OVERVIEW

In 2016, The California Endowment (TCE) set out to identify strategies that would amplify the impact of its past investments in girls and women-focused efforts. Through research and analysis, Urban Habitat captured the voices of local girls and women on key issues such as leadership development; cross site, regional, and statewide convenings; and support for a network.

The purpose of the research was to identify how to improve their leadership skills, heal from community trauma, and build a movement around regional and statewide health equity campaigns.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The needs assessment included three main components:

1. GIRLS AND WOMXN REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES

As Table 1 shows, 250 girls and women from 53 organizations attended the Assemblies. Figure 1 shows the ethnic and racial diversity of the participants. Approximately one in three attendees were staff from participating agencies and close to 70% were community members. Over one-third of participants were under the age of 21, and 17 participants reported being gender non-conforming. The following languages were spoken at the Assemblies: English, Karen, Khmer/Cambodian, Somali, Spanish and Vietnamese.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Girls & Womxn Assembly Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Assemblies</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number Participating Organizations</td>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Participants</td>
<td>250</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Community Members</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Staff from Organizations</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Youth (ages 15 to 21) Participants</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Adult Participants</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Gender Non-Conforming Participants</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Race & Ethnicity of Participants

- Latina: 55.6%
- African American: 16.6%
- East African American: 15.6%
- Asian: 11.2%
- White: 2.4%
- American Indian: 0.4%
- Multi-Racial: 0.8%
- Other: 0.4%
NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Findings

• **Guiding Values:** Participants from across all regions were unanimous in articulating a series of values that should guide the girls and womxn leadership network:
  – Intersectionality and inclusiveness
  – Multigenerationality
  – Community-led
  – Transparency

• **Network Structure and Operations:** Across the board, Assembly participants agree on several points pertaining to the structure of the Network and how it should be operationalized.
  – Coordinating organization and dedicated staff with strong facilitation skills
  – Steering committee made up by at least 50% youth and gender non-conforming representatives.
  – Network of both individuals and organizations
  – Network holds regular in-person local and regional meetings
  – Network holds a statewide annual conference
  – Strong communications infrastructure with online, virtual presence
  – Network should be built on what already exists

• **Network Benefits:** The following findings are related to how girls and women see themselves benefiting from having a network:
  – A space to develop a common policy agenda.
  – A space to heal, engage in self-care, and establish a support system.
  – A leadership pipeline
  – A place to share information and access to resources
  – A place to work with boys and men

• **Skill-Building Needs:** One of the questions posed to Assembly participants during the break-out sessions was related to the skills that they would like to further develop in order to further propel them as leaders. The most commonly cited skills are listed below.
  – Community Organizing and Policy Advocacy
  – Leadership Development
  – Communications to share their personal stories and improve their public speaking skills
– Collaboration to learn how organizations or individuals from different cultures or backgrounds that have different perspectives can work together towards common goals

– Social Justice

  – Community Accountability/Restorative Justice/Conflict Resolution/Anger Management
  
  – Grant Writing and Financial Management
  
  – Self-Care
  
  – Asset Mapping

• **Supports for Girls and Women:** Lastly, girls and women attending the Assemblies were asked what would make it possible for them to be fully engaged in network activities. Their responses included:

  – Stipends, internships, or other kinds of financial incentives
  
  – Childcare and other services for parents with young children
  
  – Language interpretation services
  
  – Accessibility in terms of the location and times
  
  – Food that is culturally relevant
  
  – Transportation or transportation reimbursements

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**FOCUS GROUP AT SISTERHOOD RISING LEADERSHIP RETREAT**

The Sisterhood Rising Leadership Retreat (SRLR) brings together about 70 female youth leaders between the ages of 15 to 19 from TCE’s 13 BHC sites for a week at a nature wilderness camp to experience healing and empowerment. TCE has been hosting the camp for the past three years.

A total of 12 young women attending the 2017 camp participated in the focus group session which lasted two hours. Of the focus group participants, 83% (10) were Latinas, and 17% (2) were Asian. In terms of BHC site, 33% (4) of the focus group participants were from Santa Ana, 25% (3) were from Coachella, and each of the following sites had < 1% representation (1 representative): City Heights, East Salinas, Long Beach, Merced, and Oakland.

**Findings**

Campers identified the following elements for ways of connecting across BHC sites:

• A space where they can continue healing and growing as leaders beyond the summer camp.

• A focus on racial equity.

• A leadership pipeline to groom girls to run for office.
• Train adults to work well with youth.
• Be intentional about intersectionality to make sure it’s inclusive to all.
• They believe that using the terms “girls” and “women” can make some feel excluded.
• Create space to work with boys and men on issues of gender equity, masculinity, sexism, and the culture of violence and rape.
• They really appreciated that their voices were heard and incorporated into camp programing.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

A total of 31 interviews were conducted with leaders from a variety of sectors including girls’/women programs, policy advocacy, and philanthropy. Overall, key informants were very supportive of TCE’s idea to launch a girls and womxn leadership network. Most agreed that there is great momentum and that the time is ripe for this effort, given the current environment. Several grantmakers would be open to further discussing with TCE opportunities for collaboration if priorities are aligned with their focus such as capacity building and organizing support, domestic violence, and low-wage workers.

On the other hand, key stakeholders also voiced some concerns about TCE launching this effort as the BHC initiative is about to end, and had questions about what would happen to the Network after 2020. Some also raised that there are already established networks of girls and women that could be funded instead of starting something new.

• Lessons learned from working with low-income girls and women from key stakeholders
  – Recommend that the voices of those most impacted have to be at the table from the beginning.
  – Most low-income women need to be subsidized to be able to fully participate. With increased incarceration of men of color, women face the additional burden of economic survival.
  – Most non-profit organizations do not have a gender lens. This is a challenge in Asian American and Pacific Islander communities, and other communities of color.

• Networks that work
  – Have clear expected outcomes, expectations, and criteria for the network upfront
  – Select an organization that has strong coordinating skills and capacity, including skilled facilitators to create a safe and inclusive space
  – Be sure to have shared leadership and dedicate sufficient time for relationship building for organizations to share their work
  – Important to get other funders at the table
• **Possible challenges**
  
  – Be prepared to sustain the network long term if you want to attain real policy changes.
  
  – Fundraising as a network is very challenging. It is essential to build a culture of cooperation and not competition among Network organizations. Navigate distrust of philanthropy by being transparent.
  
  – It can be a challenge to bridge silos between LBTQ, women of color, and White women, intergenerational gap, and geographic differences.
  
  – Having two different target groups (organizations and individuals) will require different approaches. Executive Directors working with low-income girls and women need support too.
  
  – Be prepared in the event that participating girls and women need help dealing with crisis including frequent home relocation and change of contact information.

• **How TCE can build upon current investments**
  
  – The 250 women and girls who participated in the Assemblies are “low hanging fruit.” Give them the opportunity to build the Network through developing relationships.
  
  – Support existing successful networks like California Women’s Policy Institute.
  
  – Explore partnership opportunities of training and mentoring with organizations like EMERGE, Latinas Lead, and sororities for women of color that provide services.

• **How to ensure inclusiveness**
  
  – Do not name it “women and girls.” Some suggested using the spelling “womxn.”
  
  – Be intentional and have explicit goals about inclusiveness by having representative of the broad range needs to be part of the early conversation and woven in throughout of the project (vision, mission, values statements).
  
  – Special outreach needed to the transgender community.
  
  – Integrate intergenerational and intersectional approach.

• **Other Recommendations from Key Informants**
  
  – Start with an action oriented and results-oriented goal, not just process.
  
  – Take the long view to allow mistakes and try again.
  
  – Be flexible and develop an organic process to align with a place-based strategy.
  
  – Have a good external evaluation for regular feedback.
 Coordinate with existing Boys and Men of Color work and apply their lessons learned from the program. Include boys and men in discussions.

**Key Take-Aways from the Research**

Establishing a statewide girls and women leadership network would be important and timely. Based on the results of the needs assessment, girls and women from participating BHC sites are eager to get involved and other funders are interested in potential partnerships. In the policy arena, there is momentum and focus on gender equity issues.

In particular, the assessment found the need for:

- A safe space that is diverse and inclusive in terms of ethnicity, race, sexuality, gender identity, and age.
- Regular convenings of girls and women across California.
- An organization with the capacity and skills for coordinating a network.
- Build off of existing organizations working programmatically to develop activities which include creating a shared analysis to move to collective action; networking, power building, and relationship building; and skills-building trainings.
- Support for participation with stipends, interpretation services, childcare, travel, lodging, and meals.