East Contra Costa STRONG Collaborative Fund

Learnings from the Field

2022-2023

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STRONG

(Strengthening Tenacious Resilient Organizations and Nurturing their Growth)

East Contra Costa STRONG Collaborative Fund
Findings from the Field Learning Brief

BACKGROUND

This learning brief shares findings from the STRONG Funder's learning process conducted by Community Centered Evaluation and Research between September 2022 and May 2023. This learning process documented the needs and assets of ECCC residents and nonprofit organizations, and identified opportunities to increase racial equity and economic justice in ECCC. This learning process also served to guide the implementation of STRONG's roadmap, inform future decision-making, and serve as an accountability tool for the STRONG Fund.

The learning process was informed by interviews with ECCC nonprofit organizations, past Emerging Leaders of Color cohort members, public sector officials, and STRONG Funders as well as a secondary literature search of recent listening campaigns in ECCC to incorporate resident voices and perspectives. Appendix A includes a description of the methodology undertaken.

Advisory Subcommittee

The Learning process was guided by an Advisory Subcommittee composed of ECCC community residents and nonprofit staff and leaders. The Advisory Subcommittee provided feedback on all elements of the data gathering process, identified opportunities and challenges for the data gathering activities, and shared nuance and context about the ECCC community and residents. Advisory Subcommittee Members included:

- Danny Espinosa, formerly with Monument Impact and Regional Suburban Organizing Project
- Elissa Robinson, JAIDE Conservation Collective
- Jose Rizo, Village Community Resource Center
- Rev. George Cummings, Faith in Action East Bay
- Susun Kim, Family Justice Center
- Allison Magee, Zellerbach Family Foundation

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STRONG COLLABORATIVE FUND

The East Contra Costa STRONG Collaborative Fund was launched in 2015 to increase racial equity and economic justice in East Contra Costa County (ECCC) by strengthening the capacity of nonprofits, supporting leadership development, and building community voice and power. The STRONG Collaborative Fund is guided by the following three goals outlined in its 2021-2024 Roadmap.

- Invest in **leadership and capacity building** towards racially equitable changes in policies and institutions, especially around issues most important to BIPOC communities.
- Support **community-led narrative change** efforts.
- Increase **public/philanthropic investment** in ECCC.

The following six principles guide the STRONG Collaborative Fund's goals.

1. **Center the voices** of Black, Indigenous, and people of color.
2. **Model equitable collaboration** between funders and community stakeholders.
3. **Leverage relationships** with community leaders and decision makers.
4. **Seek out unmet opportunities** ripe for investment.
5. **Stay flexible** to meet emergent opportunities.
6. **Commit to long-term work** within the ECCC community.

APPRECIATIONS

We sincerely appreciate all the individuals who contributed their expertise, wisdom, and time during the Learning process of the STRONG Collaborative Fund.

Advisory Subcommittee Members

› Danny Espinosa, formerly with Monument Impact and Regional Suburban Organizing Project
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Nonprofit Organizations Serving East Contra Costa County

1. Bridge Builders
2. Bonafide Sisterhood in Antioch
3. Contra Costa Immigrant Rights Alliance
4. El Timpano
5. Ensuring Opportunity
6. First 5 Contra Costa
7. Hijas del Campo
8. Lift Up Contra Costa
9. Mobility Labs
10. One Day at a Time
11. Renaissance Enterprise Center
12. RTL Cohort Member
13. Rubicon
14. The Latina Center
15. S.H.A.R.E Community
16. Stand Together Contra Costa
17. Safe Return Project
18. United Latino Voices
19. Urban Habitat
20. Village Keepers African American Wellness Center

Emerging Leaders of Color

› Danny Espinosa, Sheriffs for Trusting Communities
› Jose Rizo, Village Community Resource Center
› Eduardo Torres, ACCE
› Taylor Sims, Richmond Community Foundation
› Cynthia Garrett, Hope Solutions
› Gaby Castro, Village Community Resource Center

Contra Costa County Public Officials

› Marla Stuart, Director of Employment and Human Services Department
› Gilbert Salinas, Equity officer, Contra Costa Community Health
› Shanelle Scales-Preston, Pittsburg Mayor
› Sukari Beshears, Director of Human Resources for the City of Brentwood

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INSIDE THIS LEARNING BRIEF

This learning brief is organized into four sections that share the key findings captured through the learning process.

Section 1 provides a community snapshot of East Contra Costa County, including demographics and pressing needs.

Section 2 describes the network of nonprofit organizations serving ECCC and highlights the primary services they provide, their needs, and philanthropy's role in supporting the network of organizations serving ECCC communities.

Section 3 outlines key opportunities ahead shared by stakeholders interviewed for the STRONG Collaborative Fund.

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1 ABOUT EAST CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

ECCC is home to 318,900 community members and consists of four major cities, including Antioch, Brentwood, Oakley, and Pittsburg, as well as the unincorporated areas of Bay Point, Bethel Island, Discovery Bay, and Byron.[1]

Racial and Ethnic Composition of ECCC

Between 2000 and 2015, just like Contra Costa County as a whole, ECCC experienced a shift in its economic and racial/ethnic composition. During these 15 years, ECCC saw its most considerable growth in the Latino population.[2] Between 2000 and 2015, the Latino population grew from 18% to 25%, while the White population decreased from 58% to 46%.[3] Similarly, during this period, the Asian/Pacific Islander population increased from 11% to 17%.[4] Data from 2019 shows that there is nearly an equal split between the Latino and White populations, with 35% of the population identifying as Latinx and 36% identifying as White. Smaller proportions of the population identify as Black (14%), Asian/Pacific Islander (11%), or Native American/Alaskan Native (0.4%).[5]

REGIONAL SNAPSHOT

→ 318,900 individuals live in ECCC.

→ Between 2000 and 2015, the White population decreased from 58% to 46%.

→ From 2000 and 2015, the Latino population grew from 18% to 25%.

→ As of 2019, the racial/ethnic breakdown for ECCC is as follows:
- ◆ 35% Latinx
- ◆ 36% White
- ◆ 14% Black
- ◆ 11% Asian/Pacific Islander
- ◆ 0.4% Native American

→ 13% of individuals live in poverty, compared to 6% for Tri-Valley/Contra Costa County.

→ 18% of children live below the federal poverty level.

→ 15% of adults in do not have a high school degree, compared to 6% for Tri-Valley/Contra Costa County.

[1] John Muir Health. (2019). Community Health Needs Assessment Retrieved from https://www.johnmuirhealth.com/content/dam/jmh/Documents/Community/JMH_2019CHNA_FinalReport_12.18.2019.pdf

[2] East Contra Costa Alliance. (2020). A Report on Community Needs, Opportunities, and a Path Forward for the East Contra Costa Community Alliance. Retrieved on February 9, 2023 from https://www.ecccalliance.org/publications

[3] East Contra Costa Alliance. (2020). A Report on Community Needs, Opportunities, and a Path Forward for the East Contra Costa Community Alliance. Retrieved on February 9, 2023 from https://www.ecccalliance.org/publications

[4] East Contra Costa Alliance. (2020). A Report on Community Needs, Opportunities, and a Path Forward for the East Contra Costa Community Alliance. Retrieved on February 9, 2023 from https://www.ecccalliance.org/publications

[5] https://www.johnmuirhealth.com/content/dam/jmh/Documents/Community/JMH_2019CHNA_FinalReport_12.18.2019.pdf

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Economic Shifts in ECCC

The cities of Antioch, Pittsburg, and Bay Point "grew rapidly in the early 2000s, as lower- and middle-income households sought affordable homeownership and jobs in the area's growing construction and service sectors."[6] When the recession crisis of 2008 hit, these areas saw a rise in poverty due to the decline in local economies, high rates of foreclosures, and a decline in property taxes. More specifically, in the 2000s, poverty rates increased by 33%, with "most ECCC communities experiencing a doubling of poverty between 1990 and 2010."[7] Currently, 13% of individuals in ECCC live in poverty, compared to 6% for Tri-Valley/Contra Costa County.[8] Moreover, 18% of children live below the federal poverty level, and over half of the school-aged children in ECCC are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches.

Exhibit 1. Households in ECCC Receiving Public Assistance[9]

ECCC Cities	CalFresh Households	CalWORKs Households	Medi-Cal Households
Antioch	10,042	1,617	25,494
Pittsburg	5,815	798	16,661
Oakley	2,127	240	6,533
Brentwood	2,087	237	7,265

A substantial number of households in ECCC rely on public assistance programs. As displayed in Exhibit 1, over 10,000 households in Antioch and over 5,000 in Pittsburg receive CalFresh, which supports low-income individuals who meet the federal income eligibility requirements and want to access healthier food for their families. In Antioch, over 1,000 households are CalWORKs recipients;

[6] Urban Displacement University of California, Berkeley. (n.d). Rising Housing Costs and Re-Segregation in Contra Costa County. Retrieved March 2023 from https://www.urbandisplacement.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/cc_final10_26.pdf

[7] East Contra Costa Alliance. (2020). A Report on Community Needs, Opportunities, and a Path Forward for the East Contra Costa Community Alliance. Retrieved on February 9, 2023 from https://www.ecccalliance.org/publications

[8] https://www.johnmuirhealth.com/content/dam/jmh/Documents/Community/JMH_2019CHNA_FinalReport_12.18.2019.pdf

[9] https://cocogis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=2ca98abf67424678ae766410aaa0d3fd

in Pittsburg, 798 households receive this type of public assistance. Over 10,000 households in Antioch and Pittsburg rely on Medi-Cal for their health insurance.

Pressing Community Needs
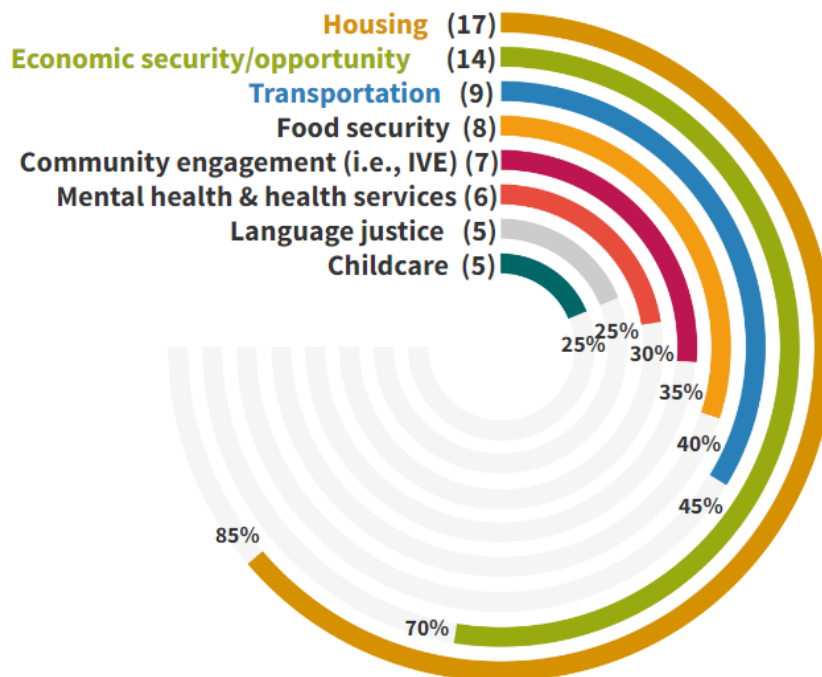
Critical needs among community members in ECCC include access to affordable housing, opportunities for economic advancement, transportation, food security, and increased opportunities for community engagement.

Access to affordable and secure housing was elevated as a top need for families and residents in ECCC across all the interviews conducted with nonprofit organizations, emerging leaders of color, and public officials. Stakeholders interviewed also emphasized that access to economic mobility opportunities, transportation, food security, and increased opportunities for community engagement are critical needs in the region, particularly for historically underserved communities, including undocumented individuals, Black and Latinx communities, and youth. These needs and others identified by nonprofit organizations are described below.

➔ **Secure Affordable Housing**

The largest proportion of stakeholders interviewed (85%) indicated that ECCC community members and families need access to secure, affordable, high-quality housing as well as pathways for homeownership. Nonprofit organizations were vocal about the ongoing and ever-growing housing crisis in ECCC. They expressed concern over the lack of housing affordability, renter protections, and pathways for homeownership. According to stakeholders interviewed, these conditions lead families to live in unsafe and substandard housing dwellings and can cause homelessness among the most vulnerable residents in ECCC. As one nonprofit organization described, "*The universal unmet need right now is housing. We don't have enough affordable housing dwellings for individuals or families. What results from that is stacking and having multiple, multiple families in one space that's not really designed for that many people. There is this concept that it is more affordable to live rent in ECCC. Well, that may be true, relatively speaking, but based on wages and costs, there is still very much a gap in what's affordable.*"

> *"ECCC is still the most affordable place to live in the region, but it is increasingly becoming unaffordable. So stabilizing rents and just case eviction is what people need. People need access to more low-income housing not just affordable housing because affordable could mean $1,950, but people need access to housing they [can] afford based on their income."*
>
> **- Nonprofit organization**

The lack of affordable housing in ECCC leaves families and community members entrenched in a cycle of poverty. Nonprofit organizations stressed a need for increased housing justice advocacy in the region that includes implementation of just cause eviction ordinances, rent stabilization efforts, augmenting awareness of tenants' rights, and increasing the stock of low-income housing. In this regard, another nonprofit organization shared, "*ECCC is still the most affordable place to live in the region, but it is increasingly becoming unaffordable. [S]tabilizing rents and just cause eviction is what people need. People need access to more low-income housing, not just affordable housing, because affordable could mean $1,950, but people need access to housing they [can] afford based on their income.*"

➔ Economic Security and Financial Mobility Opportunities

Nearly three-quarters of nonprofit organizations (70%) underscored the need for economic security among community residents through higher-paying employment opportunities closer to home. Several nonprofit organizations also shared that many of the employment options available in ECCC are focused on the service sector and do not pay a living wage. According to nonprofit organizations, community members in ECCC need access to career jobs that will provide long-term economic security for families. Additionally, the high cost of living, skyrocketing housing costs, and scarcity of local higher-paying jobs push many community residents to endure long and drastic commute times to access better economic opportunities outside ECCC. Most stakeholders interviewed noted that the limited employment options in ECCC come at the high cost of residents not having enough time to engage or feel connected to their communities. A nonprofit organization staff member echoed the sentiment of stakeholders interviewed:

> "*The thing that we continue to come back to is access to work that is close to or in proximity to [the city] we live in. The experience of commuting is quite common, and what has become acceptable to commute to get a 'living wage' is ridiculous. Many residents are willing to travel [outside of ECCC], but they trade being connected to their community, with their child, or their local school boards.*"

Nonprofit organizations and emerging leaders of color interviewed shared a need to create accessible employment pathways for community members. Nonprofit organizations explained that while higher-paying career jobs may be available in ECCC, the rigid education requirements limit the number of individuals who can apply for open employment opportunities. As stated by one nonprofit organization, "*[Community members'] education level doesn't allow them to find work that is better paid, and they always have to work in construction or house cleaning.*" Another nonprofit organization emphasized that employers in ECCC "*need to take chances on people who don't meet their employment qualifications. Some people haven't even graduated from high school, but it doesn't mean they [don't have experience].*"

➔ **Accessible and Affordable Public Transportation**

Approximately 45% of nonprofit organizations elevated access to rapid, affordable public transportation as a critical need in ECCC. Nonprofit organizations were vocal about the limited public transportation infrastructure in ECCC. Nonprofit organizations explained that the lack of a robust transportation system in ECCC impacts mobility, access to employment, food security, and community belongingness. For instance, one nonprofit organization stressed that in ECCC, *"it takes longer than one hour to catch each bus...the frequency of transit isn't oriented to working people when you have to wait an hour for every bus. The transit system isn't sufficient for working poor people."* Stakeholders interviewed explained that the lack of affordable and reliable transportation creates an added barrier for families and residents that further threatens their economic security.

➔ **Food Security**

About 40% of nonprofit organizations identified food security as a pressing need among individuals and families in ECCC. The lack of economic opportunities, rising housing costs, lack of affordable transportation, and scarcity of grocery stores contribute to the rising food insecurity for families and residents in ECCC communities. In response to the growing food insecurity, nonprofit partners shared the numerous efforts they engage in to meet the food access needs of families. For example, some organizations provide free food baskets or groceries to farmworker communities, Latinx communities, and low-income families.

➔ **Community Engagement Opportunities**

Over one-third of nonprofit organizations (35%) vocalized the need to implement community engagement strategies in ECCC. According to nonprofit organizations, many residents in ECCC have been displaced or pushed out from their native communities to the rural suburbs, where there are limited community engagement and community organizing efforts. *"There isn't any aggressive voter engagement, voter registration or voter education or trainings or even community engagement...one of the biggest needs in East County is belonging. We've all been essentially pushed out of our communities in San Francisco, Richmond, and Oakland...we've been pushed out of the urban center into the rural suburbs. We've been pushed*

out of the center where all the nonprofits are doing all the [community engagement] and organizing," shared a stakeholder.

Nonprofit organizations stressed that community engagement is critical to building political power and a sense of belonging in ECCC. In addition, stakeholders also noted that community engagement could be a useful strategy to create greater awareness about the services that are available in the community and to strengthen voter engagement and education.

➔ **Health and Mental Health Services**

Roughly one-third of nonprofit organizations (30%) emphasized that community members need access to health and mental health services. Nonprofit organizations expressed that within our communities, particularly Black and Latinx individuals lack access to routine healthcare services due to the lack of culturally relevant healthcare services and the limited staff who represent the backgrounds of community members served. The lack of trust in healthcare providers among communities of color is rooted in medical institutions' historical maltreatment of people of color. This historical and generational mistrust prevents community members from trusting healthcare agencies and accessing the medical care they need. For this reason, nonprofit organizations urgently emphasized the importance of medical institutions hiring residents that represent the backgrounds of vulnerable populations because "*the county agencies are primarily [White] and you may see one to two African Americans or Latinos, and for the most part how they engage people is different. Having a person of color in decision-making positions can really assure people that you are going to get what you ask for.*" Another nonprofit organization shared that the lack of affordable health care insurance prevents older adults, particularly Latinx older adults, from accessing routine health screenings like mammograms or pap smears.

According to nonprofit organizations, access to mental health services is critical for parents and youth in ECCC. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, nonprofit organizations noticed an increased demand for mental health support for children and youth. As one nonprofit explained, "*Mental health is one of the top three needs in services that are requested. Since the pandemic, we have noticed more parents reaching out to their children.*

But then it turns into the entire household [getting help] because some parents don't realize they can also use some support."

➔ **Language Justice**

One-quarter (25%) of nonprofit organizations believed that language justice is a top need for community members in ECCC. Nonprofit organizations believe that greater language justice supports, such as providing access to interpreters or information translated into community members' home languages, is critical to increasing access to resources across ECCC. As one nonprofit emphasized, *"A lot of folks out here in ECCC are Spanish-speaking, and that can be difficult when you go to [access] different resources and you don't have translators, or you don't have your son or daughter to translate for you."* For another nonprofit organization, language justice is also inextricably

Language Justice

The right for every individual, regardless of their immigration status, identity, or ethnic/racial background, to speak, understand, and be understood in their native language, their language of preference, or a language they feel comfortable communicating and articulating their experiences.

-National Institute of Health

tied to community engagement and strengthening community members' knowledge of existing services and resources. This service provider felt that as part of community engagement efforts, *"there needs to be a robust culturally responsive approach, which includes language justice. In order for community members to understand what the services are, there needs to be outreach in multiple languages."*

➔ **Affordable Child Care**

Approximately one-quarter (25%) of nonprofit organizations uplifted access to high-quality, affordable child care as a need for working families with children. With the high cost of living, particularly the rising cost of housing, and as more ECCC residents find employment out of the area and face longer commute times, the need for high-quality, affordable child care is increasing for families. Single-income families and single-parent households face a greater need for affordable child care. A nonprofit organization shared, *"Child care [is a need] related to this need of working adults having to travel far to get a job…*

particularly for a family with one parent." Stakeholders interviewed pointed out that the lack of affordable childcare options forces families to rely on their older children to provide care for their younger children, further limiting the time youth have to participate in extracurricular or recreational activities. In this regard, the nonprofit organization stated: *"We have a lot of kids that can't participate in different programs or sporting activities because they are raising kids. To be able to get your kid into child care, it's like $1,200. The childcare thing is tough. We have a lot of kids that are raising kids."*
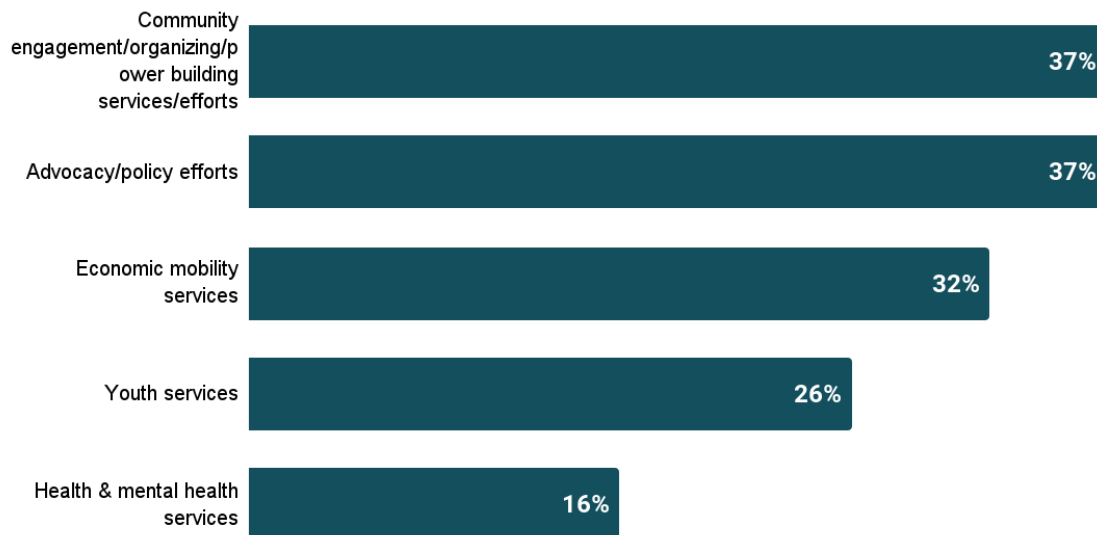
2 NETWORK OF NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS IN ECCC

Services Provided by Nonprofit Organizations

To explore the network of nonprofit organizations that serve the ECCC, the Learning and Evaluation team interviewed 20 nonprofit organizations that serve families and residents living in ECCC. The larger proportion of nonprofit organizations (53%) interviewed provide a variety of direct services to the ECCC community, while the remaining 47% focus on the provision of advocacy and community engagement services.

As illustrated in Exhibit 3, the primary services offered by the nonprofit organizations that participated in the learning process were community engagement, organizing, and power building (37%) and advocacy and policy (37%), followed by economic mobility services (32%),

Exhibit 3: Services Provided by Nonprofit Organization Interviewed (n=20)

Service	Percentage
Community engagement/organizing/power building services/efforts	37%
Advocacy/policy efforts	37%
Economic mobility services	32%
Youth services	26%
Health & mental health services	16%

youth services (26%), and health and mental health services (16%).

Needs of Nonprofit Organizations Serving ECCC

Nonprofit organizations identified their most pressing organizational needs to continue their work supporting the ECCC community. The most common categories of need across the 20 nonprofit partners interviewed were accessing funding opportunities (95%); infrastructure support (50%); capacity building and leadership development (40%); increased partnership and collaboration across ECCC organizations (25%); and physical infrastructure or organizational facilities (25%, see Exhibit 4). Further details and analysis within each of these major categories are reported below.

Exhibit 4: Primary Needs of Nonprofit Organizations Interviewed (n=20)
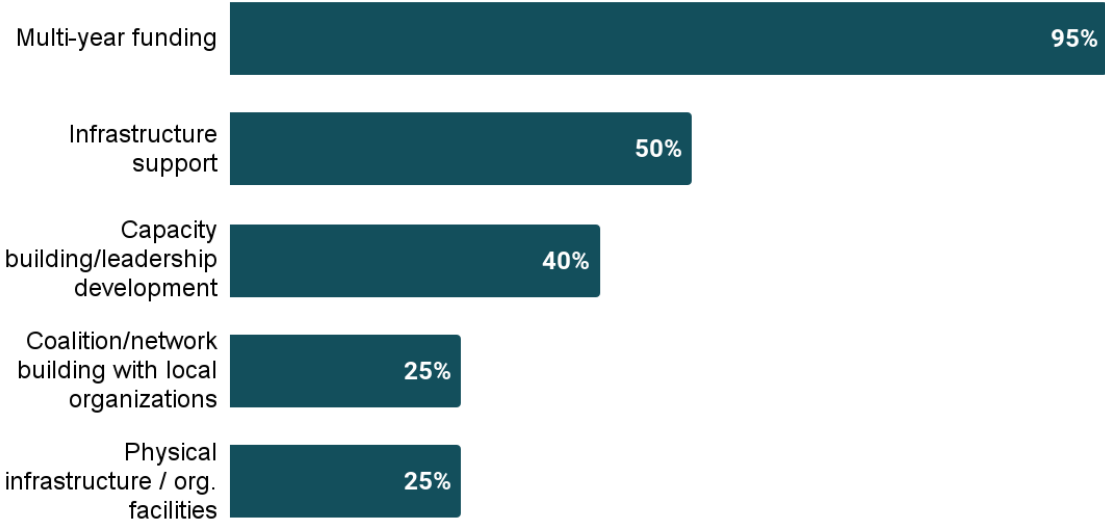
Need	Percent
Multi-year funding	95%
Infrastructure support	50%
Capacity building/leadership development	40%
Coalition/network building with local organizations	25%
Physical infrastructure / org. facilities	25%

➔ **Accessing Funding Opportunities**

The need for additional funding and assistance in accessing funding opportunities was by far the most frequently mentioned by the nonprofit organizations interviewed. Almost all nonprofit partners (95%) mentioned the need for support in accessing these opportunities, including general and unrestricted funding and grants for community members. Within this category, 75% of interviewees specifically mentioned that they needed funding to hire staff and to provide staff with benefits packages and a livable wage. Nonprofit organizations shared that funding for hiring and salaries would help decrease staff turnover. Interviewees reported that *"in the nonprofit structure, everyone moves around to get increases in salary,"* and *"a lot of organizations can't compete [...] to recruit people to come into this career."* In fact, across nearly all interviews conducted, the need for liveable wages was raised as a top concern that often leads to staff turnover among nonprofit organizations.

> *"It is an extreme learning curve to be a small nonprofit and to need to apply for grants, and to know how to do that, and to have the time to do that. It is incredibly hard to navigate."*
>
> *– Nonprofit Organization*

Nonprofits also reported needing funding to expand or support existing programs, including legal services and language equity programs. Slightly over one-third (35%) of all interviewees needed funding for program support and explained that *"[they] are short in the number of staff to implement new programs,"* and *"the problems [their organizations face] are very, very real, yet the money has dried up."*

➜ Infrastructure Support

Half of the nonprofit organizations (50%) mentioned that their organizations could benefit from infrastructure support. For smaller organizations, this support included basic tasks like structuring general operations and setting up their respective boards. A grassroots nonprofit organization stated: *"[We need support] to maintain a volunteer system, leadership development, and power building; [for our organization] those words are foreign, and we don't know*

how to implement these systems." Other nonprofit organizations needed support with accounting services, data entry, communications, and marketing. For example, one organization requested technical and accounting support, and shared that they *"don't have an IT department [...] we don't have a Salesforce administrator"* and that they needed to find *"somebody to guide us in the leadership of operations [and] nonprofit accounting."* A few nonprofit organizations also shared that their infrastructure and staffing needs included community engagement efforts, addressing backlogs and waitlists, and language translation and interpretation.

Additionally, 25% of interviewees mentioned requiring funding specifically for technology and IT support, including access to computers and projectors. One organization needed *"proper IT consultants that [they] can trust"* and expressed the added worry about how to secure their participant data, particularly for organizations that serve immigrant communities. Finally, organizations also requested *"newer collaborative IT tools and trainings"* to enable them to move into new virtual spaces and capabilities, as well as training with these collaborative IT tools.

➔ **Capacity Building and Leadership Development**

A desire for capacity building and leadership development was mentioned by 40% of the nonprofit organizations interviewed. Nonprofit organizations are keenly interested in receiving coaching, mentoring, staff development, and training on emotional intelligence. The need for capacity building and leadership development was most common among grassroots nonprofit organizations. As one grassroots organization volunteer shared, *"The big piece is around leadership development. We are all volunteers – to move us forward, we need paid staff and more training."* Larger nonprofit organizations most commonly identified leadership development and promotion from within as a need in their respective organizations, especially relating to supervisory and managerial competencies: *"When you have opportunities for staff to be promoted into management or supervisory positions, of course, everyone wants that opportunity because it's more money, right? But how do we also ensure that*

that individual has the skill set to be successful?" Furthermore, nonprofit organizations noted that access to training opportunities for staff was seen as an incentive that fostered staff retention. Some interviewees also perceived that training was needed at the highest levels, including for CEOs and Executive Directors, in the areas of leadership and emotional intelligence.

Emerging Leaders of Color who participated in the interviews also strongly voiced a need for capacity building and leadership development, particularly for leaders of color in the community who bring lived experience. *"There are not many opportunities within Contra Costa County and definitely not ECCC for leaders of color. There is not a lot of opportunity for growth and leadership positions. Young people of color are put and kept in organizing positions, and that is why we see young leaders take positions in Alameda, San Francisco, and Los Angeles,"* shared an interviewee. Emerging Leaders of Color highly suggested that funders work closely with their nonprofit grantees to better understand

> "We find [that staff] in our team actually seek employment elsewhere because they move to another organization with more funding [and] training programs... where they can actually develop and become more complete participants in this work."
>
> **-Nonprofit Organization**

the racial and ethnic diversity among their leadership and leadership transition plans. An Emerging Leader of Color elaborated, *"Are funders also having conversations with the White leaders to know what their transition will look like and how they are preparing for the future? How are they working on inclusion? These are difficult conversations that we avoid, but we need to have hard discussions and push ourselves."*

➔ Coalition and Network Building in ECCC

The need for collaboration and partnership was raised by 25% of nonprofit organizations. As well as the sense of community and support

> "All these big nonprofits with the big infrastructure aren't in relationship with the smaller groups on the ground... is there a way to create a sense of relationships and networking? Bringing people together? A requirement of partnerships, if possible, because people don't know how to work together yet."

fostered by inter-organizational partnerships, interviewees pointed out that increased collaboration could reduce a sense of scarcity around resources, encouraging nonprofits to partner rather than compete. As one partner put it, *"People have been in their own bubble doing their thing for so long, and there is no real network, then philanthropy says 'Here is money,' and it creates a sense of scarcity because people are [not collaborating]. We don't want people to fight for the money. We want people to be in relationship [so] they don't have to fight over it."* Nonprofit organizations called out that in addition to competition for resources, siloes often exist simply due to the lack of awareness that exists among organizations of the services that their fellow colleagues provide. While nonprofit organizations acknowledge that there are several coalitions and network formations across Contra Costa County, this is not the case for ECCC, and they welcomed opportunities to connect with other organizations and strengthen their collaborations. As one Emerging Leader of Color noted, *"we need to have opportunities to get to know the nonprofit organizations that serve ECCC and then be able to strategize together."*

Public officials also agreed that there is a need to increase collaboration among nonprofit organizations in ECCC. As one public official stated, *"We are all in our siloes. We need to figure out how to get people together. We have a lot of people trying to do the same thing, but we can [serve] many more people if we were all working together."* Public officials recognized that the lack of resources in ECCC often created competition among nonprofit organizations and noted that county resources often *"poured into west county."*

Nonprofit organizations also called out a need to increase collaboration between funders and nonprofits and between large and small nonprofits. Some perceived that funders take a blanket view of the region and might not consider the details of each organization's contributions. One

> "[ECCC nonprofit organizations] are broken up and siloed. A big reason for this is that the majority of the funding goes to West Contra Costa County. Nine out of 8 dollars goes to west county and that is a big gap."
>
> -Public Official

organization recommended that *"funders can help inform coalition building and be a thought partner ... as long as the coalition is led by the people on the ground."*

Despite nonprofit organizations' desire for collaboration, interviewees reported that they lack the funding, staff time, and capacity for coalition building. Nonprofits recommend that coalition-building efforts in ECCC take into account the funding that is needed to set up the structure and consider resourcing organizations to identify staff who can meaningfully participate in networking and convening opportunities. One interviewee stated, *"We have to figure out where the gaps are and where are the overlaps [in the ECCC service provision network] and build up a structure... [we need] a dedicated staff person to do the power mapping, the research, the policy tracking."*

➔ **Physical Infrastructure and Organizational Facilities**

 Several interviewees (25%), particularly grassroots organizations, also communicated needs for physical infrastructure and facilities, in addition to the organizational or technological infrastructure and capacities described above. Specifically, these needs included a mobile unit for a wellness center, access to affordable storefronts or business real estate, and locations to hold meetings. Safe and affordable physical spaces in central locations would enable nonprofits to scale up and increase their capacity to serve the community.

Philanthropy's Role in Meeting the Needs of Nonprofit Organizations

Nonprofit partners, Emerging Leaders of Color, and public officials also discussed the roles that philanthropic organizations could play in supporting nonprofit organizations serving ECCC. The most common roles for philanthropy were in providing multi-year general operating support; building relationships with funders; creating and strengthening connections among nonprofit organizations serving ECCC; funding power building and organizing; and supporting nonprofit organizations' communication and marketing capacity. Further analysis and detailed suggestions within each of these categories are provided below.

- **Multi-year General Operating Support and Staffing.** Especially for smaller nonprofit organizations, support with general operations and staffing is necessary. Half of the organizations interviewed (50%) reported that they needed funding to "*build capacity within the organization*" and "*help [pay their staff or volunteers] a livable wage.*" General, unrestricted funding is highly desirable because it allows organizations to make rapid decisions and respond to immediate needs. An interviewee stated that "*unrestricted funding is something that I know all organizations won't turn down because, specifically for our work here, that allows us to have the nimbleness to create different programs.*" Emerging Leaders of Color also elevated the dire need for multi-year funding, sharing that "*[they] do not have the capacity to compete with organizations outside of ECCC because of the level of p*ay." Funding directed for staffing purposes could include costs of hiring "unique staff" to build capacity on multiple projects, as well as stipends or funds for mentorship and coaching opportunities.

- **Building Relationships with Funders.** A major theme that emerged, and one about which many of the nonprofit partners spoke eloquently and in detail, was a shared desire to build relationships with funders. Interviewees discussed potential strategies for relationship building and shared that philanthropic organizations could help by creating exposure, holding networking events, and informing funders about small nonprofits. Through individual visits or group events, nonprofits suggested that funders should "*allow us to present about our program and consider us when you have funding available.*" Additionally, "spreading the word" and creating "introductions to other sectors" would be helpful strategies, as would sharing "connections or partnerships."

  Introductions and connections were also seen as key components of relationship building that philanthropy could help facilitate; an interviewee suggested, "*You can introduce us to new funders, you can introduce us to new donors, get one of us on a panel, invite us to a funder briefing.*" Having the ability to meet foundation representatives or simply share the name and mission of the nonprofit would be extremely beneficial, especially for small nonprofits. Philanthropists could create "*networking opportunities for small nonprofits or some sort of email list where we can share our names with funders.*"

Nonprofit organizations also felt it was important for philanthropists to develop a true connection with the work they fund, in order to understand the needs of the community. One nonprofit sensed *"a disconnect"* and said that philanthropists need to be more connected, *"coming to direct action or poem night – or coming to a symposium."* To this interviewee, a higher level of engagement would show that the philanthropic organization cares about the work, "not just a tax write-off." Other interviewees suggested: *"Come out to do site visits and engage more directly with the organizations and community,"* and *"meet the foundation staff to get an idea of what it is all about,"* rather than prescribing funding opportunities based on externally perceived needs. These types of direct relationships and engagement were seen as demonstrating true investment in the work.

> "[Philanthropists] can help by visiting us so they can learn about us and our programs, so they can learn how people are benefiting and how we are resolving difficult situations."
>
> – Nonprofit Partner

- **Build and Strengthen Connections Among Nonprofit Organizations.** Stakeholders interviewed suggested that philanthropists could also help the nonprofits build connections among the nonprofit organizations serving ECCC. One specific suggestion for helping nonprofits to make connections was for philanthropic organizations to create networking or introduction opportunities between the multiple nonprofits they fund. Although lists of funded organizations are available, philanthropists are *"not necessarily making those connections within those organizations."* Intentional connections that highlight the mission of nonprofits that might not know of each other's work would be helpful in building networks.

Public officials also suggested that philanthropy can play a role in bringing together different sectors to engage in conversations about the needs facing communities with the intention of creating shared goals and outcomes. *"A role for the STRONG Collaborative Fund or other philanthropic*

> "We can definitely support each other, [but] if we don't know each other's work… all we would see is "Oh, this is a list of who got this funding." We can reach out, but if there is some kind of connection, it's always nicer."
>
> – Nonprofit Partner

groups is to be a convener of regular meetings that include representatives from all sectors to build a shared understanding of the need and create shared goals," shared a public official interviewed. They went on to state that while *"the government has a lot of power, coalition building among nonprofit organizations is important to have a powerful block of nonprofits to interact with government to balance the power dynamics that exist."*

- **Funding Power-Building and Organizing.** Several nonprofits that were interviewed suggested funding power-building and organizing work and supporting the workforce and organizations that focus on this work. Perceived needs within organizing work included streamlining multiple coalitions to address overlapping issues more efficiently: *"There's a coalition for racial justice, then there's a coalition for immigrant justice. There's a coalition for reimagining public safety and there's loose coalitions around housing, not to mention the service providers have coalitions... all of our issues are interconnected and we're spending so much time going to these meetings."* Another interviewee pointed out that power building and community-driven work are *"huge topics"* that can be operationalized in many ways, and wondered when it comes to identifying *"power building"* work, *"What are the STRONG Funders' criteria? ...You can do beautiful work [that] is not organizing and power building oriented."*

- **Support Nonprofit Organizations' Communication and Marketing.** To support organizations, especially small nonprofits, in securing funding and attaining sustainability, interviewees suggested that philanthropists could help with marketing, communications, and exposure. For example, one interviewee said, *"Create ways to spotlight the work we do. It's been hard to tell our own story because we've been small but mighty for so long... We got a small grant for communications, and I was able to hire a communications manager, but now we need to sustain that position so we can tell our story and attract different funding opportunities."* Many smaller organizations may not be well-known in the communities they support, as another nonprofit partner related: *"One of the struggles that we're having as an organization is brand recognition to the community. We don't do a really good job at marketing ourselves in the community."* This partner suggested that providing training on marketing and the use of communications dollars would be helpful in teaching organizations how to market

themselves to a broader audience. As well as targeted communications and marketing, mere exposure was seen as helpful. Nonprofits needed help *"spreading the word that we're here."*

Additional Roles for Philanthropy

In addition to the frequently mentioned categories discussed above, nonprofit partners had the following suggestions for additional ways in which philanthropy could support their organizations:

★ Providing non-monetary support or sponsorships for small nonprofits, including in-kind donations and volunteering
★ Funding organizations directly rather than funneling money through the county
★ Creating and funding mentorship, coaching, and stipend opportunities for board participation
★ Providing support with establishing a program database to track outputs and impacts
★ Bringing in consultants to provide technical support or leadership development
★ Ensuring that funding requirements (e.g., reporting) are commensurate with the amount of funding available, and minimizing the administrative burden on smaller nonprofits.

3 OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD FOR THE STRONG FUND

Stakeholders are grateful for the support and investment that the STRONG Collaborative Funders have provided for ECCC communities, and the nonprofit sector's mission to increase racial equity and economic justice in ECCC. Stakeholders offered the STRONG Collaborative Fund a set of recommendations that are largely built on the needs of the community and the network of nonprofit organizations that serve ECCC which are detailed in prior sections of this learning brief.

Deepen the connective tissue of the nonprofit ecosystem

While there was a sentiment that "Contra Costa is a land of coalitions," stakeholders adamantly underscored that this sentiment does not hold true for ECCC. There are ample opportunities to connect nonprofit organizations with each other and help strengthen their connective tissue to support a thriving ECCC. Convening nonprofit organizations can help break down the silos that have been created due to the scarcity of resources that have historically been allocated to ECCC.

Several nonprofit organizations specifically spoke about the myriad of issues that organizations are addressing and their interconnectedness. *"There are a lot of grassroots efforts happening county-wide, including ECCC. I was in a meeting just yesterday, and there was a whole list of different but related issues, not connected efforts. And so I think one thing is to provide support, whether that is facilitation or convening support and funding to bring some of the efforts together because many efforts that are on a smaller scale people don't know about or they're under-resourced."*

"I think there's something to be said for **consolidating the coalition**. There's a coalition for racial and immigrant justice, there's a coalition for reimagining public safety and there are loose coalitions around housing, not to mention the service providers have coalitions. **All of our issues are interconnected and we're spending so much time going to these meetings.** But with that said, especially since we're talking about **ECCC there really aren't very many coalition's in the area.**"

-Nonprofit Organization

East Contra Costa STRONG Collaborative Fund
Findings from the Field Learning Brief

Enhance the infrastructure capacity of grassroots organizations serving ECCC

According to the majority of stakeholders interviewed, grassroots organizations play a vital role in the service provision network in ECCC. Grassroots organizations are commonly led by residents with lived experience and expertise who are responding to the emerging needs of the most impacted communities. However, grassroots organizations are often overlooked and underfunded in ECCC. Some stakeholders recounted instances where larger county-wide organizations "follow the funding streams into ECCC" to the detriment of grassroots organizations and, when funding is no longer available, pull their services out of ECCC communities. In contrast, grassroots organizations continue to support the community. As one nonprofit organization staff expressed, *"One of the things about East County is there are a lot of great grassroots organizations that are not funded at the same level of the larger [organizations] that are coming up here and getting those bigger grants."*

As detailed in previous sections, there is ample consensus among stakeholders on the need to provide multi-year funding to grassroots organizations to help build their infrastructure and capacity to continue to support the most impacted communities in ECCC.

Expand the leadership capacity of BIPOC leaders

There was recognition among stakeholders interviewed of the need to build and expand the leadership capacity of staff and residents of color. Emerging Leaders of Color shared that it was important for nonprofit organizations to look within their organizations for leaders of color and *"provide opportunities for growth for the next generation of executive leaders."* A key opportunity for growth that several stakeholders elevated was funding professional development trainings and conferences for staff of color and volunteers. According to interviewees, these opportunities are often offered to executive leaders and seldom extended to staff members. Emerging Leaders of Color interviewed also noted that professional development and training opportunities such as those offered by LeaderSpring were ripe opportunities to continue to build a pipeline of future leaders of color in ECCC.

A few stakeholders interviewed also commented that building the capacity and leadership of people of color in ECCC was directly tied to the need to strengthen power-building and resident leadership efforts that were emerging in the community. As a nonprofit organization leader shared, *"[How do] leadership and capacity building tie into the various other coalitions and power-building movements happening around the county to build collective power? Is there a sort of a through line or a pathway for [past ELOC members] to connect into the actual power building and systems change work?"*

While building the capacity and leadership of people of color is essential in ECCC, stakeholders also noted a need to *"push for change within organizations to remove barriers that prevent staff of color from having power."* Other stakeholders shared that some nonprofit organizations *"are not able to see leaders of color in executive leadership positions because there is such an unconscious bias about what a leader looks like."* To continue to support leaders of color, a concentrated effort needs to be placed on addressing the racial biases that exist within nonprofit organizations.

Strengthen community organizing and power-building strategies

As detailed above, several stakeholders strongly believe that the pathway to increase racial equity and build economic justice requires concentrated efforts to strengthen community organizing across ECCC to amplify the power of the community. As an interviewee shared, *"[we] need to connect to a power-building orientation. You can do beautiful work, but if it does not have an organizing and power-building orientation, it will not build up the community to get to the structural change that is needed."* Community organizing and power-building was also identified as a potent vehicle to *"hold public institutions accountable"* and direct resources to ECCC community and nonprofits. However, nonprofit organizations working on community organizing and power-building efforts emphasized the importance of making a distinction between the cities in ECCC as community organizing efforts move forward: *"It is important to recognize that each city has a very different history and culture around racial equity, economic justice, and mobilizing and organizing that create different consciousness and different power structures."*

Stakeholders noted that there is an *"opportunity to build out the capacity of [base building and power-building] groups that already have existing trust, history, and relationships"* with the ECCC community. An interviewee elaborated, *"Build up the policy advocacy, capacity, and research capacity within organizations already doing the base building or building up the capacity of some of the regional think tanks and policy groups of which there are several, but to focus on East Contra Costa, which often isn't on their radar."*

4 CONCLUSION

The STRONG Collaborative Fund provides an essential opportunity to strengthen and build the capacity of ECCC nonprofit organizations and the communities they serve. This learning brief builds and reinforces previous data collection efforts that have highlighted the community's strengths and their most pressing needs. It further provides a blueprint for grantmaking opportunities ahead for the STRONG Collaborative Fund, including deepening the connective tissue of the nonprofit ecosystem, enhancing the infrastructure capacity of grassroots organizations, expanding the leadership capacity of BIPOC leaders, and strengthening community organizing and power-building strategies. In direct response to these findings, the STRONG Collaborative Fund has begun to sharpen its grantmaking strategies with these recommendations in mind. As the work of the STRONG Collaborative Fund moves forward, it will be important for the funders to continue to serve as advocates for the ECCC community in the larger philanthropic field, and to continually listen and learn from those on the ground serving the communities most in need to make real-time pivots in grantmaking.

Appendix A: Methodology of the learning process

The learning process included a robust set of data-gathering activities intended to provide greater insights and nuance regarding the ongoing needs of ECCC residents and the nonprofit organizations that serve the community. Below we provide a description of the data-gathering efforts conducted between the fall of 2022 and the spring of 2023.

STRONG Funder Interviews. The data-gathering process began with a set of five interviews conducted with STRONG Funders in the fall of 2022 to gather their reflections on the Fund's grantmaking strategies, their perspective about the needs impacting ECCC residents and nonprofits, and opportunities to address racial equity and economic justice in ECCC systematically.

ECCC Nonprofit Organization Interviews. Interviews were conducted with 20 nonprofit organizations between late-January 2023 and March 2023. Based on guidance from the Advisory Subcommittee, eight grassroots nonprofit organizations were included among the 20 nonprofit organizations interviewed. The interviews aimed to capture ongoing and emerging needs, challenges, and assets in ECCC and identify opportunities to address systemic change.

Emerging Leaders of Color Cohort Interviews. Eight interviews were conducted with ECCC leaders of color who participated in the Emerging Leaders of Color Cohort facilitated by LeaderSpring and funded by the STRONG Collaborative Fund in February and March of 2023. The interviews captured leaders' insights about the strengths of the existing network of nonprofit organizations in ECCC as well as the organization's internal capacity and management needs. An interview with the LeaderSpring staff was also conducted to capture their perspective on the opportunities to support leaders of color in ECCC.

Secondary data literature review. To avoid duplicating existing data-gathering efforts underway with residents and community members and with guidance from the Advisory Subcommittee, the voice and insights of ECCC residents were incorporated via an extensive secondary data literature review of recent and recently released findings. Among others, the secondary data literature review included findings from the 2022 community engagement process conducted by the Contra Costa Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice, which included over 40 listening sessions with 400 residents in Contra Costa County.

Public Official Interviews. The final data-gathering activity focused on conducting four interviews with Contra Costa County public officials to briefly share the key findings from the data-gathering efforts above and gather their perspectives on the needs of the community, the nonprofit infrastructure, and the tangible actions that are needed to create a thriving ECCC.