

IN SOLIDARITY, WE FEED  
OUR COMMUNITY





*Image: Community partners cutting the ribbon at the San Antonio Family Resource Center grand opening with Supervisor Wilma Chan.*

## DEDICATION

ALL IN Alameda County and its partners would like to dedicate this brief to its founder and champion, the Honorable Wilma Chan, Alameda County Supervisor, District 3, for her commitment to community, investment in collaboration, and her inspirational leadership in service to children, youth, and families in Alameda County. Supervisor Chan's commitment to supporting collaboratives working together to meet the basic needs of families busted siloes, built bridges, and was always centered on the greater good for the community. ALL IN and its partners are committed to seeing her legacy live through by promoting the lessons we've learned through briefs like this and by advocating for the intentional inclusion of community-led collaboratives in evolving solutions impacting the most vulnerable.

**The following individuals generously contributed their time and perspectives through participation in interviews and in the review of this report.**

**Andrew Park**, Trybe

**Candice Elder**, The East Oakland Collective

**Dr. Cesar A. Cruz**, Homies Empowerment

**Gabriela Galicia**, Street Level Health Project

**Jessica Blakemore**, Alameda County Health Care Services Agency<sup>1</sup>

**Julie Hadnot**, All IN Alameda County

**Dr. Larissa Estes White**, All IN Alameda County

**Patricia Contreras Flores**, Street Level Health Project

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<sup>1</sup> Formerly with ALL IN Alameda County

# ABOUT THE COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS

**Homies Empowerment** is an independent, grassroots community-based organization out of East Oakland operating a FREEdom Store, Care Center and Learning Center as part of a larger strategy to get to community independence. Through empowering education, community cultivation, food justice, and cooperative economics, Homies Empowerment works alongside community towards a world absent of whiteness, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy. They are seeking to create a world where our freedom is connected to our neighbor's freedom.

CONTACT: Dr. Cesar Cruz, Executive Director EMAIL: [cesar\\_cruz@mail.harvard.edu](mailto:cesar_cruz@mail.harvard.edu)

**Street Level Health Project** is an Oakland-based community center dedicated to improving the wellbeing of underinsured, uninsured, and recently arrived immigrants in Alameda County. Street Level Health Project engages the community in constructing collective power and leadership in order to advance a more just, inclusive, and empathetic society.

CONTACT: Gabriela Galencia, Executive Director EMAIL: [gabriela@streetlevelhealthproject.org](mailto:gabriela@streetlevelhealthproject.org)

**The East Oakland Collective** is a member-based community organizing group invested in serving the communities of deep East Oakland by working towards racial and economic equity. With programming in civic engagement and leadership, economic empowerment, neighborhood and transportation planning, and homeless services and solutions, we help amplify underserved communities from the ground up.

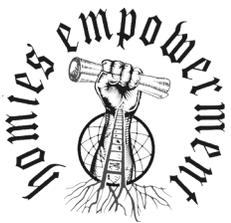
CONTACT: Candace Elder, Executive Director EMAIL: [candice@eastoaklandcollective.com](mailto:candice@eastoaklandcollective.com)

**Trybe Inc.** is a community-based nonprofit rooted in East Oakland serving youth with high needs by showing them they have a future—that they are our future. Through opportunities to build and serve, Trybe works to create “ubuntu” spaces for people to be together, transforming communities from the bottom up.

CONTACT: Andrew Park, Executive Director EMAIL: [baypark@gmail.com](mailto:baypark@gmail.com)

**ALL IN Alameda County** leads, innovates, and collaborates across public, private, and community sectors to catalyze the equitable policy and systems change required to address the root causes of poverty. ALL IN is a business unit within the Alameda County Administrator's Office (CAO) and a multi-stakeholder collaborative overseen by a 37-member steering committee.

CONTACT: Larissa Estes White, Executive Director EMAIL: [larissa.estes@acgov.org](mailto:larissa.estes@acgov.org)



**This report highlights how four grassroots organizations organically came together to hold space for their communities at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. From this collaborative work, they collectively urge the funders, government agencies, grassroots organizations, and community to reimagine how they work toward social change. This report suggests some concrete ways in which funders, government agencies, grassroots organizations, and community members can rethink the distribution of resources and reconceptualize the way collaboration happens.**

**Although the work in this report highlights the community's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is pertinent to note that these issues are not new or unique consequences of the pandemic. These issues existed long before the pandemic and will continue to stay if systems or processes are not changed. As the late activist Grace Lee Boggs in 2012 urged us, *"The time has come for us to reimagine everything."*<sup>2</sup>**

**The report aims to answer the following questions:**

***What brought these partners together?  
What did they accomplish together?  
What are the partners looking forward to?***

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.reimaginerpe.org/19-2/boggs>



Image: SLHP Thanksgiving Distribution/ SLHP Volunteer.

## WHAT BROUGHT THEM TOGETHER

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, these four people of color led and Oakland-rooted organizations were working in their own spaces, serving the community in their own unique capacities. Homies Empowerment focused on youth development, education, and building a community empowerment center. Street Level Health Project had been working with immigrant communities in Alameda County, including day laborers and Mam-speaking communities. The East Oakland Collective had been distributing food and supplies to unhoused persons in Oakland through their Feed the Hood program. Trybe's focus has been in community building with the youth at the center.

When Alameda County issued a shelter-in-place order on March 16, 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, these organizations were poised with an unusual and unfamiliar challenge. Leaders at each organization named fear as a challenge - not only did they have to witness their family and friends fall ill or even die, but they were also stepping into the unknown without really knowing what other organizations were doing and how they were serving their communities.

## TIMELINE

### PRIOR TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

- 2018** ALL IN secured funding from First 5 Alameda County to launch Neighborhoods Ready for School, which resulted in the establishment of the San Antonio Family Resource Center in partnership with Lotus Bloom, Trybe, and East Bay Asian Youth Center (EBAYC).

### COVID-19 PANDEMIC

- 3/2020** Shelter-in-place order announced in Alameda County.  
Alameda County Communities
- 3/2020** Alameda County Communities Connect: A COVID-19 Health Equity Initiative was launched. Since March 2020, ALL IN has convened or engaged community partners in the most impacted neighborhoods, and provided grant writing, capacity building, and technical assistance support to organizations providing food and shelter-in-place supports.
- Resource sharing began between Homies Empowerment and Trybe.
- 5/2020** COVID-19 Racial Disparities Task Force began meeting. Some partners connected at these meetings.

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# TIMELINE

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## COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ALL IN began convening a regular meeting specific to District 3, which eventually broadened to organizations throughout Oakland for emergency support coordination.

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The four partners began meeting regularly every Thursday.

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Partners learned about each other's work through conversations and site visits.

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**7/2020** Partners were awarded a contract with Alameda County to support emergency food distribution.

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Partners continued to meet regularly.

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**4/2021 - 6/2021** ALL IN convened organizations from across the county to identify common themes in need and strategy to inform Allocation of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding allocations.

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Partners continued to meet regularly.

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**12/2021** Emergency food contract ends.

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**01/2022** Partners continue to organize and support the people even with no funding.

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***"I think we were all operating in islands at the beginning and part of it was the shelter-in-place was so scary and the reality of so many people getting sick left and right ... and we were living in the unknown ... where everything was to shut down, many jobs were to close, some to never come back. And many places to even gather food were not even available. Then there was this fear of everything's going to run out. So, I think our individual organizations gathered with each other and figured out what [to do], and then... we were like, we have to defy the shelter-in-place and we just have to open and serve the people."***

***"I think it was really the 'lack of' and the lockdown that drove us to reach out to each other."***

These organizations quickly shifted to meet the eminent needs of the community because they were on the ground, listening to the community and their needs. The organizations found themselves having to quickly shift their focus to food and basic necessities. Each of these organizations had experience in distributing food, supplies, and other basic necessities to the community to varying degrees by that point, but they realized that these services needed to be their main focus for the immediate future. They knew what they needed to do. Defying the shelter-in-place order, these organizations kept their doors open and continued to serve the community in creative ways. The partners were able to break the silos and work together in such efficient and effective ways because they were small and able to make decisions quickly. But most importantly, they all shared a common goal and values. Their goal was simple: to serve the community and to put the community first. They were "uncompromising in meeting the needs of who they serve."

***"We got to be more real with each other. We got to, you know, kind of like talk about our hopes, dreams, challenges, frustrations, you know. It was like all masks off, you know, everyone was real."***

In addition, the four partners were able to build trust with one another quickly because they respected each other, were candid and open in their communication, were authentic in their relationship, and most importantly, they connected with each other on a human level. They listened with their hearts and showed up for the community and each other. They put humanity first. They learned about each others' struggles and just held the space to listen and feel.

Previous relationships set the foundation for these four partners to come together to meet the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. ALL IN Alameda County (ALL IN), a critical supporter of the collaborative, and Trybe had a working relationship prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. They worked with ALL IN and other community partners to launch the San Antonio Family Resource Center to provide space for families to connect with other families and community resources. From this partnership, ALL IN had learned about Trybe's work. Trybe and Homies Empowerment had a mutual acquaintance that was able to connect them. The partners also learned about each other's work at other convenings in the community, namely the Alameda County Communities Connect meetings organized by ALL IN and the City of Oakland COVID-19 Racial Disparities Task Force meetings. The collaboration of these partners emerged organically. The leaders of each partner organization learned about each other and began talking with each other about building together.

***"We got to be more real with each other. We got to, you know, kind of like talk about our hopes, dreams, challenges, frustrations, you know. It was like all masks off, you know, everyone was real."***

***"It definitely was what I mentioned first in terms of like game recognize game, that we showed each other a level respect, and we recognized ourselves in each other."***

Source: East Oakland Family Resource Fair hosted by Treva Reid | La Familia video.



Image: Free food for the people at Homies Empowerment.

## LEADING WITH SHARED GOALS AND PURPOSE

At the center of their relationship was the belief that food is a human right. All people in Alameda County deserve the right to adequate, affordable, and nutritious food or means to access it at all times.

***“What ties us all together is the food, and we realized how much food injustice, and how much food insecurity there really is and how much people just live with being hungry and succumbing to the tyranny of hunger.”***

***“So what brought us together really is the food. We are realizing our power within that. Not that we’re experts on sourcing food, on delivering food... but our expertise lies in really the***

***last leg of distribution of knowing the community. Being culturally appropriate, culturally competent and being able to have programs that work to really feed the people.”***

And, the belief that no amount of fresh produce will fix the inequitable access of food in Alameda County without addressing the systemic issues of racism, white supremacy, and poverty, as well as the dismantling of the nonprofit industrial complex.

***“Address food apartheid in East Oakland. We don’t just want to serve meals, serve groceries. We want to actually explore what food sovereignty looks like. What does dismantling food apartheid look like? That looks like growing our own food. That looks like sourcing more food from BIPOC and indigenous farmers. ... then food is just a conduit to other resources.”***

***“There’s the need to fund collaboratives [in] what we call systems change work. A lot of times funders go from putting a bunch of money and government into one strategy, then they move on to a different strategy... at the end of the day it’s looking at the root causes of why people are hungry, why people are living in poverty.”***  
***“We don’t, we have not succumbed to the nonprofit industrial complex. We are not hoarding opportunities or resources. We’re not thinking with that scarcity mindset. We’re thinking with abundance that if we do this together, if we advocate and support each other, we can get additional funding, we can get the additional support to help our individual organizations and to help all of us.”***

In the midst of the global pandemic where stress and survival was already at its limits, the partners knew that building a “sense of sharing and community” was necessary. The belief that community is the place for motivation, inspiration, learning, support and collective growth was fundamental to each partner’s work.

***“In the middle of the pandemic, we were able to offer relatives and community members [paid jobs]. And I don’t mean relatives like personal family, that’s just what I call community. So, our relatives... from other families that were coming for food now became part of the staff and the fabric of our organization.”***

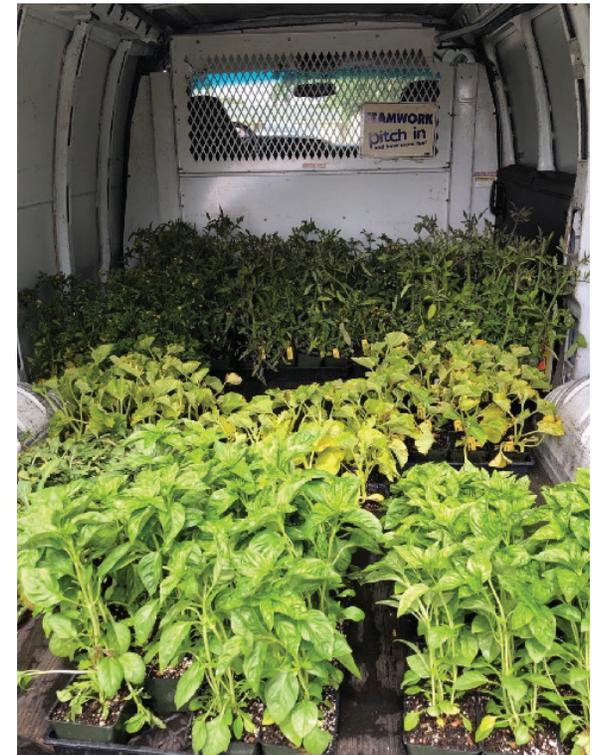


Image: Trybe and Homies Empowerment delivering donated produce plants from Annie’s Annuals and Perennials.



Image: Typical delivery of 200+ lbs of food and essential supplies.

***“[Name of organization] actually dropped off a pallet of pumpkins and so [there] was this beautiful exchange of people talking to each other about how you could cook pumpkins, how you can decorate them but also how you can cook them, and it was like this plethora of like, ‘Oh, we do this, and oh we do that’ and so it’s kind of the mutual aid day... now when the community actually gathers.”***

Instead of competing for resources and depending on structures of power to provide for them, these partners meet their community’s needs by “doing together.” Their work was solidarity-based bringing communities together to unite against the common struggle of hunger. In its most beautiful term, mutual aid is a way of living and was exemplified by these four organizations.

***“We’re serving the people together. We have values of sharing and mutual aid over just giving away stuff and we really have a mentality of serving the people.”***

It is also critical to honor the leadership of these organizations. All four of these organizations are led by Black, Asian, LatinX and Indigenous leaders.

# REVEALING THE URGENT NEEDS THAT WERE ALWAYS THERE

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent shelter-in-place order, the need for food and jobs became more urgent than ever.

*“But what the pandemic change[d] [was] where we got our food. All our food sources stopped serving, so we’re scrambling to source food. ... We work every single day to make sure that all this fresh food got out to the people... We were just on the fly trying to meet the demand. We expanded our service base to not only include the unhoused living on the streets or in cars or in RVs, but also to front door delivery services to seniors, to those who are disabled, those who had high risk health conditions.”*

*“We weren’t just dropping off a box. Usually it was like 100lbs. with our deliveries. Now, we drop off close to 2-300 pounds ... through the survival need of the pandemic, you know, folks just started coming out of the woodworks and ... it truly, really revealed the need that was there with food scarcity, and especially like healthy whole food, you know [such as] produce.”*

However, the organizations collectively emphasized that these issues did not result from the pandemic. These issues existed before the pandemic and will continue to exist. Thus, it is more important than ever to address the root causes of these issues - systemic racism, white supremacy, capitalism, patriarchy.

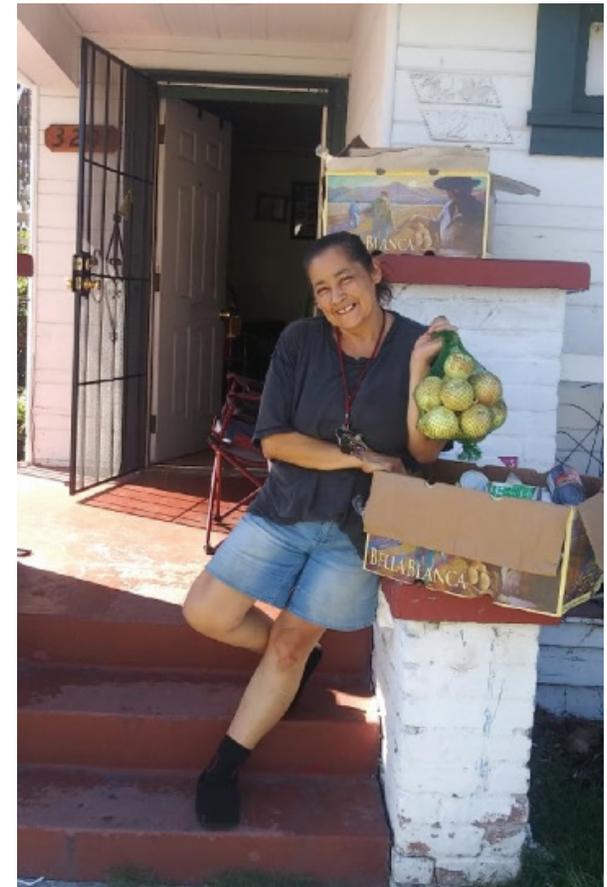


Image: Community member receiving fresh produce and meals.

*“This doesn’t have to be within the context of COVID or the pandemic. I think this can be pretty much how many people feel at the end of every two weeks or end of every month or how different communities feel this way.”*

*“We need to look at, you know, policies regarding the local level living wages. We need to look at more free education, deeply affordable housing. And, you know, renter and homeowner protections. ... more economic relief. It also really [is about] addressing systemic racism because this is what all this [is]. This is the root causes. You know, of all these inequities.”*



Image: Family receiving food, supplies and cash grant.



8 MILLION  
Meal Equivalents (MEQ)  
Distributed



9.5 MILLION  
Pounds of Food Distributed



4,500 HOUSEHOLDS  
Served Per Month



22,000+ PEOPLE  
Reached Per month



10,000+ HOUSEHOLDS  
Reached Over the  
Past 1.5 years

# ADDRESSING THE URGENT NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY

In the midst of all this, the partners, as a collaborative, offered solutions that gave hope and motivation in the community. The partners distributed food and supplies to the community with the “solidarity, not charity” mindset. The partners provided fresh food that was culturally appropriate to their communities.

***“For us, it meant being able to purchase things that we could not find at the food bank. ... Because a lot of our community members do live with chronic illnesses like diabetes, high blood pressure and others, they come looking for produce. Our community members are used to cooking their own foods, and growing their own food, so you know having some of these more Americanized or canned food or other options is not an option for them. And so we were able to use the funding to be able to purchase the produce and we’ve gone to the corner market across and purchased [the produce]. We’re able to add hot meals, we have some people that are unhoused, or just don’t have a place to cook, so that was really important for us.”***

In the midst of a global pandemic, the four organizations got together as a community and as a family. They started meeting weekly to strategize together and to provide emotional support and make connections. They shared events with one another. For example, they brought their staff together for training, socially distanced and outdoors. They visited each other’s organizations to learn more about their work. And ultimately, they shared resources with each other. This was possible because they had community at their core, and because they were nimble grassroots organizations. They were able to act quickly (with minimal institutional hurdles) and to think outside the box to meet the community’s needs.

***“And then we broke bread during the pandemic. We brought 70 of our staff together during the pandemic. We were able to do celebrations. We’ve been able to do community trainings together.”***

This collaborative was successful and continues to be successful because they shared some common ways of living and doing:

ABUNDANCE MINDSET  
ACCOUNTABILITY  
ACTION-ORIENTED  
COMMUNITY-CENTERED  
PROBLEM SOLVING  
MUTUAL RESPECT  
TRUST  
HONESTY  
HUMILITY  
OPEN COMMUNICATION  
LOVE  
VALUE IN HUMANS  
PRACTICE OF SOLIDARITY  
AUTHENTICITY

*“We visited [other partners] just to see how their food distribution was going, what they were doing [and] to learn from them. And then have them come and also visit us as well. And so I think through that we were able to then come together, officially through this emergency food service contract, which allowed us to do many different things.”*

*“I’ve really been learning about collaborations and you know when you’re small, you can make decisions really quickly, and be independent. And always kind of have that sense of like, where people are happy to see you because you’re always sort of bringing some unexpected blessing. You’re not like a big agency or the school district where it’s more like you’re dealing with people’s unmet expectations, right?”*

*“Once we all started coming together it’s been beautiful and it’s been also difficult because we can celebrate the successes of addressing capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy in our thinking and in our organizations and that doesn’t sound celebratory, but sometimes you don’t have a lot of comrades in the struggle that you trust enough to call each other in and call each other out and do so with a lot of love, and we’ve been able to do that.”*

*“It’s been important to also hold each other as human beings. A lot of these conversations did get deep like, ‘this is what I’m dealing with’ or ‘I can’t [do] this anymore, I’m tired, I’m exhausted, I’m burnt out’ conversations... just being authentic with one another and having these authentic conversations. Just being able to have a space where you could just reflect with one another and you don’t have to do it alone, but I don’t feel like I could have this conversation or conversations in other collaboratives.”*

*“It has been very easy with this coalition to do joint fundraising. Because we talk through it, you know we [get] on the same page and then we go after it. It is because we advocate for each other, which is really hard to find.”*

## ALL IN'S ROLE

ALL IN was a critical ally to the partners as they were able to recognize the collaboration and see the value in their work. They served as the convenor but also as a translator between the county government and the organizations. They were an internal advocate and connected the partners to funders and resources.

*“ALL IN has just been helpful in spotlighting the partnership between the four of us... and really elevating that [partnership] and creating this space for us to be able to do the work.”*

*“I think it’s been great because most of the time we don’t have that support or that relationship with county staff. I think that [ALL IN] is very much a different ... that [they are] able to connect with us on the ground [and] is willing to take the time to listen, willing to work with us, to hear what are the needs happening on the ground and then being able to transform that or take that information to wherever it needs to or connecting us to who we need to connect with.”*

*“I think the real capacity to build and stuff was... introducing us to funders, validating us, giving us space to talk in front of county boards, and say, ‘hey listen to the story.’ I think that gave us confidence and created a capacity that we didn’t know was quite there.*

# MOVING FORWARD IN SOLIDARITY

Given the immense challenges of our time and the many obstacles to achieving positive change, the imperative question is: What can I do? This report invites funders, government agencies, grassroots organizations and community members to reflect on how they can take bolder leadership roles to the scale of addressing the systemic issues of Alameda County.

## **For funders and government agencies:**

- Address food insecurity as a grantmaking and capacity building priority. Being good stewards of the money means funding projects with the most reach that also serve those hardest to reach. A partner shared, “Empowerment is trying to redistribute funds to feed the people in the best of ways to support the development and empowerment of East Oakland. To us, that means [supporting organizations that are] Oakland-rooted, BIPOC- and immigrant-led, womyn-owned, and grassroots, [provides] organic/fresh/healthy [food], minimizes waste, and has progressive hiring and labor practices.”
- Be open and expand opportunities for funding that include grassroots organizations. Grassroots organizations are an essential strategy for catalyzing systemic change. Yet the traditional ways of funding make it challenging for grassroots organizations to engage. One partner shared, “It’s true innovation of funding the messiness of being close to the community... Fund the passionate hungry organizations... who really have innovative ideas... they have the answers.”
- Support long-term investments in communities because sustainable change cannot happen overnight. It is harmful to the community when funding is stopped in the middle of the projects or contracts are extended monthly, which discourages community stability. Support organizations to close out the project in a sustainable way. The development of transitional planning allows organizations to wind down and maintain community at the center of the discussion.

- Build meaningful relationships with grassroots organizations to understand who and what you are funding and the larger impact. Funders often fund established organizations that can write a good grant proposal but are not doing the work on the ground. Visit the organizations and meet the communities they serve. It is critical that funders conduct their due diligence to see which organizations are really about mutual aid. A partner shared, “we want to build a relationship with you. We want to win you over but in a way that’s relational.”
- Invest in agencies to serve as a bridge between community based organizations and the county agencies, departments, and Board of Supervisors. Continue to support projects like ALL IN Alameda County to collaborate across public, private, and community sectors to catalyze the equitable policy and systems change required to address the root causes of poverty.

### **Additional recommendations for government agencies:**

Remove the barriers for organizations to work with the County. There are many barriers that organizations face trying to do work with the County. For government contracts, the County is set up to only work with non-profit organizations and not grassroots organizations. In addition, make things more centralized and coordinated so that there is no wrong door for an organization, especially a small grassroots community based organization.

Work with the community to create win-win situations. Another barrier was infrastructure. There are empty buildings like former super stores like Walmart that could have been opened up to allow the four organizations to have distribution centers. Instead, due to the disconnect, the four organizations had to figure that out on their own with very limited space and resources.

Amplify the voices of the grassroots. Oftentimes grassroots organizations are excluded from conversations. Dedicate effort to amplifying the voices of community organizations by convening and connecting them with county agencies and departments, funders, and other partners allowing their work to reach a wider audience.

## Our Offering to Grassroots Organizations

Across Alameda County and our region, courageous movement leaders like you are tirelessly organizing for racial, economic, and social justice in the face of a pandemic and the unprecedented public reckoning with systemic racism and white supremacist ideologies. As a partner shares, “let’s understand ‘divide and conquer’ strategies, and not allow us to be in a ‘crabs in a barrel’ mentality. For organizations to come together, break bread, share values and passion, and see what unites us.”

The partners call on grassroots organizations and community members to be fearless, take risks, and be unafraid to share their thoughts.

***“Don’t be afraid to say things that are controversial... find your voice. Find your allies [and] mobilize and be willing to speak [the] truth, because at the end of the day, you got to face yourself and your values in the mirror.”***

## What More Can We Do Together?

“According to the Japanese, everyone has an ikigai - a reason for living.” As one partner shares, “[ikigai] is a combination of mission, vision, vocation and profession, leading to your divine destiny.” It is the convergence of doing what you love (your passion), what the world needs (your mission), what you are good at (your vocation) and what you can get paid for (your profession). As the world moves through massive change on many levels, the collaborative of Homies Empowerment, Street Level Health Collective, The East Oakland Collective, and Trybe is a pure example of individuals and organizations aligning their skills, their hearts, and their gifts with a greater cause.

The challenges that we face today are not simple challenges. They are complex, multi-dimensional issues that require expansive multi-dimensional thinking, collaboration and action. This report is an invitation for each of us to ask, “What more can we do together?”

***“We have/had this “si se [p]uede” (yes we can) attitude as we always found a way out of no way.”***

## PRACTICING UBUNTU TOGETHER

Ubuntu is a South African philosophy that places emphasis on “being self through others” and humanity. It can be defined as “a quality that includes the essential human virtues of compassion and humanity.”

“We have to be entered in it from a community perspective, from a spiritual perspective. Meaning that we’re looking for small and big miracles for these relationships, for this ubuntu, into this village mentality so that what stops someone from grabbing a gun is not just because they have some money in their pocket, but because we’ve humanized each other, because we’ve developed these roads for relationships.”