Californians born abroad to 26 percent,²¹ an internationalism not surpassed since the arrival of the Irish, Italians, Polish and Chinese during the two previous centuries. Other shifts, such as declining birth rates among African American women and a steady rise in the birth rate among Latinas, are changing the composition of California's newest generation.²² In fact, 43 percent of California's children are Latinos,²³ and interracial families are becoming more and more common. In another sign of diversity, gay and lesbian families are becoming more visible: the US Census began counting same-sex unmarried partners in 1990 and found a 152 percent increase in their reported numbers in California in 2000.²⁴ All of these changes have made California a panorama of diversity, with the most varied and complex populations of all the states.

- Latinas, Asian and African American women now make up more than 50 percent of the state's female population.²⁵
- Nearly half of all youth between the ages of 13 and 24 are either foreign-born or the children of immigrants.²⁶
- Significant numbers of immigrant families from at least 66 countries around the world call California home.²⁷

To look to the future of California's women and girls is to imagine a place where inter-cultural fluency is indispensable in schools, workplaces and boardrooms, in the daily functioning of government, in electoral politics and in the non-governmental sector. We envision a California where democracy grows stronger and deeper as civil society becomes more inclusive and more responsive to diversity.

The social progress initiated in the twentieth century by movements to advance women's rights in particular

and human rights in general has reaped many rewards, with the following results:

- Women own 30.1 percent of all privately-held businesses in California, generating more than \$406 billion in sales.²⁸
- Thanks in large part to Title IX, the participation of girls and women in sports in California schools and colleges has skyrocketed.²⁹
- The number of girls enrolled in many Advanced Placement math and science courses is roughly equal to the number of boys.³⁰
- Nationally, more women than ever are graduating from advanced degree programs: 46 percent of medical school graduates are women,³¹ and 44 percent of all doctoral degrees are earned by women.³²
- California is home to two female US senators and a woman serving as house minority leader in congress.

In addition to gains in employment and educational attainment, California women have more electoral clout and more consumer power than ever before. Ten million women are eligible to vote in California, creating the possibility for gender to play a decisive role at the ballot box. Further, women are the primary consumer decision makers in 85 percent of all United States households.³³ Female spending power may be the most important story to go unreported in the financial pages.

Despite these important changes in women's lives, gender inequity continues to constrain women's choices, extract sacrifices that disadvantage the people they love and diminish the dreams of their daughters. Particularly for women of color, immigrant women, lesbians, bisexual and transgender women in California's lowest-income communities, gender bias, gender violence and the gendered nature of poverty compound the hardship of increasingly profound inequities.

Insight on Women's Needs

In 2000, the Women's Foundation of California conducted a statewide survey to assess the issues of greatest concern to women and girls in the state. The findings from that study played a critical role in the funding decisions we subsequently made and the areas in which the Foundation has grown. Five years later, we decided it was time to take the pulse of women and girls once again to recalibrate our priorities, making sure they are in line with women's priority needs and concerns.

In May 2005, the Women's Foundation of California embarked on the Road to Equity Tour. Over 23 days, Foundation staff traveled more than 2,500 miles to meetings in ten cities with more than 1,000 women and girls who shared their insights, heartfelt testimony, hunger for action and remarkable enthusiasm about the power of women and girls to change their communities and California for the better. A wide range of vantage points resulted in a rare, rich form of honest dialogue. Participants included concerned community members, women from government and public service agencies, corporate leaders, emerging and seasoned activists and representatives of philanthropic foundations.

A Statewide Agenda for Women and Girls

Through the Road to Equity Tour, the Women's Foundation of California is proud to provide leadership to

foster the creation of an agenda for California created for women and girls by women and girls.

Developing an agenda that will guide advocacy and policy priorities for California's women and girls is a tall order. Any such agenda must illustrate and respond to the myriad ways in which the problems women face arise from the intersections of such issues as education, housing, the environment, transportation and health care. "Health," for example, goes far beyond the need for health care. Health is also the result of good jobs and clean air, of access to sex education that informs and empowers and the chance to develop the self-esteem that accompanies positive body image. To isolate one issue from another is to overlook the ways in which seemingly diverse issues interact to expand or contract women's options.

At every Road to Equity Tour stop, across differences in economic status, race, geography and country of origin, women articulated many shared values and priorities. Throughout the state, the energy and enthusiasm of the participants, along with their diversity and the caliber of the dialogue that took place, underscored for the Foundation that women today are every bit as concerned as generations past with women's rights, roles and responsibilities. Conviction and passion for gender equality remain strong, and these are expressed in hopes as diverse as the origins and experience of the women who hold them. But rather than isolating gender as a sole axis from which to measure women's status against that of men, many women use their consciousness of gender inequity as a bridge to understanding the many other related forms of injustice that deprive individuals of their human rights. The power of viewing social and economic issues through a gender lens lies not simply in making women's issues visible, but in making interdependence undeniable.

The Pages Ahead

This report is intended to reflect the voices of women who desire to work together to build a healthier, stronger, more secure future for women and girls in California.

The first section of the report describes women's and girls' top concerns and provides additional data to illustrate the social significance of each priority area in its broader context. The latter half of the report is devoted to solutions. We offer a series of recommendations — proposals for action and change that reflect the vision of the Women's Foundation of California, along with strategies for advancing a statewide agenda for women and girls. We also provide an overview of some of the infrastructure already in place — community organizing, policy advocacy, leadership development and greater investment in women and girls — that must be built upon in the years to come.

The agenda we are proposing goes beyond the work of the Women's Foundation of California. We hope this report will also serve as a valuable tool for other philanthropists as well as for local and state policymakers, community-based organizations and individuals who wish to join our vision of building a more just and equitable California for all.

The Road to Equity Tour was an amazing journey. We thank every individual who joined us along the way. We welcome your comments and feedback about this report and the agenda we are presenting for women and girls in California. You can email your comments to agenda@womensfoundca.org. Progress along the road to equity will require the energy of thousands of women and men. The journey forward continues.

What Women Think: Results of the Tour

The Road to Equity Tour was an historic journey designed to discover the comprehensive needs of California's women and girls and their families. Two years in the making, the Road to Equity Tour took the Women's Foundation of California to ten California cities and counties — San Francisco, San Jose, Fort Bragg, Redding, San Diego, Riverside, Santa Ana, Bakersfield, Fresno and Los Angeles — during May 2005.

This report details information gleaned from Listening Sessions held at the Tour stops. The Listening Sessions were designed to engage participants in meaningful and productive dialogue and in brainstorming action items and potential solutions to key issues of concern.

This report also incorporates data obtained through a separate survey that was completed by 770 individuals. Some respondents were Tour participants; others accessed the survey on the Women's Foundation of California website, where it was posted throughout May 2005. Taken together, the Listening Sessions and survey responses provide critical information about the issues women identify as most significant in their communities and the strategies they believe are most likely to create equality for women and girls in California.

Tour participants ranged in age from 13 to 80. Sixty percent of the participants were white; 40 percent were women of color. The tour was designed to include stops in rural, urban and suburban areas, with the result that nearly half of those who attended were from urban areas, while 33 percent were from suburban neighborhoods and 18 percent from rural communities. Thirty-seven of California's 58 counties were represented.

At each listening session, participants seated at roundtables of eight to twelve people (including a facilitator and note-taker) spent approximately 75 minutes identifying key issues of concern and brainstorming potential solutions. Trained facilitators guided the participants to choose one or two of the key issues to focus on, then led the group through steps to consider specific strategies, identifying at least three actions to address the chosen area of concern. Detailed notes were collected on all of the issues and strategies discussed. At the conclusion of the roundtable sessions, the participants reconvened as a large group. A spokesperson from each table presented the main issue addressed and one key action item proposed.



Key Issues for Women and Girls in California

Tour participants reflected the remarkable demographic diversity that is California, and their concerns covered a wide range of issues, from health, violence and economic opportunity to the personal development of young women and girls. Strikingly, participants at each stop made an effort to locate connections between individual concerns. They repeatedly suggested that the social, political, economic, community and family issues that affect women and girls are interrelated. Moreover, they emphasized the need to address these interconnections when developing recommendations and solutions for redressing the problems they identified.

One dimension of the participants' interest in interdependence surfaced prominently in the listening sessions. In contrast to an ethos of individualism foremost in so many policy debates — discussions about tax rates, for example — with its focus on individual benefits and individual sacrifices, Tour participants tended to be concerned with “we” — all of the people who make up the vast “community” called California. They presented an alternative logic emphasizing that investment in the good of the whole is what allows each person to reach her or his individual potential, and that the strength of our communities must be a collective pursuit.

Out of the roundtable process, participants identified priority issues and needs they believe most affect the lives of women and girls in California. Participants' diversity was reflected in their response on priorities. For example, the most important issue among African

American respondents was ensuring women's economic security, whereas the most important issue among whites, Asians and Pacific Islanders and Latino/as was improving access to affordable, quality health care. In turn, we found that the most important issue for urban respondents was improving access to affordable quality health care, while the most important issue for suburban and rural women was reducing violence against women and girls. Acknowledging the interconnections among these various priority issues, we have grouped them broadly into five categories for the purpose of discussion in this report:

- Improving access to affordable, quality health care
- Reducing violence against women and girls
- Ensuring women's economic security
- Improving access to safe, affordable housing
- Nurturing the personal development of young women and girls

In the following section, we address each of these primary concerns. In subsequent sections, we discuss solutions participants identified and make recommendations for formulating beneficial actions in these areas.

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Women are powerful and resilient; working together, we can accomplish great things.

— 25-year-old woman from Contra Costa County

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Five-Year Comparison of Issues Concerning Women in California

In 2000, the Women’s Foundation conducted a survey of women throughout the state to poll their top issues of concern. This table compares the top five issues cited in the 2000 survey to the top five issues cited by women participating in the Road to Equity Tour survey and roundtables in 2005.*

2000		2005	
1.	Access to health care*	1.	Access to health care
2.	Public schools (quality education)	2.	Reducing violence against women and girls (Ranked 6 out of the top 20 issues in 2000)
3.	Controlling the spread of AIDS	3.	Ensuring women’s economic security
4.	Ensuring equal pay for equal work*	4.	Improving access to safe and affordable housing (Ranked 11 out of the top 20 issues in 2000)
5.	Higher education* (greater access to higher education for women)	5.	Personal development of young women and girls

*The Women’s Foundation invested resources in several issue areas that were identified as priorities in the 2000 survey. The Economic Development and Justice Fund is a donor circle created to address economic inequities facing women and girls. The Initiatives Forum provided grants, training and capacity building to mobilize women and girls in California to advocate for policy change in the areas of women’s health and the environment and organizing for better pay and benefits for women.

IMPROVING ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE, QUALITY HEALTH CARE

Participants discussed the need for health care that was affordable, multicultural and comprehensive.

Access to affordable and reliable health care

The need for women and girls to have access to affordable, quality health care was a concern that was echoed throughout the state. California’s health care system must respond to the needs of residents who are ethnically, geographically and economically diverse.³⁴ Poverty, the high cost of health insurance, the decrease in public resources and a decline in employer-sponsored health insurance coverage combine to keep many Californians from obtaining the health care services they need for preventive, acute and chronic care. Because women are often the primary caretakers of children as well as of elderly and ill or disabled family members, they are doubly affected by the inadequacies of the health care system. Nearly two-thirds of women indicated that they alone were responsible for health care decisions for their family, and 83 percent had sole or shared responsibilities for financial decisions regarding their family’s health.³⁵

In 2002–2003, the most recent year for which statistics are available, 21 percent — or approximately 3.6 million women in California — lacked health insurance.³⁶ Put another way, one in six California women between 18 and 64 years old does not have health insurance. Most likely because they are not covered by insurance, women are more likely than men to report delaying medical care because of expense.

For those who are eligible for health insurance, high cost can make it prohibitive. From 2000 to 2003, premiums for employment-based health insurance grew by 31.3 percent.³⁷ Today, the average annual cost of health insurance for a family of four is more than \$10,800 — exceeding the annual income of a minimum wage earner.³⁸ Health insurance costs can put a financial strain even on women who earn a solid middle-class income. A national report in February 2005 found that half of the people who filed for bankruptcy did so because they lacked the means to pay their medical bills.³⁹ Most of these people were middle-class workers with health insurance.⁴⁰

Tour participants highlighted the need for more public education about existing programs and their eligibility requirements. For example, Medi-Cal, California’s Medicaid program, currently provides health insurance coverage to more than 6.6 million low-income Californians.⁴¹ However, in 2003 approximately 204,000 children and 244,000 non-elderly adults who were eligible for Medi-Cal were not enrolled.⁴² Without even the rudimentary coverage of Medi-Cal for eligible Californians, these thousands are likely to go without any options for health services outside of expensive emergency room health care.

Multicultural health care

Tour participants in all areas spoke of the necessity for the health care system to embrace and address the needs of immigrant women and undocumented workers. The need for hospitals and clinics to provide both multilingual and multicultural care is especially important in California, where people of color make up more than half of the state’s population and one in every six residents is not a US citizen.⁴³ In Orange County, for example, 29 percent of the area’s three million residents were born outside the state and 41 percent speak a language other than English at home; in Santa Clara County, 45 percent of the area’s almost two million residents are foreign-born, with the largest numbers of these immigrants coming from Vietnam, China, the Philippines, India, and Mexico; and in San Francisco County more than one-third of the area’s residents are foreign-born and close to half speak a language other than English at home.⁴⁴

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We need an integrated, comprehensive approach to women’s and girls’ health in Los Angeles and the state of California. No woman or girl should die from illness that we can screen for and prevent. Prevention matters!

— *Juanita L. Watts, MD, Regional Women’s Health Leader, Southern California Permanente Medical Group*

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Tour participants also thought government could do more to let immigrant women know what services are available to them. As an example, they point to the fact that, unlike other public aid programs that bar undocumented people from benefits, both documented and undocumented immigrant women are eligible for the Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC), which provides nutrition information and supplemental nutritious foods.

Preventive health care and awareness

Tour participants identified a need to expand access to health clinics that provide free or low-cost prevention, diagnostic and treatment services. For women of all ages, this includes access to reproductive and sexual health services, such as contraception, family planning and testing for sexually transmitted diseases. An estimated 40 percent of high school students in California are sexually active,⁴⁵ and nearly five percent of young women aged 15–19 gave birth in California in 2001.⁴⁶ In Shasta County, the birth rate for white teens is 70 percent higher than in the rest of the state,⁴⁷ underscoring why Tour participants in rural areas emphasized the need for expanded reproductive and sexual health services. Adolescents and young adults also have the highest rates of chlamydia and gonorrhea, the most common sexually transmitted infections in California.



According to the Public Health Institute, poverty is the strongest link to teen pregnancy, indicating that a population's economic status and their access to programs and services that prevent unwanted pregnancies are directly connected. California's investment in comprehensive teen pregnancy prevention and reproductive health programs in the late 1990s has had a measurable impact on decreasing both teen pregnancy rates and the rates of sexually transmitted disease.⁴⁸ Annual teen birth rates in California have decreased in the last decade. By 2001, rates in California were similar to the average in the US overall: 45.2 per 1,000 for California versus 45.8 for the country.⁴⁹ However, the California Department of Finance predicts that the combination of demographic shifts and an increase in poverty rates will result in a steady increase in teen birth rates by 2008.⁵⁰ This problem will be exacerbated by California's budget challenges and the greater cuts to state funded family planning and reproductive health programs.

In other areas of preventive health, the tendency of economically disadvantaged women to delay seeking treatment until there are signs of advanced stages of disease points to the need for early prevention efforts. Cardiovascular diseases (heart disease and strokes) are leading causes of death

among California women.⁵¹ In 2001, nationally, 57 percent of African American women between 45 and 64 were diagnosed with hypertension, twice the rate for white women of the same age range.⁵² Hypertension is one of the leading causes of cardiovascular disease. Another key concern for adult women is improved access to screening programs for breast and cervical cancer. Statewide data from 2001 shows that while 79 percent of white and African American women over the age of 40 had received a mammogram in the previous two years, only about 70 percent of Latina, Asian, and American Indian women had.⁵³ Specific subgroups have even greater discrepancies — for example, among Korean women 50 years or older in Santa Clara county in 2002, only 59 percent had had a mammogram in the previous two years. Nonetheless, this represented a steady improvement in screenings among this population since 1994.⁵⁴

At a statewide level, the relationship between women's health and the environment did not emerge explicitly as a top concern. However, a close look at the data from our listening sessions makes clear that in areas of the state where pollution is already causing chronic and life-threatening diseases, women feel that corporations and government officials should be held responsible for removing the threats from environmental pollution and cleaning up existing contamination. In Fresno, for example, which carries the undistinguished moniker of the “asthma capital” of California, one in every six children has trouble breathing;

this is three times the national rate.⁵⁵ In some Los Angeles neighborhoods, like those in the Figueroa Corridor, 54 percent of the children under the age of six receiving services at a local clinic were found to have lead concentrations in their blood above the level demonstrated to cause disabilities.⁵⁶ Participants in the state's agricultural areas were particularly concerned about the need for increased community education about pesticide drift, a problem that occurs when agricultural pesticides are blown off course and contaminate nearby areas where there are workers, housing or schools.



WOMEN'S HEALTH

The women's health movements that emerged in the 1960s transformed how women view their bodies. But women also achieved something even more monumental. By fighting for women's reproductive rights, establishing feminist health centers, expanding access to medical literature, and advocating for research on women's health, women activists literally changed the way medicine is practiced. Moreover, by teaching women how to become partners in their health care, activists set the stage for disease-specific advocacy. There is little question that the tremendous gains that have resulted from HIV/AIDS and breast cancer activism are an outgrowth of the women's health movement.

Today, women's health advocates are not only teaching women about subjects ranging from birth control to heart disease, but working in and with organizations that are fighting to hold corporations and governments responsible for reducing environmental toxins linked to chronic and life-threatening diseases like asthma and cancer.

The cutting-edge advocacy of the Women's Foundation of California's grant partner Breast Cancer Action is one example of this work. For two years, Breast Cancer Action, working in conjunction with the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics, fought vigorous opposition from the chemical and cosmetic industries to achieve passage of the California Safe Cosmetics Act. The Act, signed into law by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in October 2005, is the nation's first state law addressing the health effects of chemicals in cosmetics. The law requires, in part, that cosmetics manufacturers disclose to the state

any product ingredient that appears on state or federal lists of chemicals linked to cancer or birth defects. The Safe Cosmetics Act was also a focus of the Foundation's 2004–2005 Women's Policy Institute (WPI), which played a critical role in lobbying for its passage.

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Every woman diagnosed in California with breast cancer today faces a rising tide of environmental toxins that is clearly contributing to the increasing incidence of breast cancer and other diseases that primarily affect women. Girls are exposed to these toxins when they are still in the womb, and these early life exposures are the ones most likely to lead to later cancers and reproductive health problems.

— Barbara Brenner, Executive Director, Breast Cancer Action

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In 2005, the Los Angeles chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility and Pesticide Action Network North America, two Women's Foundation of California grant partners, worked diligently for passage of SB 600, the Healthy Californians Biomonitoring Program, which would have made California the first state in the nation to conduct a statewide biomonitoring program. Biomonitoring involves analyzing body tissue and fluids such as blood and breast milk to assess levels of exposure to natural and synthetic chemicals. Health activists faced strong opposition from business organizations such as the American Chemistry Council, the California Chamber of Commerce and the Industrial Environmental Association, which lobbied heavily against the bill. Although Governor Schwarzenegger ultimately vetoed the bill, women's health activists remain committed to fighting for legislation that will hold corporations responsible for the effects of their products on the environment and on human health.

REDUCING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

For too many women and girls, violence is a routine part of life. In 2004, California law enforcement reported receiving 186,439 domestic violence calls; 138 women in the state were killed by their husbands, ex-husbands or boyfriends.⁵⁷ Nearly 10,000 forcible rapes were reported to law enforcement in California in 2003.⁵⁸ Women make the vast majority of calls about domestic violence, and although domestic violence is found throughout the state, some areas have a much higher incidence. In San Diego County, for example, there were 21,855 domestic violence incidents in 2002, averaging 2.5 incidents every hour of every day, more than double the number of aggravated assaults.⁵⁹ In 2003, there were 8,291 domestic violence-related calls for assistance in Fresno County. Fresno County ranked number one in the number of felony domestic violence arrests in California per capita.⁶⁰ Throughout the state, Tour participants discussed the need to expand services and programs that address the root causes of violence, including poverty, cultural conditioning, and the proliferation of violent images in popular culture.



The intersection between images in popular culture and violent behavior

At each Tour stop, participants discussed the violence that has become ordinary fare in popular culture — on the Internet and television and in movies, music, music videos and video games. Since the 1950s, more than 3,500 research studies on the impact of media violence on behavior have been conducted in the US.⁶¹ All but 18 have shown a correlation between exposure to violent behavior in the media and violent behavior acted out in real life.⁶² Further, several studies have shown that violent video games desensitize children and adolescents to violence and increase their levels of aggressiveness and hostility toward others.⁶³ Tour participants echo the conclusions of these studies in their concern about the ways in which sexualized violence in particular contributes to the objectification of and violence against women and girls.

Response to victims of violence

Tour participants urged that local law enforcement agencies improve how they respond to women and children who are the victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. In addition, they recommend more outreach to undocumented residents about domestic and family violence services available to them. Regarding poor response by law enforcement, a report released in July 2005 by the California Attorney General's Task Force on Criminal Justice Response to Domestic Violence identified myriad



problems statewide and included frightening examples of local agencies that failed victims of domestic violence. Not only did agencies fail to enforce current laws, they were also shown to do little to hold abusers responsible for their actions.⁶⁴ For example, it is well recognized that a batterer can be prosecuted for violating a Family Court restraining order.⁶⁵ Yet, according to a statewide database, in some counties up to 50 percent of these orders have never been served by law enforcement,⁶⁶ leaving these batterers unaware that there are restraining orders against them. Even when served, these orders may be of little use; in all too many counties throughout the state such orders are

rarely enforced.⁶⁷ This lack of enforcement suggests that local law enforcement agencies do not take restraining orders seriously, and it provides little incentive for women to reach out to law enforcement agencies for assistance. Immigrant women face additional obstacles in accessing victim services or adequate assistance from authorities because of language and cultural barriers.⁶⁸

Preventive programs and services

Throughout the Tour, women and girls underscored the need for programs designed to prevent interpersonal and family violence and sexual assault. They highlighted the need for programs to begin in elementary school, when children are just beginning to learn about gender roles. Further, they emphasized the need to teach adolescents that domestic and sexual violence is not a women's issue, but a societal problem that has grown out of a devaluation of girls and women alongside the distorted belief that it is acceptable for men to exert power and control over others. Participants also recognized that this education cannot be addressed solely to women and stressed the need for such programs to involve adolescent boys and men. While Tour participants recognized that violence occurs in every social stratum, they identified a particular need for programs that explore the connections between family violence and poverty, unemployment, mental health and alcohol and substance abuse.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

In the 1970s, the second wave of the US women's movement began to transform domestic violence from a private issue cloaked in shame into a pressing public health concern. At that time, there was no hotline for a woman to call, no shelter in which to seek safety, no laws that would protect a woman from her partner's rage. Now, 35 years later, the domestic violence movement is a model of how grassroots, feminist activism can transform people's lives. Advocates for women who were at that time called "battered" founded shelters that provide safe housing for women and their children, established state coalitions and nationwide networks to advance their work, lobbied for hundreds of new laws aiming to stem domestic violence and played a leading role in the development of new procedures for how police respond to calls involving domestic violence.

The most significant reform to date has been the passage, in 1994, of the national Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). The result of more than a decade of intense lobbying by women throughout the country, this legislation made evident the government's responsibility to protect victims of interpersonal violence. The federal law funds services for victims of rape and domestic violence, provides funding for special training programs for police and court officials and provides for a national 24-hour hotline for battered women. Since its inception in 1996, the hotline has answered more than 1,240,000 calls.

In California, activists have helped pass dozens of domestic violence laws created to broaden the impact of VAWA and improve the lives of women and girls. One of these laws, which was a focus of the Women's Foundation's 2003–2004 Women's Policy Initiative fellows, requires that victims of domestic violence or abuse be informed that they have the right to have a domestic violence

counselor or other support person with them when interviewed by any law enforcement authority or district attorney. Other new laws include mandatory arrest policies for restraining order violations and a requirement that forms for reporting domestic violence be available in languages other than English. Family court decisions must now be made with the presumption that allowing a perpetrator of domestic violence to have custody is detrimental to a child, a dramatic policy shift decades in the making.

Throughout the state, a number of organizations have begun to educate youth and men around the prevention of violence. The Support Network for Battered Women, in Mountain View, for example, a Women's Foundation of California grant partner, is providing young women and men with leadership training to prepare them to be peer educators on domestic violence, healthy relationships, community resources and intervention strategies in Santa Clara County schools.

In recent years, the domestic violence movement has expanded to address the needs of women in same-sex relationships, facing the hard truth that women can be batterers as well. It has also raised awareness about dating violence among teenagers and elder abuse by family members as well as instilled an understanding that emotional and psychological abuse can be as damaging as a fist.

The movement is also no longer solely the purview of women nor limited to the United States. Today, a global network of organizations is working to eradicate violence by intimate partners, united by a call for universal human rights that recognizes that a fundamental requirement for women to be free and equal is the eradication of all forms of gender-based violence, including domestic and sexual violence.

ENSURING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC SECURITY

Across the state, Tour participants stressed the problems women face making ends meet. They focused particularly on women's need for economic equity, which includes access to opportunities, such as higher education and training programs, that will lead to higher wages, access to higher paying careers and enforcement of pay equity.

A living wage

Many participants mentioned the success of living wage initiatives as one promising, regionally focused, grassroots strategy to boost the incomes of low-wage workers and an antidote to inaction in raising the minimum wage at the federal level. In California, 20 Living Wage Ordinances have been adopted by city or county governments, from Sebastopol to Sacramento to Santa Monica.⁶⁹ The most recent, in the City of San Diego, requires contractors to pay employees a minimum of \$10 per hour with benefits or \$12 per hour without benefits.⁷⁰ Immigrant activists and union members have often been at the forefront of campaigns to win passage of these ordinances, frequently in the face of concerted opposition by chambers of commerce and industry lobbies.

The need for a living wage is driven, in part, by the high cost of living in California. The *Self-Sufficiency Standard for California* for 2003, released by the National Economic Development and Law Center, describes the income required by California's working families, on a county-by-county basis, to pay for the basic needs of rent, food, child care, health care, transportation, miscellaneous costs and taxes. Statewide, on average, a single parent with a preschooler must work full-time for a median wage of \$12.50 per hour (almost double the state minimum wage of \$6.75) to pay for basic household costs.⁷¹ In one-third of California counties, these families require an hourly wage above \$15 per hour to make ends meet.⁷² Even then, a single head of household would have no opportunity to build assets or to save for her own retirement or for her child's college education.⁷³

In California, low-income families are doubly stressed — not only do they face a high local cost of living, but the standard measure for determining eligibility for benefits as well as for setting state funding levels for many public aid programs is the federal poverty level, which is based on much lower national average estimates of the cost of living.

In California's economy, many two-parent households need two incomes to stay out of poverty, let alone to get ahead. But many women can find only low-paying, dead-end jobs, which



contributes to the fact that more than 10 percent of California women live in poverty.⁷⁴ Among poor women in the state between the ages of 25 and 59, 36 percent work, while 25 percent rely on public assistance as their main income source.⁷⁵

For working mothers, child care imposes additional costs. After paying for child care, there is often little money left for other basic family needs. Full-time care for a two- to five-year-old child represents almost 50 percent of pre-tax earnings for a woman working full-time at the minimum wage of \$6.75 per hour and 20 percent of pre-tax earnings for a woman working full-time at a much higher average pay of \$18.20 per hour.⁷⁶ California families with two children devote between one-fourth and one-third of their basic budget to child care.

Tour participants noted that single women often must take two or three jobs to make ends meet, which curtails their ability to care for their children. Therefore, participants emphasized, a living wage needs to go hand-in-hand with access to affordable, quality preschools, along with extended day care and child care facilities.



Higher-wage and non-traditional careers

To do more than survive in California's high-priced economy, women need jobs that pay more than the minimum wage. Tour participants pointed out that one starting point to higher wages would be economic equity; that is, ensuring equal pay for equal work, a goal that, in spite of the Equal Pay Act of 1963, has not yet been achieved. Today, among high school and college graduates alike, women earn one-third less than men.⁷⁷ This situation is in part a reflection of the fact that positions that have traditionally been filled by women pay less than those traditionally filled by men. Women need to have access to the job training that will allow them to qualify for higher-paying positions not traditionally held by women. Even in many professional positions, however, when key factors that influence earnings are taken into account — including years of work, hours of work and job tenure — women on average still earned around 80 percent of what men earned in 2005.⁷⁸

Nearly 75 percent of tomorrow's jobs in the United States will require the use of computers, but today, fewer than one-third of participants in computer courses and related activities are girls.⁷⁹ While women have made gains in terms of how many enroll in undergraduate study (57 percent), the fields they pursue tend not to be focused on math or science and tend to lead to lower-paying jobs. Studies indicate that women pursue a higher proportion of degrees in education and sociology, whereas men

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A solid education is the ticket to a better quality of life, including good jobs that pay decent wages and offer opportunities for advancement. An education can be a lynchpin not only to one's economic future but to securing your rights.

— *Luisa Medina,*
President of the Fresno Unified School District

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are more likely to major in computer science, engineering and physics, degrees that will translate into occupations in business and industry that have among the highest-paying jobs.⁸⁰

Women are highly overrepresented in the service sector, making up 69 percent of clerks and skilled and unskilled service workers.⁸¹ Tour participants expressed enthusiasm for building on a variety of strategies already in place to speed the rate at which women

are able to move into higher-wage, traditionally male-dominated jobs. For example, in San Francisco, women who are able to take advantage of basic computer skills training have succeeded in finding jobs with starting salaries that range from \$32,000 to \$45,000, a huge jump from their \$11,500 average annual salary prior to the training.⁸² Women who complete certification courses in the biotechnology industry have experienced similar success.⁸³ In traditional blue-collar trades like construction and electrical work, programs that offer access to peer networking and ongoing training have proven instrumental in ensuring that pre-apprentice, apprentice and journey tradeswomen are able to protect their jobs and advance.⁸⁴

Tour participants also spoke about the need for employers to be more responsive to the role women play in family life. Currently, only one in three workers can use paid sick leave to care for their children, while 77 percent of the lowest-paid workers have no paid sick leave at all.⁸⁵

Higher education

Tour participants underscored the role of access to higher education and specialized training as a means for helping women achieve greater economic security. Currently, a woman with a two-year associate's degree earns 28 percent more than one with only a high school education, while a woman with a bachelor's degree earns 75 percent more than one with only a high school education.⁸⁶ While increasing the number of higher-wage jobs, we need to simultaneously strengthen the education system so that young women and girls are better prepared for entering college.

Participants also discussed the need for programs that help pregnant and parenting teenagers and girls from low-income neighborhoods or rural areas to recognize the benefits an education can provide and that help them graduate from high school and get into — and stay in — college.

TOWARDS ECONOMIC EQUITY

Fifty years ago, job listings in the newspaper were categorized by gender, and those that paid best were found under the headline “Help Wanted — Male.”

In the 1960s, women elevated job segregation and pay discrimination into national civil rights issues, leading to the passage of the Equal Pay Act in 1963. This federal law was the result of relentless documentation, consciousness raising and agitation by women, many of whom were determined to regain economic ground lost by the displacement of millions of “Rosie the Riveters” from good jobs following the end of World War II.

But the Equal Pay Act quickly proved insufficient. Employers continued to pay women less than men to perform equivalent work. Emboldened by the women’s movement, women from many different employment sectors filed 50,000 complaints with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. When the agency failed to respond, a group of 28 women came together to form a new organization to work to persuade government and business leaders to prioritize economic justice for women — the National Organization for Women (NOW).

In addition to vast improvements in equal pay for equal work, women have gradually but consistently increased their overall earnings relative to men’s. Over the past 30 years, women’s earning power has risen with their overall gains in education and inroads into trades and professions traditionally dominated by men. The wage gap between women and men was 59 cents for every dollar in 1963, and 77 cents by 2002. In California, women’s wages are now 80 percent of men’s.

Women advocates, policymakers, scholars and grassroots organizers are at the forefront of new organizations, coalitions and movements that are advancing a vision of economic equity that reaches far beyond gender parity. Regional equity, for example, is an integrated approach to economic development that calls for linking economic

development with public transportation planning, affordable housing, environmental sustainability and meaningful participation by local community leaders in decision making. The goal is to ensure that growth and justice go hand in hand, a “double bottom line” solidified by community organizing that ensures accountability. LA Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE), a grant partner of the Women’s Foundation of California, is among 11 organizations pioneering regional equity strategies. LAANE’s leadership was critical in winning passage of a \$500 million Community Benefits Agreement designed to support the environmental health and economic well-being of the communities most affected by the Los Angeles International Airport expansion project.

Throughout the state, women are taking a stand to address the greatest equity challenge of our time: the widening gap between the wealthy and the poor. Here are some examples of Women’s Foundation grant partners who are doing this work:

- At **Centro Mujer** in Ventura County, immigrant women develop their leadership skills to defend their rights to a living wage and call for the enforcement of health and safety protections.
- **The Center on Policy Initiatives** helped spearhead the campaign for a Living Wage Ordinance in San Diego. Passed in 29 regions across the state, each Living Wage Ordinance directly benefits thousands, sometimes tens of thousands, of women workers.
- **WAGES** is an eco-friendly house cleaning cooperative operated by immigrant women in Oakland. The program assists low-income women by helping them develop business plans and build the assets they need to run microenterprises.

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TOWARDS ECONOMIC EQUITY (CONT.)

- **OpNet Community Ventures** is helping women to become economically self-sufficient through job training in higher-wage sectors, such as computer technology and biotechnology.
- **Tradeswomen Inc.** has helped apprentice and journey tradeswomen to advance in their jobs through access to training, peer networking and support resources.

As progress toward broader, more ambitious economic equity goals continues, women who work in many different regions, sectors and movements have the opportunity to join forces to pass statewide policies that build upon the strategies illustrated above to expand long-term economic security for more Californians.

IMPROVING ACCESS TO SAFE, AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The economic difficulties of women throughout California is reflected in the difficulties families face in trying to buy a home and in the large numbers of women and girls who lack access to any safe, affordable housing.

California's high housing cost

Throughout the state, housing costs have skyrocketed. Today, only 59.7 percent of families in California live in homes they own, the second-lowest rate in the country. San Francisco, Marin and San Mateo are tied as the least affordable housing markets in the country. Fifty-six percent of renters are unable to afford a typical two-bedroom apartment. The gap between the median income and the income needed to purchase a median-priced home continues to increase. In Los Angeles, for example, the median annual income is \$54,450, but a family would need \$94,000 in income to purchase a median-priced home (putting 20 percent down). These high housing prices exclude more than 80 percent of families from buying a median-priced home.⁸⁷

Safe, affordable housing

While middle-class families struggle to buy homes, low-income families struggle to find safe, affordable housing. Many participants noted that the only areas where some women can afford to live have poor schools, high crime rates, no neighborhood grocery stores that stock fresh fruits and vegetables and few job opportunities. Fresno has the distinction of having the nation's highest concentration of residents isolated in extremely poor neighborhoods.⁸⁸ An hourly wage of \$11.29 (167% of the minimum wage) is required to afford a two-bedroom unit in Shasta County.⁸⁹ As a result, over 2,400 children in Shasta County were either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless in 2004.⁹⁰ In Los Angeles County, an estimated 80,000 families are homeless each night, and one-third to one-half of those family members are women and girls.⁹¹

New housing developments need to include a percentage of housing at affordable rates for low-income families. Agencies responsible for monitoring redevelopment projects, especially in rural and urban communities, should find ways to create more equity in the housing market by requiring community accountability from developers to create set-asides for low-income housing units in new development projects.

NURTURING THE PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG WOMEN AND GIRLS

In every region throughout the state, participants discussed the need for attention to the societal pressures facing young women and girls, particularly the need for young women to have access to formal and informal educational programs that will give them the tools to be critical thinkers and to make healthy choices. They also want to see the initiation or expansion of leadership and mentoring programs that connect adolescent girls with strong female role models who can help them traverse the difficult terrain from adolescence to adulthood.

Educational opportunities

At every stop throughout the state, Tour participants saw education as the primary means by which young women could improve their lives and cited schools as a potential forum for educating girls on a range of issues, from sexual health to financial literacy and leadership development. But participants also recognized that for education to truly help girls achieve more, girls need to be encouraged to take courses in science, math and other subjects that will set them on the road to higher-paying jobs and successful careers. They also noted that California's education system is already overburdened and its resources strained. New forums need to be developed that can provide opportunities for young women and girls to be healthy and thrive.

Leadership and personal development

Young women do not have enough opportunities to develop leadership skills. Tour participants stressed the need for young women to have more exposure to positive role models and formal mentors. These relationships can increase self-esteem and guide girls as they set goals for their future and acquire career and life skills. Studies indicate that mentorship can have a significant impact on young women and their communities. One evaluation of an 18-month model mentoring program called Friends for Youth in Redwood City, California conducted by clinical psychologists found a series of significant changes for young women participants. These included decreased anxiety and depression, increased grade point averages, fewer missed days of school and improved measurements of self-concept.⁹²

Societal pressures

A recurring theme throughout the Tour pointed to the societal pressures young women face and the messages they receive about what it means to be a young woman in our culture today. In every Tour city, mothers expressed fears of the impact that gender stereotypes, especially in the media, may have on young women's self esteem, body image and personal development. A Girl Scouts Research Institute Survey of more than 2,000 girls found that girls' own definitions of being healthy are more related to feeling accepted by their peers than with eating well and exercising regularly.⁹³ For many, fitting in is directly related to body size, with one in four girls saying they were dissatisfied with their weight.⁹⁴ An interesting finding of that survey is that most girls are also strongly influenced by their mother's words and actions, viewing their mothers as role models and turning to them for information on how to live well.⁹⁵

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN LOCAL WOMEN LEADERS SET THEIR SIGHTS ON SACRAMENTO?

During election season, the term “gender gap” surfaces in the headlines when pollsters predict that women’s voting patterns are potentially strong enough to determine who will govern and which ballot measures will become law. Raw numbers make it likely that women will tip the balance on issues they feel strongly about: there are more women in California than men, more women registered to vote and more women who can be expected to turn out at the polls. When it comes to support for abortion rights and gun control, the gender gap widens as far as 20 percent.

But the choices women have at the polls are determined long before Election Day. To shape the rules and decisions that affect our jobs, our health, our rights and our families, women need to be in Sacramento where they can affect the day-to-day debates that determine which issues become priorities. It’s not enough to speak out. Women need to learn how to do so effectively.

This is the central objective of The Women’s Policy Institute (WPI), a public policy training program launched in 2003 by the Women’s Foundation of California. Through a year-long fellowship program, WPI is expanding the numbers of women who know the inner workings of the public policy process. Fellows learn how to research and draft bills and testify at public hearings, gaining the leadership skills they need to play a direct role in pushing women’s priorities into law.

WPI fellows are not typical lobbyists. From one hundred applicants, WPI selects a class of approximately 28 women who reflect the tremendous ethnic and regional diversity of California and who have experience in a wide range of issue areas and advocacy strategies. The fellows

work together in teams throughout the year to decide which of their own policy ideas they will pursue and how.

“This is not an academic exercise on how a bill becomes a law,” explains WPI Director Marj Plumb. “Once we hit the ground, fellows start running and get a front row seat to see the interaction of politics and policy.”

The proximity can be discouraging when the inner-workings of the policy making process gets complicated. But the upside, says Plumb, is eventually seeing a rational process in play. “People speak the truth and decision makers listen to those truths,” she says. “Over time, if you continue to show up and be on message, when an opportunity arises you can achieve change.”

In the past two years, WPI participants have played key roles in introducing and shepherding seven bills onto the governor’s desk. The following five have been signed into law; the others were vetoed or have been carried over to be reintroduced to the legislature.

The five victories to date include:

- **Education Works! (SB 1639)** improves access to community colleges for CalWORKs students and foster care youth; passed in 2004.
- **SB 1441** provides victims of domestic violence with the right to have a counselor present during any interview by a police officer or attorney; passed in 2004.
- **The California Safe Cosmetics Act (SB 484)** requires cosmetics manufacturers to disclose all ingredients in their products linked to cancer or reproductive harm; passed in 2005.

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WHAT HAPPENS WHEN LOCAL WOMEN LEADERS SET THEIR SIGHTS ON SACRAMENTO? (CONT.)

- **The Violent Video Games Bill (AB 1179)** restricts minors' access to violent video games; passed in 2005.
- **AB 1796** provides that a convicted drug felon, with certain exceptions, shall be eligible for aid under the Food Stamp Program; passed in 2004.
- Defending the California Environmental Quality Act
- Strengthening enforcement of laws that protect abortion clinic employees and women who work in shelters from violence
- Instituting "good operator" codes at liquor stores to require better lighting, cleaner stores, storefronts and parking areas and stronger fines for selling liquor to minors
- Expanding access to services for survivors of human trafficking
- Establishing guidelines for sex education programs

The 2006–2007 class of Fellows has decided on a new slate of priorities. Among them are the following:

- Improving care for pregnant inmates and their newborns

Moving Towards a Stronger California

The Road to Equity Tour revealed a number of important issues that must be addressed if women and girls in California are to have healthy and productive lives. In the areas of health care, prevention of violence, economic security, housing and personal development, there is much to be done to bring equity to women throughout the state.

The women and girls who took the time to take part in the Road to Equity Tour did so because they believe, soundly, that solutions are within reach. Their willingness to bring their perceptions, their anger and their faith to the table — to listen and to be heard — stems from a desire to turn their personal passion for the well-being of women and girls into public dialogue and visible, tangible progress. Participation was not merely an exercise in democracy, but inspired by the knowledge that the information collected would be used by the Women's Foundation of California to put forth a series of priorities for California's women and girls.

The histories of the tour participants — of work, immigration, motherhood, feminism, resilience — guided the discussions and the priorities that emerged. **The resolve that echoed throughout the Tour was this: it's time to connect issues, connect movements and connect "individual responsibility" with interdependence.** The project of achieving a stronger California is a social responsibility, one that will require a great deal of involvement and perseverance. The women who took part in the Road to Equity Tour are able and willing to take up the challenge. Indeed, many of them have decades of experience as seasoned advocates. They are ready to join forces as advocates for a common agenda, an interconnected vision of progress. With sufficient momentum, it need not take a generation to turn this vision into reality.

The Road to Equity: Looking Ahead

The participants in the Road to Equity Tour represent a determined fraction of Californians ready to exercise leadership to enact bold solutions addressing the comprehensive needs of women, girls and their families. Behind them are many more women and men who share our belief that we can and will make California a more equitable place.

Substantial evidence shows that in many arenas a majority of Californians share the primary concerns voiced by the Tour participants. According to a March 2005 Field Poll, Californians rate the well-being of children as their primary concern and cite education, health care and the cost of living among the top five concerns. Women show higher levels of concern in these areas than men.⁹⁶

Given that the constituency of support for “women’s issues” is broad and deep, how can we best channel public opinion into public advocacy, legislative progress and the means to strengthen broad-based social movements led by women? How can Californians who give primacy to the concerns of women work together across “issue silos” and sectors to embrace innovative approaches that cross public and private, non-profit and corporate spheres and go far beyond political partisanship? How can the women of California’s new majority drive a statewide agenda in the coming decade that builds on the movements that have come before and that can be built on by our daughters?

The Women’s Foundation of California sees four core strategies as central to the success of a statewide agenda for women and girls: movement building, leadership development for women and girls, policy advocacy and increasing investments in programs that benefit women and girls.



SUCCESS STORIES

The work of several grant partners of the Women's Foundation of California was showcased during the Road to Equity Tour to provide inspiring examples of promising models that community-based organizations are using effectively to raise awareness and shift perceptions and resources in favor of change. Among these were the following success stories, which illustrate the four core strategies the Foundation suggests pursuing to improve the lives of California's women and girls.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING FOR MOVEMENT-BUILDING

The Rural Poverty Water Project, Kern County

Driven by women, this rural project in Central California is working to ensure that low-income communities and communities of color in this region have safe and affordable drinking water. The project provides training and legal assistance to grassroots groups — most of them made up of predominantly women — in localities that disproportionately bear the burden of pollution and environmental hazards. Through its work, the project builds the skills and leadership of a base of women activists who will be able to sustain the work in the years to come.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

Women's Policy Institute (WPI), statewide

The Women's Policy Institute is the Women's Foundation's year-long policy advocacy training program designed to provide women throughout the state who are already leaders within community-based organizations the opportunity to enhance their skills as leaders, policy shapers and experts. In the last two years, WPI classes have developed ideas for legislative bills and worked with other advocates to support or shepherd 16 pieces of legislation. Of those, eight have become law; three others are being carried over into another legislative session for consideration. See page 28 for the WPI wins.

Because these strategies overlap and feed the efficacy of one another, increasing investment in them over time will produce a larger pool of young women and experienced leaders whose efforts intersect — as well as mitigate actions and practices that are harmful to women and girls. Together, the issue expertise, local knowledge and breadth of skills that women and girls develop through these types of programs will constitute an overarching network of capacity to drive movements for equity that incorporate gender as a central concern.

CHANGING POLICY THROUGH ADVOCACY

The Center on Policy Initiatives, San Diego

The Center uses community organizing as a central means to identify the most pressing community concerns and build a bottom-up constituency to press office holders for fairer public policies. Most recently, the Center spearheaded a successful four-year advocacy effort to improve the economic security of low-income women in the region. The campaign resulted in a guaranteed living wage of \$10 per hour, with benefits, to employees under city contracts.

INCREASING FUNDING FOR PROGRAMS THAT BENEFIT WOMEN AND GIRLS

The Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (CAST)

Programs specifically geared toward women and girls continue to receive a small proportion of philanthropic dollars nationally (7.3 percent),⁹⁷ and funders often neglect programs that address controversial and little-seen issues. This was the case with CAST, a pioneer in the movement to end sex trafficking and forced labor practices in the United States. Based in Los Angeles, CAST is the first US-based organization to offer a comprehensive set of programs to assist in the shelter, recovery and economic well-being of survivors of trafficking. Its activities include social services, legal services and advocacy training, along with support to help women testify in the criminal prosecutions of traffickers.

A Statewide Agenda for Women and Girls: Five Recommendations

As a result of the Road to Equity Tour, the Women's Foundation of California has outlined a statewide agenda comprising five recommendations to address the most pressing needs of women and girls in California:

- 1. THE NEED FOR UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE HAS REACHED CRITICAL PROPORTIONS.**
- 2. END THE EPIDEMIC OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS.**
- 3. ENSURE PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY FOR ALL.**
- 4. END POVERTY AND CLOSE THE ECONOMIC GAP.**
- 5. NEXT GENERATION LEADERSHIP IS IMPERATIVE.**

In the following section, each recommendation is discussed in terms of action steps for three key stakeholders — funders, policymakers and activists — working toward building a future where California's women and girls and their families can thrive.



Detailed Recommendations and Action Items

RECOMMENDATION 1

THE NEED FOR UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE HAS REACHED CRITICAL PROPORTIONS.

The Women's Foundation of California believes that addressing the need for access to affordable and reliable health care begins by recognizing the *right* to health care and involves strategies that improve health care systems and closes the gaps on health disparities. We believe that one important step to achieve this goal is to eliminate the complexity and administrative expense associated with financing the current health care system by establishing statewide universal health care. In addition, we must work to improve the health of California's women, girls and families by addressing the root causes of health disparities, especially as they affect low-income communities of color and rural communities. It is necessary to consider how economics, geography, race, genetics, gender and environmental factors operate together and separately to contribute to health disparities in the state. We therefore recommend the following specific actions toward building a healthier California for all:

- Policymakers and community advocates should support universal health care coverage for all Californians (currently proposed in Senate Bill 840).
- Community organizers should help raise public awareness and mass support for universal health care policy in California by educating and organizing diverse audiences (faith-based communities, civic and community groups, schools and so on).
- Funders should invest in culturally appropriate, community-based prevention — including prevention education, screenings, clinic-based and mobile services, and outreach, particularly in low-income communities of color, immigrant communities and rural areas.
- Policymakers should continue to vote for and enforce policies that protect water and air quality throughout California, especially in urban and rural regions of the state, where pollution and environmental toxins have been linked to disease, chronic illness and birth and developmental disorders.
- Funders should continue to invest in leadership development opportunities for community-based health educators, organizers and advocates, especially in low-income communities and communities of color.
- Funders should invest in public education campaigns that raise awareness of health care services available to low-income and immigrant residents of California.
- Policymakers should continue to support and implement policy that secures comprehensive sexuality education, evaluation and implementation in California (as currently proposed in Senate Bill 71).
- Community leaders and funders can promote and support local organizing campaigns that may have positive effects on health, including affordable full-service supermarkets with expanded fresh fruit and vegetable offerings (preferably organic), farmers' markets in low-income neighborhoods and broad access to safe parks and trails that encourage exercise and healthy, active lifestyles.

“

I think we need to go beyond our comfort zone, we need to lobby for laws, more of us need to vote, we need to build a political presence, speak out and exercise our people power. We know how to do this. Let us not use politeness as an excuse for not speaking out. Consider the possibilities!

— *Kathy Anderson, founder and executive director,
Shasta Regional Community Foundation*

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RECOMMENDATION 2

END THE EPIDEMIC OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS.

Domestic violence was once considered a private matter, but thanks to many decades of public education, activism, legislation and the creation of shelters and services, it is now viewed as illegal, immoral and preventable. Just as we know how to break cycles of family violence, we know more than ever about the root causes of violence and the circumstances that exacerbate its likelihood. It is also important that we expand the dialogue of violence prevention to include addressing the prevention of sexual assault. Extreme gender stereotyping and the objectification of women in a hyper-commercialized media environment may contribute to violence against women and girls both in the media and in real life.

The desire for safety has little to do with ideology. With vision and leadership, we can advance anti-violence strategies that are proven to increase the well-being of women and girls and their families and support the right of all women and children to exist in an environment free from abuse and violence. Here are recommendations on places to begin:

- Policymakers and funders should support the development and institutionalization of programs whose goal is primary prevention of domestic and sexual violence through changing social norms. Working with men and boys as well as women and girls, these programs should also mobilize all elements of the community (schools, faith-based communities, businesses and community-based organizations) to reduce violence.
- Policymakers, advocates and activists should work together to develop policies, systems and programs that enable victims of domestic violence to be economically independent.
- Policymakers and advocates should continue to work to enforce the Violence Against Women Act to ensure that adequate resources go to violence prevention, education and victim services.
- Funders should invest in and implement media campaigns whose goal is to prevent violence and change social norms around domestic and sexual violence. Some of these campaigns should encourage men to take action in opposition to violence against women and children, with a special emphasis on reaching non-English-speaking communities of color and rural communities.

- Community-based organizations and advocates should develop strategies specifically for immigrant populations and those who interact with them. These strategies should include educating women in immigrant communities about their rights and service options and educating service providers, law enforcement officials and the legal systems not only about the laws but also about the specific needs of immigrant communities and those in them who suffer violence. This effort should include providing immigrant women with economic opportunities so they don't remain in abusive situations for economic stability.

RECOMMENDATION 3

ENSURE PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY FOR ALL.

As evidenced by the energy and enthusiasm of the participants on the Road to Equity Tour, women seem to be little affected by the apathy and cynicism that is purportedly rampant among California voters. Women in rural areas, coastal towns and urban centers came together on this Tour to share ideas and strategies because they were asked to take part and because they had reason to believe that their participation would be valuable. But their willingness also sprang from a desire to take a direct role in a new initiative to prioritize their concerns. By design, the Road to Equity Tour was a welcoming and authentically democratic forum. If there is a message to be taken from the success of the Tour, it is that, given a genuine opportunity and a climate that reflects their values, women will embrace the chance to expand and deepen their participation in civic life. The Women's Foundation of California believes all Californians should have the opportunity to participate in the democratic process and the knowledge to advocate for their basic human rights. The following actions can help expand the number of women who are actively engaged in the public policy process:

- Community-based organizations and advocates should encourage and support women to run for public office and connect them to existing training programs that train them to do so.
- Funders should support grassroots organizing that links voting and civic participation with community organizing around specific issues of concern.
- Community-based organizations and advocates should link efforts to engage communities of color and low-income communities in the political process with efforts to promote the political leadership of women as advocates and policymakers in an effort to create broader diversity in all political arenas.
- Funders and community-based organizations should develop and support initiatives that focus on educating and involving young women in the political process by, for example, placing young women as staff, mentees and interns on political campaigns.



RECOMMENDATION 4

END POVERTY AND CLOSE THE ECONOMIC GAP.

Women in California are well aware of the challenges they face in meeting the cost of living in many areas of the state, and many have a solid grasp of the causes of the slow, steady decline in earning power experienced by a large population of women who are identified as “working poor.” But rather than wait for an economic boom to build and crest, more and more women are becoming aware of innovative strategies to bolster economic security through community organizing campaigns, such as the Living Wage Campaigns that have experienced a strong series of successes nationally and particularly in California. In fact, women on the Tour cited community organizing as one of the strategies they believe to be most effective in combating poverty. When it comes to gaining the skills to advance in the workforce or manage money effectively, participants cited education and training as top strategies for enhancing women’s economic opportunity. The significance of public transportation, affordable child care and financial assistance for low-income women working to earn postsecondary degrees was also often repeated. The Women’s Foundation of California supports the

right of all Californians to earn a living wage and have access to education that allows them to achieve economic security. The Foundation recommends the following strategies for improving economic security for low- and no-income women:

- Policymakers should adopt an “education first” approach to reducing poverty. California’s economic development and workforce development systems should align their job-training goals and fund and deliver effective education and training services for the lowest-income and low-income individuals.



California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKS)

is a state welfare program that gives cash aid and services to California’s needy families and children. There are a number of criteria that dictate eligibility and the amount of services or aid a family receives, including citizenship, income level and the number of children in the household.

Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs)

are responsible for assisting the governor in performing the duties and responsibilities required by the federal Workforce Investment Act of 1998. This act rewrites federal laws governing workforce preparation programs, including job training, adult education and literacy and vocational rehabilitation, replacing them with streamlined and more flexible systems.

- Policymakers should reform the CalWORKs systems so that education and training to reduce poverty become top priorities. Policymakers should appropriate adequate funding through CalWORKs for education and training services for all CalWORKs participants. Successful CalWORKs outcomes should be linked to participants' economic self-sufficiency rather than their removal from the CalWORKs case load.
- California should increase funding for local Workforce Investment Boards and other job training and placement resources specifically for jobs in higher-wage growth industries where employers need a trained workforce and there are opportunities for career advancement.
- Policymakers should continue to appropriate funding for subsidized child care for low-income families.
- Funders and policymakers should partner with community-based transportation justice advocates to work for equitable regional and state transportation funds so that low-income workers who depend on public transit have reliable, affordable and safe transportation services to job centers.
- Policymakers should increase the minimum wage to \$8.75 per hour and index it annually. (While \$8.75 per hour is realistically not adequate to bring an individual living in California to self-sufficiency, this is a first step to move politically closer to establishing a living wage in California.)
- The state should adopt a statewide Living Wage Ordinance that applies to all state employees and contractors.
- Counties and the state of California should systematize the allocations, oversight, monitoring and evaluation of private development projects that are subsidized with public funds in order to increase accountability of development projects.
- Public and private funders should fund programs that link industry-specific education and training with employment in job-growth sectors to ensure long-term economic stability.
- Private funders and the state of California should leverage each other's financial strengths to adequately fund economic development and workforce development programs both to train workers and to attract and develop sustainable higher-wage jobs.
- Public and private funders should support collaborations among public agencies, community-based organizations and private companies to maximize the benefits to low-income workers available from the federal Earned Income Tax Credit.

A Living Wage Ordinance

requires businesses that have a contract with a city or county government or those who receive economic development subsidies from the locality to pay wages that are above federal or state minimum wage levels. The rationale behind the ordinance is that city and county governments should not contract with or subsidize employers who pay poverty-level wages.

Earned Income Tax Credit (EIC)

is a tax refund designed to offset the loss of income from payroll taxes owed by low-income working families. The EIC is a refundable benefit for working people who earn low or moderate incomes. By providing a return on federal income tax paid, the EIC serves to reduce the tax burden, supplement wages and provide work incentives for low-income and moderate-income families.

RECOMMENDATION 5

NEXT GENERATION LEADERSHIP IS IMPERATIVE.

The Women's Foundation of California believes that supporting and developing the leadership skills of progressive activists and organizations is key to building a progressive movement in California. By investing in individual, organizational and community development, we strengthen both organizations and the emerging leaders that organize and lead campaigns, provide services to create systemic change in their communities and advocate for policy to build communities that thrive. We understand that organizations become more effective when they are given financial and technical support to strengthen their infrastructure. The Women's Foundation of California is therefore committed to developing the leadership, advocacy and movement-building skills of social justice activists and leaders, particularly young and emerging leaders. This strategy ensures that girls have the opportunity to become key players in building social movements that focus on addressing the needs and creating opportunities for low-income women and girls and women and girls of color.



- Funders should foster leadership by investing in experiential learning, skills-building, networking and other leadership development opportunities for young women and women of color to work to increase the number of leaders from these constituencies.
- Funders can provide assistance that strengthens organizations through capacity-building and movement building, including developing skills in advocacy, sharing and deepening critical political, social and economic analysis, building our base of support and working in coalitions.
- Funders should support programs, such as community convenings, that provide opportunities for intergenerational and cross-cultural interactions and discussion.
- Funders and community-based organizations should support and provide opportunities, such as sabbaticals, to sustain individual leadership development, allowing time for thorough reflection and long-term visioning.
- Policymakers should help support the development and capacity of community organizers and activists to participate in crafting and changing public policy.

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