



[SDFOODVISION2030.ORG](https://sdfoodvision2030.org)

Objectives 8-10 address major, interrelated challenges that communities of color face in shaping food system policies, practices, and narratives, as well as building resilience against risks that threaten everyone.

OBJECTIVE 08

Black, Indigenous, and people of color are underrepresented and excluded from political, business, and nonprofit leadership positions.

As those who are most directly impacted by inequities across our food system, we need to listen to communities of color, respect their wisdom, and follow their lead.

OBJECTIVE 09

The local food movement has largely been driven by corporate interests and White-dominant culture. As we confront pandemics, climate crises, increasing economic inequality, and entrenched racism, many are realizing that fixing our systems requires deeper reflection and a profound examination of power.

OBJECTIVE 10

In the face of increasing natural disasters, public health crises, and growing inequalities, our food system is showing deep vulnerabilities and testing our resilience. Planning for a resilient food system will require coordination and collaboration to prepare us for future crises. We will need to cultivate working partnerships with Indigenous and other marginalized communities, strengthen our local food economy, and develop bold sources of funding.

OBJECTIVE

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Increase Leadership by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Across the Food System



STRATEGIES AT A GLANCE

- Increase community-led food system planning & policy efforts
 - Elevate voices of BIPOC people, places, and programs
 - Diversify food system leadership and Invest in BIPOC leaders
 - Democratize funding decisions
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Introduction

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Our country's founding ideals and folklore have always been in conflict with its reality. American history is rooted in genocide, slavery, and theft. This history—and the oppressive systems that enabled it—are ever present today and form the foundation of our food system.

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From the violent dispossession and displacement of Indigenous people to the enslavement of millions of Africans, to the exploitation of migrant guestworkers, the U.S. food system was built on stolen land and stolen labor. This historic and ongoing theft of land and labor is a result of enduring racism that is still deeply visible across our food system.

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Today, most owners of farms, food businesses, and land are White, while farm and food workers are predominantly people of color. Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) disproportionately live in neighborhoods with limited healthy food options, and are more likely to suffer from diet-related illnesses such as diabetes and obesity.

Wealth and power across our food system are held by a White majority, while people of color have limited economic opportunity and agency. These disparities are visible across every data set and are the direct result of federal policies and practices deliberately designed to discriminate against people of color.

Ironically, the movement to build a more just food system has also been dominated by White voices. Black, Indigenous, and people of color—those most disproportionately impacted by inequities—remain cast in minimizing roles, marginalized by the very movement that is intended to benefit them.

The same culture that allowed our foundational, discriminatory policies to take root is also responsible for creating our modern-day, industrial food system that erodes natural environments, local economies, and human health. Many concepts now gaining popularity as sustainable and equitable alternatives—including organic farming, regenerative agriculture, CSAs, cooperatives, community land trusts, and food sovereignty—can be traced back to food justice leaders of



color. Living in harmony with nature, honoring ancestral wisdom, sharing prosperity, and using the Earth's resources in a way that is mindful of other species and future generations are cultural values deeply held and long practiced by communities of color, particularly Indigenous communities. Excluding Black, Indigenous, and people of color from leading the way in our food system has cost us dearly.

People of color are the unrecognized leaders of our modern day, sustainable food system movement, but racist policies and narratives have perpetually kept them from gaining influence, making decisions on behalf of their communities, and simply being respected as such.

Dismantling racism and increasing wealth, power, and leadership opportunities for Black, Indigenous, and people of color is essential for creating a more equitable and resilient food system. As those who are most directly impacted by inequities across our food system, it is time to listen to communities of color, respect their wisdom, and follow their lead.

Commentary

Building Community Assets, Pride, and Power

WRITTEN BY N. DIAN MOSS, [PROJECT NEW VILLAGE](#)



Back in 2008, I accepted the definition for food justice as “everyone having access to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food in sufficient quantity and quality to sustain a healthy life with full dignity.” Beyond food justice, the term food sovereignty also resonates with me because it speaks to self-determination and control over our food and food producing processes.

Ashante M. Reese, the author of [Black Food Geographies](#), states that food institutions are implicated in the disinvestment within Black neighborhoods. As we move to a more just food system, food geographies provide an understanding of Black ways of living and are inseparable from how Black residents navigate food inequities.

Project New Village (PNV) which operates in food apartheid neighborhoods in San Diego, is creating an [Equitable Food Oriented Development](#) (EFOD) project in Southeastern San Diego. An EFOD is a development strategy that uses food and agriculture to create economic opportunities, healthy neighborhoods, and explicitly seeks to build community assets, pride, and power by and with historically marginalized communities.

2021 marks the beginning of a new decade, perhaps a new opportunity to rethink and reimagine a better food system. Leah Penniman asserts that “Racism is built into the DNA of the United States’ food system. The work to end racism in the food system is inexorably connected to efforts to dismantle racism in the

economic, educational, criminal justice, health and democratic institutions in this country.”

As a partner of the San Diego Food System Alliance, PNV is working side-by-side with others to achieve the mission of cultivating a healthy, sustainable, and just food system in San Diego County.

It is our belief that we must foster collective agency amongst all stakeholders to make impactful changes to the current food system. We must intentionally over do that which has been under done. Karen Washington, Founder of [Black Urban Growers](#), states that she started the organization because “No one talks about our issues, and when they do talk about our issues it’s from a white voice. Why does the respected [one] always have to be a white voice?”

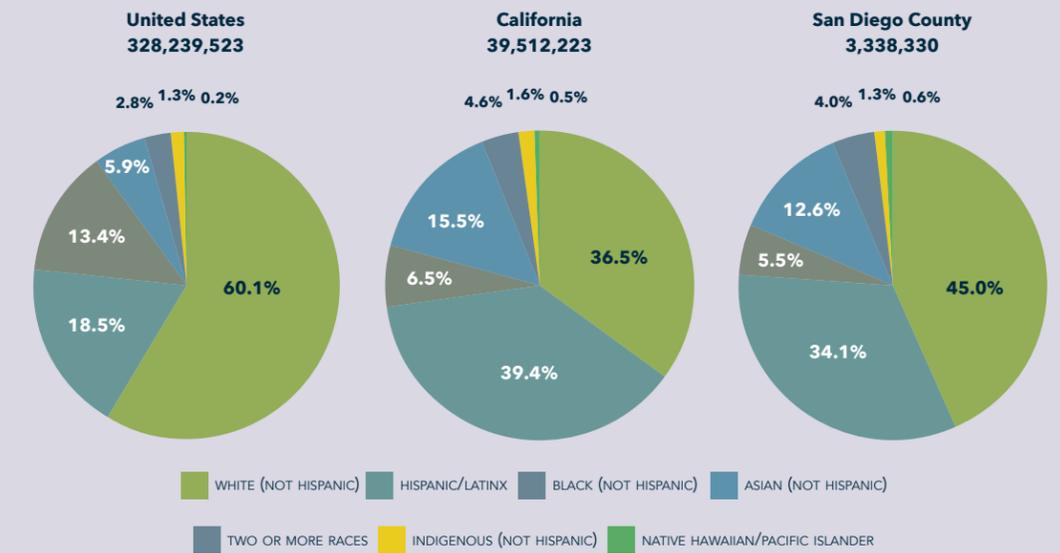
Communities of color have continuous threads of cooperative activity and development over the past two centuries, because of need and strategy. These co-ops have served as tools of resistance to racial and economic exploitation. The time is right for change, together we can take pride in shaping the future food system in San Diego. So, let’s do this!

DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE UNITED STATES, CALIFORNIA, AND SAN DIEGO COUNTY

The United States is an increasingly diverse country, and California is the [most diverse state](#) in the nation. Given the diversity of the country—and California and San Diego County in particular—one would expect to see a trend toward parity (Figure 1). The trends, however, tell a different story.

FIGURE 1

Racial and Ethnic Composition of the United States, California, and San Diego County



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, [QuickFacts](#).

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Core Challenges

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The core challenges to increasing leadership by Black, Indigenous, and people of color in San Diego County are:

- **Ending Racist and Discriminatory Policies**
- **Overcoming Systemic Barriers to Leadership**
- **Shifting the Dominant Narrative Around Food Systems**
- **Reversing the Impacts of Philanthropic Redlining**

■ Ending Racist and Discriminatory Policies

Racist and discriminatory policies have created significant disparities for communities of color in terms of wages, income, wealth, business ownership, home ownership, unemployment, food security,¹ healthcare, poverty, life expectancy, education, incarceration, political representation, and more.

Across the food system, the impact of deliberate racist and discriminatory policies has resulted in specific inequities: land loss and limited land tenure, segregation, and the exploitation of workers.

LAND LOSS AND LIMITED LAND TENURE

Most farmland in America today is owned by White people. White people make up 60% of our country's population, but comprise 92% of producers, own 96% of farms, and operate 94% of land in agriculture.² In California, White people make up 36% of the population, but comprise 80% of producers and operate 93% of farms on 96% of land in agriculture.³

Colonization and [policies pursued by the U.S. government](#), including the Indian Removal Act (1830), Dawes Act (1887), Urban Relocation Program, (1956) and many other instances of forced removal, violence, and broken treaties all played a role in the dismantling of Indigenous societies and regional food systems. Today, there are approximately 79,000 Indigenous people in this country, and they own 3% (60,083) of farms and 5.7% (59 million acres) of land in agriculture, predominantly in the Navajo Nation and Cherokee Nation.⁴

The enslavement of 12.5 million African people fueled agriculture in the South for hundreds of years,⁵ and its impacts are still apparent generations later. In fact, slavery was a daily, legal reality for 246 years—longer than it has been abolished (156 years). Near the end of the Civil War, the work of abolitionists resulted in the federal promise of “forty acres and a mule,” a revolutionary form of reparations that would give newly freed slaves ownership of land, and thus, the chance to build, accrue, and pass on wealth. Shortly afterwards, however, the order was explicitly reversed and annulled.

Despite the broken promise, Black land ownership increased significantly during the 19th century, and the number of Black farmers peaked in the 1910s, with 200,000 farmers operating an estimated 20 million acres, mostly in the South.⁶ Today, that number has dropped to 49,000 Black producers, operating 35,000 farms on a little more than 4.6 million acres, or 0.5% of all land in agriculture.⁷ Continued discriminatory policies by the USDA that excluded Black farmers from securing federal loans, along with challenges levied against

¹ Odoms-Young, Angela M., April 1, 2019, [“Examining the Impact of Structural Racism on Food Insecurity: Implications for Addressing Racial/Ethnic Disparities.”](#) *Family and Community Health*, 41.

² USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, [2017. Census of Agriculture.](#)

³ USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, [2017. Census of Agriculture.](#)

⁴ There were 58,199 producers who were “American Indian or Alaska Native only” in 2017. American Indian or Alaska Native only producers operated 42,705 farms on 52,578,979 acres.

⁵ Muhammed, Khalil Gibran, August 14, 2019, [“The Sugar That Saturates the American Diet Has a Barbaric History as the ‘White Gold’ That Fueled Slavery.”](#) *The New York Times Magazine*.

⁶ Philpott, Tom, November 19, 2020, [“Black Farmers Have Been Robbed of Land. A New Bill Would Give Them a ‘Quantum Leap’ Toward Justice.”](#) *Mother Jones*.

⁷ There were 45,508 “Black only” producers in 2017. There were 32,910 Black only farms operating 4,097,857 acres.

them for owning [heirs' property](#)—a common classification of Black-owned land—are the two major causes of significant Black land loss since the 1900s.

Today, agricultural policies and programs continue to benefit White farmers, and there is an ongoing need to create policies and redirect funding to benefit farmers of color.

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SEGREGATION

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As documented in [The Color of Law](#), until the last quarter of the twentieth century, federal, state, and local policies defined where people could live based on their race. Today, neighborhoods across the country show the lasting effects of intentional and highly visible public policies that explicitly segregated every metropolitan area in the United States, including San Diego.⁸

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Redlining—the practice of identifying certain neighborhoods as high credit risk based on their racial makeup, and subsequently denying creditworthy residents home and business loans—suppressed property ownership, upward mobility, and economic growth in communities of color during a key period of U.S. economic growth. From 1934 to 1968—the years when redlining was legally practiced—home ownership doubled across the nation—and 98% of the loans approved by the federal government during this time went to White applicants. While redlining was outlawed in 1968, its effects have endured. It remains a main cause of wealth and investment gaps between White and non-White communities, and intergenerational poverty.

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Segregation and redlining have had lasting impacts on the food environments of San Diego County neighborhoods (see *Objective 6*). Significantly higher rates of food insecurity and health disparities are clearly visible across redlined and segregated communities today. Creating policies that reverse these impacts will take time and require significant funding.

⁸ Rothstein, Richard, 2017, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation.

⁹ Ron, Ariel, and Dael Norwood, March 28, 2018, "America's Long History of Exploiting Migrant Workers," *The Atlantic*.

¹⁰ Library of Congress, [Hawaii: Life in a Plantation Society](#).

¹¹ Asia Society, [Asian Americans Then and Now](#), Center for Global Education.

¹² Library of Congress, [1942: Bracero Program](#).

EXPLOITATION OF WORKERS

The exploitation of food system workers in our country can be traced back to slavery, where millions of African people were forced to provide unpaid labor to build agricultural wealth for White people. This was followed by the practice of trafficking Chinese workers for farm and construction labor,⁹ the import of Japanese workers to labor on sugar plantations in Hawai'i,¹⁰ and recruitment of Korean, Indian, and large numbers of Filipino workers to work on farms and at canneries following the Chinese Exclusion Act.¹¹ [The Bracero Program](#) later brought millions of Mexican guest workers to provide cheap, short-term agricultural labor on farms across the American Southwest.¹²

Racist policies and narratives, combined with the insatiable need for cheap labor in our capitalist food system, have resulted in today's deeply racialized undervaluing of the people who feed our nation.¹³

Labor laws today continue to discriminate against communities of color. Today, Black, Indigenous, and people of color are disproportionately employed in food system jobs that pay low wages (see *Objective 4*). The [San Diego Workforce Partnership](#) (SDWP) found that the race of workers accounts for 25% of variation in pay, and lower paid food system jobs have a higher percentage of BIPOC workers.¹⁴

Federal labor laws that protect anti-union tactics also work against people of color. Labor unions play an important role in reducing racial wage gaps and [eliminating racism](#). For women, Black, and Hispanic/Latinx Americans, it's been proven that those represented by unions earn much more money than those who are nonunionized (e.g., Hispanic/Latinx workers represented by unions are paid 20.1% more than nonunionized peers who are Hispanic/Latinx). The increase in union busting, however, has dramatically decreased participation in unions over the years, and is impacting attempts to reduce racial disparities in the workplace.

■ **Overcoming Systemic Barriers to Leadership**

Black, Indigenous, and people of color experience systemic barriers to political, business, and nonprofit leadership, dramatically limiting their ability to generate wealth in their communities, participate in decision making, and influence the food system. Food Vision 2030 surveys revealed that 75% of San Diegans who live or work in communities of color would like to play an active role in shaping food decisions.

There has been some progress over the past several decades, but Black, Indigenous, and people of color remain underrepresented and face significant challenges advancing to positions of leadership. In spite of increasing investments in workplace equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts, people of color across organizations and sectors experience a lack of support, disparate expectations, emotional burdens, and explicit and subtle racism, all hindering their advancement.¹⁵

¹³ Bonacich, Edna, Sabrina Alimahomed, and Jake B. Wilson, "The Racialization of Global Labor," *American Behavioral Scientist*, 52(3): 342-355.

¹⁴ Enemark, Daniel, September 16, 2020, "[San Diego's Racial Equity Gap: How We Got Here](#)," *San Diego Workforce Partnership*.

¹⁵ Roberts, Laura Morgan and Anthony J. Mayo, November 14, 2019, "[Toward a Racially Just Workplace](#)," *Harvard Business Review*.

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Our elected officials and leaders have the power to influence policies, programs, and funding related to land use, community and economic development, public health, labor, sustainability, agriculture, infrastructure, transportation, housing, and education. Without proportional racial representation, our government risks favoring special interests and disproportionately harming low-income people of color.

The United States Congress has had 12,415 Senators and Representatives from its founding to the present day. **White men have accounted for about 95% of all members of Congress** (Figure 2). Although they represent only 60% of the U.S. population, White people make up 77% of voting members of the 117th Congress—the current cohort at the time of publication. Significant gains in BIPOC leadership have been made in the U.S. House of Representatives, along with the elections of the first biracial President and Vice President; however, more limited gains have transpired in the Senate and in governorships.¹⁷

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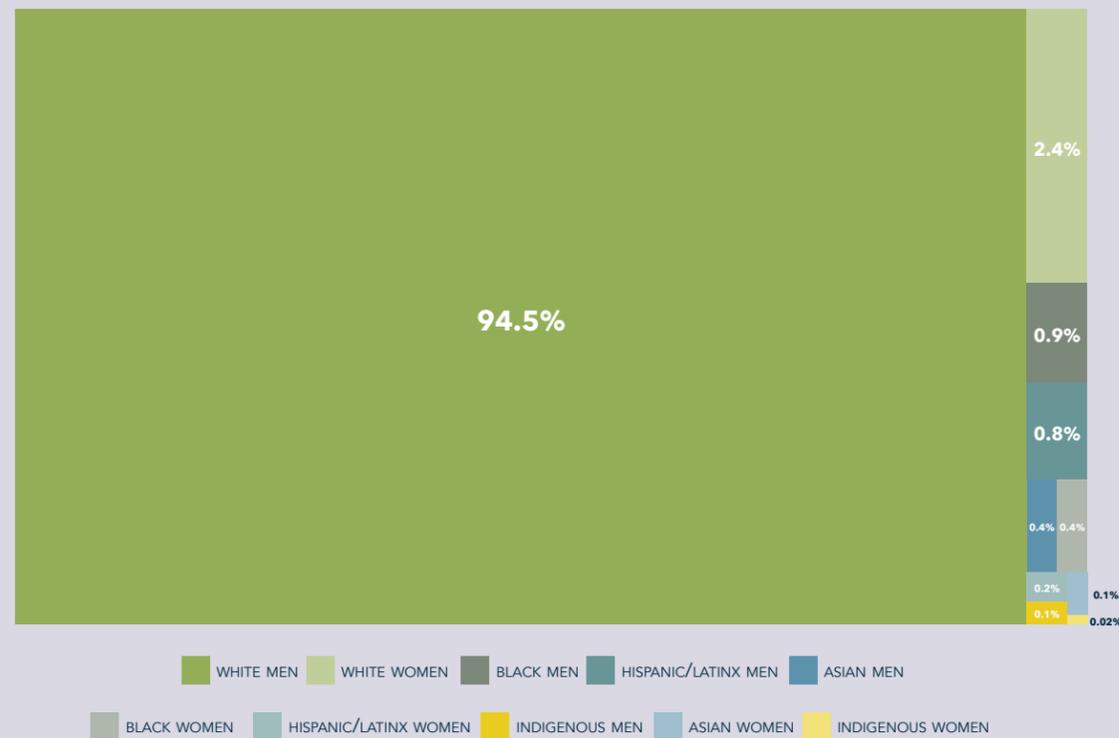


In San Diego County, the five-person [Board of Supervisors](#) has been filled exclusively by White people from 1889 to 2020 (Figure 3). 2021 was the first year that a seat was filled by a Hispanic/Latinx woman.

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FIGURE 2 Race/Ethnicity of U.S. Congressional Representatives and Senators From to Founding to Present

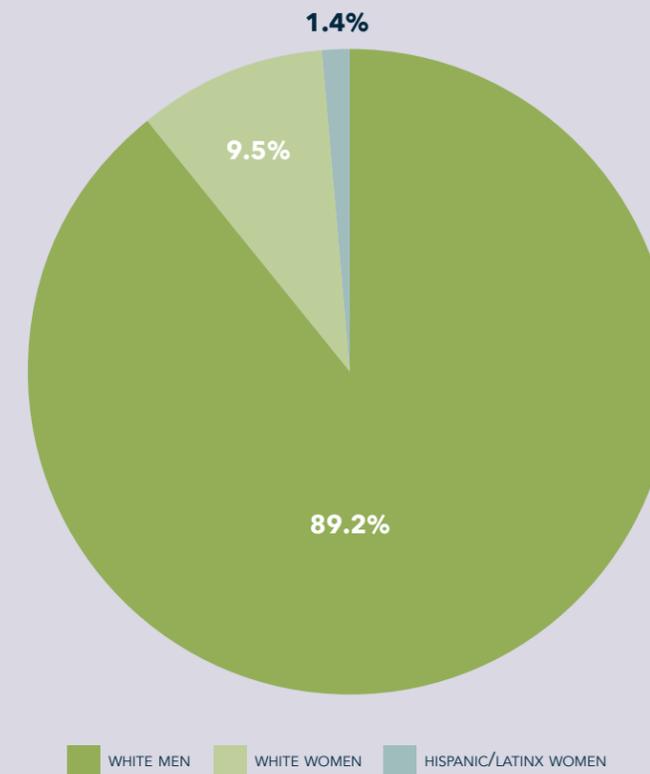


Source: United States House of Representatives, *History, Art & Archives*, <https://history.house.gov/Institution/Total-Members/Total-Members/>.

¹⁷ Brown, Anna and Sara Atske, January 22, 2021, "Black Americans Have Made Gains in U.S. Political Leadership, But Gaps Remain," Pew Research Center.

FIGURE 3

Race, Ethnicity, and Gender of San Diego County Board of Supervisors, 1889-2021



Source: San Diego County Board of Supervisors, <https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/bos/boshistory.html>.

PRIVATE SECTOR LEADERSHIP

Nationally, 93% of the CEOs on the [Fortune 500](#) list are White, while 3.4% are Hispanic/Latinx, 2.4% are Asian, and 1% are Black.¹⁸ White men also make up 83% (\$2.65 trillion) of the wealthiest Americans on the [Forbes 400](#) list, followed by White women, Asian men, Hispanic/Latinx men, Black men, one Asian woman, and one Black woman (Figure 4).

As a result of historic and ongoing discrimination, business ownership across the country is also divided along racial lines. Nationally, 77% of businesses are White-owned, 10% are Asian-owned, 6% are Hispanic/Latinx-owned, and 2% are Black-owned (Figure 4). These percentages are all disproportionate to the relative population of each race/ethnicity. The estimates for Indigenous business ownership (0.4%) and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (0.04%) are too small to be seen on Figure 5.

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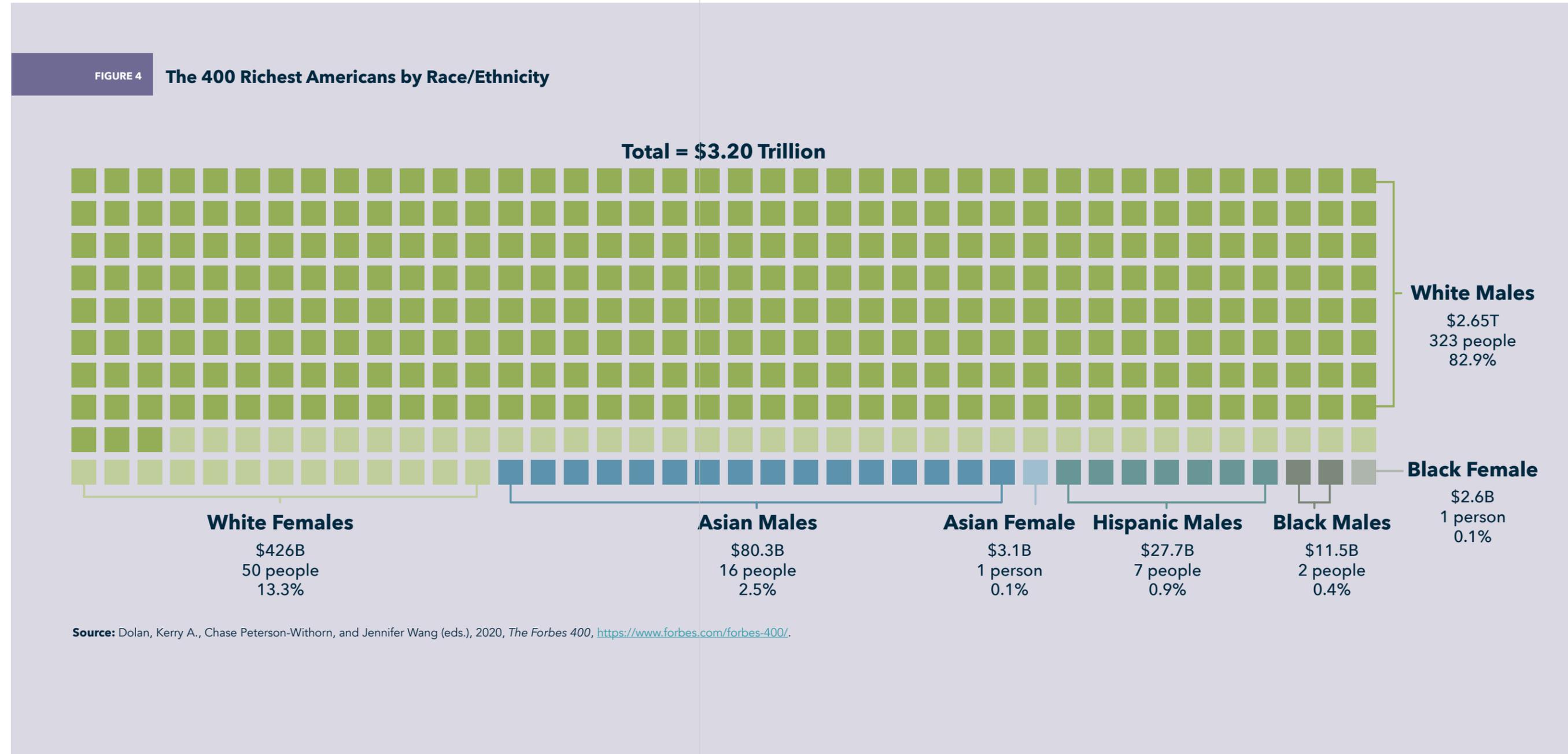
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¹⁸ Zweigenhaft, Richard L., January 2021, [Diversity Among Fortune 500 CEOs from 2000 to 2020: White Women, Hi-Tech South Asians, and Economically Privileged Multilingual Immigrants from Around the World, Who Rules America?](#)

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Compared to the national average, California has greater diversity in business ownership among Asians and Hispanic/Latinx, but lower business ownership among Black, Indigenous, and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander populations.

Other than agriculture, there is limited data available to measure the ownership of food system businesses by race or ethnicity.

The Annual Business Survey measures business ownership by race and ethnicity for *Accommodation and Food Services*, a category that includes hotels, restaurants, fast food, and bars. This category accounts for 9% of U.S. and California businesses. White, Asian, and Hispanic/Latinx owners account for the majority of Accommodation and Food Services business ownership in California (Figure 6). Data was not available to compare Black, Indigenous, and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders.

While business ownership is generally equated to building equity (as opposed to employment in a wage-earning job), the fact is that many owners of small food businesses—including farms, fishing operations, restaurants, and independent retailers—struggle to achieve profitability and make a secure living (see *Objective 2*).

Reversing these trends will require intentional shifts in policies and funding to benefit food business owners of color.



FIGURE 5

Business Ownership by Race and Ethnicity in the United States and California, 2018



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *2019 Annual Business Survey*.

FIGURE 6

Accommodation and Food Services Business Ownership by Race and Ethnicity in the United States and California, 2018



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *2019 Annual Business Survey*.

NONPROFIT LEADERSHIP

According to a 2006 national study, 82% of nonprofit executive leaders were White, 7% were Black, 4% were Hispanic/Latinx, 4% were Asian or Pacific Islander, and 3% were "Other."¹⁹ An assessment by BoardSource in 2017 found that boards today are no more diverse than they were in previous years or in decades. According to the assessment, 90% of chief executives and board chairs, and 84% of board members were White, while 27% of boards identified as all White.²⁰

In 2016 and 2019, the Building Movement Project surveyed over 5,000 nonprofit workers on their experiences of race and leadership and found that little had changed:

- Pathways to leadership across nonprofit sectors favor White people.
- People of color were more likely to state that race is a barrier to their advancement, while White respondents were more likely to agree that being White provided a career advantage.
- Compared to White workers, people of color were more likely to report inadequate salaries, few opportunities for advancement, lack of role models, lack of relationships with funding sources, lack of social capital/networks, frustration with being called on to represent a community, inequitable salaries, and being called on to push diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives.
- Although DEI initiatives are now more widespread and appear to have increased awareness of race and racism, they have not yet translated into significant change or more equity in how people of color experience their organizations or the nonprofit sector.²¹

A 2009 study of nonprofit leadership in California found that White people made up more than 75% of chief executives at the time, despite being only 43% of the population. BIPOC Californians, on the other hand, made up 57% of the population in 2009 but only 25% of nonprofit leadership. Hispanic/Latinx Californians were the most underrepresented group in nonprofit leadership, making up 36% of the state's population, but only 6.5% of nonprofit chief executives.²²

Over the past several decades however, foundations in California have increased their focus on building the capacity of BIPOC-led nonprofits, including supporting leadership effectiveness, leadership transitions, and peer-to-peer networks for BIPOC leaders, as reported by Race to Lead.²³ Despite the positive trend, survey results highlighted that BIPOC leaders continued to face more challenges than White leaders across nearly every indicator, and earned less money.

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¹⁹ Bell, Jeanne, Richard Moyers, and Timothy Wolfred, 2006, [Daring to Lead 2006: A National Study of Nonprofit Executive Leadership](#), CompassPoint Nonprofit Services and The Meyer Foundation.

²⁰ BoardSource, 2017, [Leading With Intent: 2017 National Index of Nonprofit Board Practices](#).

²¹ The Building Movement Project, 2020, [Race to Lead Revisited: Obstacles and Opportunities in Addressing the Nonprofit Racial Leadership Gap](#).

²² De Vita, Carol J. and Katie L. Roeger, November 2009, [Measuring Racial-Ethnic Diversity in California's Nonprofit Sector: An Overview](#), The Urban Institute.

²³ Kunreuther, Frances and Sean Thomas-Breitfeld, 2018, [California's Race to Lead: The Nonprofit Racial Leadership Gap in the Golden State](#), The Building Movement Project.

²⁴ Deitrick, Laura et al., 2020, [2020 Annual Report: State of Nonprofits and Philanthropy in San Diego](#), The Nonprofit Institute, University of San Diego.

²⁵ Bielaczyc, Noel, et al., December 2020, [Findings of the 2019 National Food Hub Survey](#), Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems.

The Nonprofit Institute at the University of San Diego conducts an annual assessment of nonprofit organizations in San Diego County. There are nearly 12,000 nonprofit organizations in San Diego County today, compared to 5,100 in 1995. Leadership positions in San Diego County nonprofits are not representative of the racial/ethnic diversity of the region: 32% of leadership teams, 24% of CEOs, 33% of board members, and 25% of board chairs identified as BIPOC, compared to 55% of county residents.²⁴

A lack of diverse leadership is also visible in food system nonprofits. A national survey of 43 self-identified food justice organizations conducted for a Master's thesis found that only 26% were led by people of color, only 16% had policies in place to ensure representation of community members in paid and/or leadership positions, and the ratio of Whites to people of color holding leadership positions was almost 3:1.

Results from the 2019 National Food Hub Survey found that half of the 109 respondents had members on a board of directors and half had owners and/or shareholders. Of the reported 517 board members, 14% were people of color while 4% of owners/shareholders were people of color.²⁵

The San Diego Food System Alliance reviewed the leadership and board make-up of 28 food system-related nonprofits and two educational institutions with heavy food system connections in San Diego County. We found that 14 out of 30 (47%) organizations had BIPOC executive directors and 24 out of 30 (80%) had female executive directors. Twenty of the 30 organizations had boards of directors or advisory boards. These 20 organizations had 170 total board members and 51 (30%) were BIPOC.

Overcoming systemic barriers to political, business, and nonprofit leadership for people of color is essential for cultivating justice and greater parity across our food system.

OUR ANALYSIS OF 30 SAN DIEGO COUNTY FOOD SYSTEM ORGANIZATIONS FOUND THAT:



■ Shifting the Dominant Narrative Around Food Systems

Narratives are stories that influence our view or understanding of the world. They are created and perpetuated by systems and institutions, including government, media, education, and entertainment, as well as by myths, stereotypes, and personal experiences. There is tremendous potential for narratives to shift culture, policies, institutions, and power, moving us closer to ending systemic racism.²⁶

In our food system, the dominant narrative has been told by White people. The movement to build a more sustainable and equitable food system has also been dominated by White leadership, and consequently, center White visions for what sustainability and equity look like.

In [The Color of Food](#), Natasha Bowens asks readers to imagine an American farmer or chef. It's not surprising if the image that emerges is of a White person: White experiences are hegemonic in the United States. They are dominant regardless of how many are present in a particular place and they make food spaces exclusive.²⁷ White farmers, fishermen, CEOs, chefs, authors, and others make up the majority and receive the most exposure for their food system contributions.

Yet, many of the stories and concepts that are elevated as part of our modern day sustainable food movement originated with Black, Indigenous, and people of color. Their wisdom and stories remain largely invisible in mainstream media. Regenerative agricultural practices can be traced back, in part, to Indigenous communities and Dr. George Washington Carver at Tuskegee University, [community supported agriculture](#) to Booker T. Whatley, cooperatives to Fannie Lou Hamer, farmworker organizing to Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, and Larry Itliong, [community land trusts](#) to the Civil Rights Movement and Shirley and Charles Sherrod, food sovereignty to Indigenous peoples, and many more.

These stories matter, and they need to be told. In the words of [Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie](#), "Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity."

Shifting the dominant narrative around food systems and elevating the voices of communities of color can provide one pathway to dismantling systemic racism in our country.

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²⁶ Echohawk, Crystal, February 25, 2021, "[Stolen Land, Stolen Bodies, and Stolen Stories](#)," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*.

²⁷ Slocum, Rachel, June 16, 2006, "[Whiteness, Space and Alternative Food Practice](#)," *Geoforum*.

Commentary

Holding Your Ground and Leading With Your Heart

JANICE LUNA REYNOSO, [MUNDO GARDENS](#)

When I tell people I want to challenge the system, many say it can't be done. They ask me about my education, and I say, "Why, yes, I do have my Master's." Then I point around in reference to my ancestors.

My maternal grandfather and grandmother migrated to the United States as part of the Bracero Program, which brought millions of guest workers from México to the United States. In Jalisco, my maternal grandmother's family still has their *potreros*—meadows or pastures—where they grow sugarcane. My mother Yolanda was also a farmworker in the Imperial Valley. I guess you can say that growing food is in my blood.

It wasn't until later in my life, however, that I began to truly understand how food is at the intersection of many disparities that challenge our communities, and how much of these disparities are formed based on race.

Today, my organization, Mundo Gardens, connects the dots of community, food, and justice, and makes it a little bit more possible for communities like mine to grow the food we want, participate in improving our living conditions, and increase access to healthy food. We say, *Queremos mas arte, mas parques, mas jardines, y celebrar nuestra buena salud. We put the cultura en agricultura.*

Mundo Gardens truly began two decades ago, with a man named Jose Nuñez and the vacant plot of land he farmed by his home for many years. It was a jungle of banana trees, tomatoes, mint, and citrus. Joe, as we called him, gardened daily and shared the fruits of his labor with neighbors and the community. And he was willing to teach you, if you were willing to learn.

After Joe moved away with his family in 2008, the garden was uncared for and became overgrown with weeds. My siblings Michael and Michelle, middle schoolers at the time and the youngest of the Luna Reynoso Family, approached National City's City Council to share the idea of converting the lot into a community garden. In 2010, we broke ground at Joe's Pocket Farm—now part of Mundo Gardens. Along with family, friends, local organizations San Diego Victory Gardens and YALLA, and the support of National City, we began the work to transform the garden back to its original purpose.

The reopening of the community garden is a testimony that we can do it! I'm a single mother raising my three daughters on my own, no degree, working three jobs—and I was able to impact the local food system with the help of community and family.

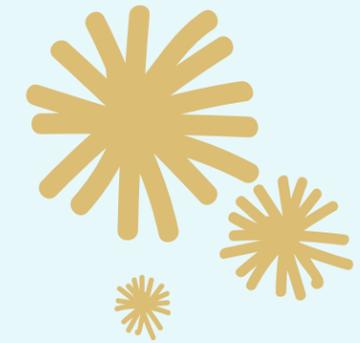


My community has grown since this journey has begun. I can walk through many of our barrios and the hood and call it my own. I feel at home and I love my community, the land, the water, the artists and their art, our music, our cultura, the activists, the Indigenous Caretakers since time immemorial, the struggle, the healing. Land is such a big part of it, the earth, la madre tierra. We are only here for an amount of time and we can work and collaborate with each other and nature to be the best stewards as possible. We belong to the land but yes I do dream of buying up blocks in our barrios to mitigate gentrification and grow our own food, for us. If leadership and business owners can help us do that, that would be awesome.

At the heart though, Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other people of color should hold the power to make decisions for their communities. But there are many challenges that stand in the way of increasing BIPOC leadership. I know because I have experienced these challenges. I have experienced the pushback when leadership is uncomfortable with change. I have also experienced being the only one who looks like me at decision making tables. I have even been challenged by other BIPOC leaders when thinking outside the box or advocating for anti-racist practices.

Persistence is key. Continuing to encourage leaders to see food systems as a priority in a culturally responsive and responsible way will benefit us all. I just keep going, and eventually hope that my passion and persistence will open more doors than they close. Ears and hearts will open if you consistently sing the same song and truly represent.

My advice to others is to stay authentic and hold your ground. Do not change your values to fit in a box. Be bold and specific about what you want and what you don't want. Show up when you can. It makes a difference. And most importantly, always recognize the land and original people of where you stand. This land we are on is Kumeyaay Land and we are fortunate enough to have the Kumeyaay Community active in San Diego County. Hold your ground and lead with heart, the people will not forget you and you cannot forget the people.



■ Reversing the Impacts of Philanthropic Redlining

01 Philanthropic redlining is the chronic underfunding of BIPOC-led organizations in the United States.²⁸ Racial inequity is built into the norms and narratives that shape philanthropic giving, making it consistently challenging for BIPOC-led organizations to get connected, build rapport, secure support, and sustain relationships with funders.²⁹

03 While information on philanthropic funding to food system organizations is limited, national data paints a picture of the inequities in philanthropic giving. Similar patterns likely exist with food system organizations.

05 In 2019, a survey of 66 Black-led nonprofits found that 60% had budgets less than \$500,000 and 16.9% had budgets less than \$50,000. The survey also found that the majority of organizations did not have enough operating reserves. Only 23.1% of the organizations reported having an operating reserve fund of at least 25% (3 months) of the annual operating budget.³⁰

08 Increase Leadership by Black, Indigenous, and People Across the Food System

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In 2020, a summary of national research on racial equity and philanthropy found that White-led organizations had budgets that were 24% larger than those led by people of color, and that organizations led by Black women received less money than those led by Black men or White women. The report also found that the unrestricted assets of organizations with leaders of color were 76% smaller than White-led organizations.

National research on philanthropic giving to Indigenous-led nonprofits found that from 2006 to 2014, funding decreased by 29% (\$35 million) and support from six of the 10 largest funders of Native organizations and causes experienced a 50% decline.³¹ In addition, approximately 0.15% of community foundation funding goes to Indigenous organizations. And although California foundations hold significant dollars, only 0.02% was devoted to Indigenous organizations.³²

Similar trends are also seen with investments into cities and neighborhoods (see *Objective 6*). From 2004 through 2016, research from Baltimore found that neighborhoods that are less than 50% Black received about 3.3 times the investment that predominantly Black neighborhoods received.³³ From 2011 through 2017, research from Chicago found that majority-White neighborhoods received 4.6 times as much investment as majority-Black neighborhoods and 2.6 times as much as majority-Hispanic/Latinx neighborhoods.³⁴

Significant funding and investment is necessary to reverse these trends, and this will require dramatic transformations in philanthropy.

²⁸ Emergent Pathways, LLC, December 2019, [The Case for Funding Black-Led Social Change, Redlining by Another Name: What the Data Says to Move from Rhetoric to Action](#), ABFE: A Philanthropic Partnership for Black Communities.

²⁹ Dorsey, Cheryl, Jeff Bradach, and Peter Kim, May 2020, [Racial Equity and Philanthropy: Disparities in Funding for Leaders of Color Leave Impact on the Table](#), *The Bridgespan Group*.

³⁰ Emergent Pathways, LLC, December 2019.

³¹ First Nations Development Institute, 2018, [Growing Inequity: Large Foundation Giving to Native American Organizations and Causes, 2006-2014](#).

³² First Nations Development Institute, 2018, [Community Foundation Giving to Native American Causes](#).

³³ Theodos, Brett, Eric Hangen, Brady Meixell, and Lionel Foster, September 2020, [Neighborhood Investment Flows in Baltimore](#), *Urban Institute*.

³⁴ Theodos, Brett, Eric Hangen, Brady Meixell, and Prasanna Rajasekaran, May 2019, [Neighborhood Disparities in Investment Flows in Chicago](#), *Urban Institute*.

The Opportunity

Strategies

- 01 INCREASE COMMUNITY-LED FOOD SYSTEM PLANNING AND POLICY EFFORTS
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- 03 ELEVATE VOICES OF BIPOC PEOPLE, PLACES, AND PROGRAMS
- 04 DIVERSIFY FOOD SYSTEM LEADERSHIP AND INVEST IN BIPOC LEADERS
- DEMOCRATIZE FUNDING DECISIONS

As a nation and a region, we are in a moment of awakening. People are beginning to acknowledge the systemic racism in our country, and how this has impacted and continues to impact the lives of Black, Indigenous, and people of color. Conversations about dismantling racism in our food system are becoming more commonplace. In San Diego County, the Board of Supervisors has publicly [declared racism a public health crisis](#).

Despite the increased acknowledgement of racism in our society, racial and wealth gaps continue to grow. Black, Indigenous, and people of color remain disproportionately underrepresented in political, business, and nonprofit leadership spaces. Their experiences, stories, and wisdom remain largely invisible. And issues across the food system are often still misconstrued as independent of race.

In San Diego County and through Food Vision 2030, we have a unique opportunity to leverage this moment of awakening and build long-lasting leadership opportunities for Black, Indigenous, and people of color across our food system.

Strategies

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INCREASE COMMUNITY-LED FOOD SYSTEM PLANNING AND POLICY EFFORTS

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Centering communities in food system system planning and policy efforts, especially communities of color and those most impacted by inequities, is essential. Using the [Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership](#), this requires moving from marginalization, placation, and tokenization to voice, delegated power, and community ownership.³⁵

[Food policy councils](#) (FPCs) often play an important role in local food system planning and policy efforts. Historically, many FPCs have been White-led, but leadership is slowly beginning to shift. There is a growing number of BIPOC-led food policy councils that are creating pathways for community-led policy advocacy, including [Detroit Food Policy Council](#), [Mississippi Food Policy Council](#), [Chicago Food Policy Action Council](#), and the [Los Angeles Food Policy Council](#). In addition, the [HEAL Food Alliance](#) is a BIPOC-led national multi-sector, multi-racial coalition of organizations working together to transform food system policies.

In San Diego County, there are several organizations working to improve food system policies, and many opportunities to partner with BIPOC-led organizations that are building community power and leading the way forward, including [Pauma Tribal Farm](#), [Project New Village](#), [Mundo Gardens](#), and [Botanical Community Development Initiatives](#).

³⁵ Gonzalez, Rosa, 2019, [The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership](#), Movement Strategy Center.

Below are a few additional examples of BIPOC-led organizations from across the country that center community-led food system planning and policy efforts that may serve as inspiration for San Diego County.

BIPOC-led Organizations Centering Community-led Food System Planning

| Organization | Description |
|--|--|
| Soul Fire Farm | Soul Fire Farm is a nonprofit based in New York dedicated to uprooting racism and seeding sovereignty in the food system. Cofounder and farm manager Leah Penniman describes their work to achieve justice in the food system in three buckets: "Farming, training, and advocacy." Their work includes regenerating the land through ancestral farming practices on an 80-acre farm, training and educating BIPOC leaders, youth, and communities to advocate for food justice, collaborating with BIPOC-led coalitions, mobilizing communities, and elevating radical self-care, and healthy work cultures. Soul Fire Farm has become a leader in advocating for racial justice, reparations, and food sovereignty at all levels, from community to policy. |
| The National Black Food and Justice Alliance | The National Black Food and Justice Alliance (NBFJA) is a coalition of Black-led organizations formed to develop Black leadership, support Black communities, organize for Black self-determination, and build institutions for Black food sovereignty and liberation. To achieve this, NBFJA engages in coalition organizing for Black food and land, increasing the visibility of Black-led narratives and work, advancing Black-led visions for just and sustainable communities, and building capacity for self-determination. NBFJA's theory and strategy illustrates the urgency of reclaiming Black foodways, and organizing Black communities to build power for systemic change. |
| First Nations Development Institute | The First Nations Development Institute developed the Native Agriculture and Food Systems Initiative to build sustainable local and systemic infrastructure in native communities to address food systems issues such as food insecurity. The Native American Food Sovereignty Alliance (NAFSA) was developed out of this initiative, and acts as an interagency food policy council engaging in long-term strategic planning. NAFSA was created to bring grassroots practitioners, communities, organizations, and tribal governments together to share knowledge, support best practices, and advocate for policies that enhance native food systems. Their programs include an Indigenous seedkeeper network, native food and culinary programs, and food sovereignty events. |
| Community to Community | Community to Community (C2C) is a grassroots eco-feminist organization led by women of color who have lived the realities of inequities in food systems. Influenced by the community organizing model of Cesar Chavez and the farmworker movements in California and Washington state, C2C's programs are rooted in participatory democracy, food justice, and movement building. C2C believes that all people should have equitable access to the fundamental democratic processes affecting their everyday lives. |

SPOTLIGHT Poder Popular

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Poder Popular, a community advocacy group under [Vista Community Clinic's Migrant Health Program](#), believes that zip codes should not determine life expectancies. Yet the reality throughout low-income communities in the United States is that those arbitrary five digits often predict premature death from causes that are almost entirely preventable.

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Economic disparities go hand and hand with a host of stress factors, including food insecurity and lack of access to healthcare. This creates a perfect storm of conditions that send communities into a downward spiral. The solution to correct this begins with community-led policy and advocacy.

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A popular education organization of mixed-status, multigenerational families, Poder Popular has been championing the causes of inequity in District 1 within the City of Vista for more than 10 years.

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The group focuses on the largely immigrant and Spanish-speaking community where most of their advocates live and work as a model to residents that lideres, or leaders, are not someone else from somewhere else. Lideres look like you or your neighbor or your grandson.

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"We are from and for the community, we live in these neighborhoods, we know what is needed for us to live a healthier and safer life and we advocate for it because we want our children to live a better life," explained Paola Illescas, former Community Health Specialist at Vista Community Clinic.

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That's why Poder Popular, which means Popular Power, focuses on community-level changes that a bigger organization could overlook. The group is involved in a number of programs that promote healthier food environments because given the opportunity more people are likely to make healthy eating choices on their own. No lectures required.

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The [Live Well Community Market Program](#) helped change access to fresh, affordable, local produce by encouraging and advising local, small markets to create support systems for business growth, community cohesion, and better nutrition options.

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Increase Leadership by Black, Indigenous, and People Across the Food System

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"Many of the markets, or *mercaditos*, are an essential component of our neighborhood's food environment and we try to help them promote healthier foods and less alcohol and tobacco," Illescas said.

For example, one of their achievements was with La Salsa, a local market. Poder Popular lideres advised the owner on presentation. As a result, the market cleaned up the display area of their fruits and vegetables so that they could present the produce in a fresh, appealing way for customers. If stores are designed so that the least nutritious items are the most attractive, is it any wonder why people make the choices that they do?

To that end, Poder Popular also works to establish community gardens as a way to alleviate the inaccessibility to organic and fresh produce. This requires not just volunteers, but policy changes. Poder Popular has had to address the issue of land availability and water affordability as they work to train youth lideres to lobby for extensive improvements to neighborhoods by collaborating with the City of Vista and other stakeholders to improve infrastructure (including land use, sidewalks, lighting, road safety, etc.).

"Many factors impact our health and it is our duty to reduce disparities via different types of efforts," Illescas said. "We have done projects focused on one-on-one health education to policy advocacy in Sacramento."

She said that ultimately, they do this work for the health of everyone because by shining attention on the problems of one community, the solutions can uplift others.



Strategies

02

ELEVATE VOICES OF BIPOC PEOPLE, PLACES, AND PROGRAMS

Elevating the voices of BIPOC people, places, and programs in San Diego County is essential to shifting the dominant narrative around food systems and shifting power to historically marginalized communities.

There are several independent national media organizations that are increasingly highlighting stories from BIPOC leaders who are reclaiming their heritage and advancing food justice, including [Real Food Media](#), [Civil Eats](#), [Food Tank](#), and [YES! Magazine](#). In San Diego County, [Edible San Diego](#) publishes stories about local food system leaders, including leaders of color, but there are countless opportunities for media and food system organizations in our region to further elevate the voices of BIPOC communities.

Below are examples of BIPOC-led organizations locally and across the country that are speaking truth to power and shifting the dominant narrative around food systems.

| Organization | Description |
|---|--|
| Soul Fire Farm | Soul Fire Farm is catalyzing the transfer of power and resources to BIPOC farmers with powerful storytelling and facilitation, through public speaking, published articles, media interviews, social media, blogging, books, and other virtual forums. They collaborate with other BIPOC-led organizations on campaigns to support farmworkers, rematriate land for Indigenous people, advance reparations for Black farmers, and regenerate ecosystems, and are building a reference library of guides, lists, rubrics, and manuals for food sovereignty. |
| The National Black Food and Justice Alliance | The National Black Food and Justice Alliance (NBFJA) works to reclaim Black histories and build back Black self-determination and food sovereignty by "changing power dynamics that historically represent inaccurate and dis-empowering narratives around Black people in food and land." NBFJA's Black food map & directory maps Black farmers and producers across the country, elevating Black people, places, and programs, and opening up opportunities for connecting producers to markets. |
| Black SD Magazine | Michael Cox started Black SD Magazine to increase the education, empowerment, and economics of the Black entrepreneur and small business community in San Diego. Black SD Magazine elevates San Diego Black-owned food businesses like the Stance family's Bowlegged BBQ and Toran Gray's Extraordinary Banana Pudding , regularly features new, Black-owned food businesses such as Ashad Ruffin's Lucy Mae's Kitchen, and shares the best of Black-owned vegan and vegan friendly businesses . Black SD Magazine also operates a nonprofit arm, The Catalyst Black Academy , formed to foster the entrepreneurial spirit within San Diego's Black community. |

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| Chia Cafe Collective | Chia Café Collective is a grassroots organization dedicated to honoring the Indigenous people of modern-day Southern California through protecting and restoring native plants, and sharing their importance as food, medicine, and for utilitarian uses. Chia Café Collective educates the community on harvesting and gathering native plants, and has published a cookbook, Cooking the Native Way , along with other resources inviting people to reconnect with Indigenous cultures of this region through their food. |
| Black Urban Growers | Black Urban Growers (BUGS) is a grassroots organization committed to building networks and community support for growers through education and advocacy. Since 2010, BUGS has convened the Black Farmers & Urban Gardeners Conference, a national conference bringing together Black farmers, food justice advocates, educators, chefs, and members of Black communities. The conference holds spaces to share best practices and build a stronger network of Black leadership in the movement for food justice and food sovereignty. |



Strategies

03

INCREASE COMMUNITY-LED FOOD SYSTEM PLANNING AND POLICY EFFORTS

Achieving racial equity in the food system requires having diverse leadership that reflects and represents diverse communities. Diversity in leadership leads to more diversity across staff and deeper connections to communities.

Nationally and locally, the demographics of leadership are beginning to change. The recent historic election of Kamala Harris as Vice President, the subsequent appointments of the most diverse Cabinet in U.S. history—including Deb Haaland (Secretary of the Interior), Xavier Becerra (Secretary of Health and Human Services), Lloyd Austin (Secretary of Defense)—and the appointment of Alex Padilla to replace Harris as California’s senator all highlight important shifts in racial equity.

Below are examples of local and national BIPOC leaders who are leading food system transformation in government, philanthropy, business, and nonprofits.

BIPOC Leaders

Government

- [Supervisor Nora Vargas](#) - San Diego County Board of Supervisors, District 1
- [Deputy Mayor Consuelo Martinez](#) - Deputy Mayor of Escondido, Councilmember for District 1 and Leadership Development Specialist at Mid-City CAN
- [Councilmember Monica Montgomery Steppe](#) - Councilmember for District 4
- [Councilmember Corinna Contreras](#) - Vista City Councilmember for District 1, Corinna also owns a business called Millennial Farmer.
- [Herminia Ledesma, MPH](#) - San Diego County Human Relations Commission Board Member
- [Chairman Temet A. Aguilar](#) - Chairman of the Pauma Band of Luiseño Indians

**These are all local leaders; there are many more statewide and national leaders.*

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Philanthropy

[A-dae Romero-Briones](#) - Director of Programs for the Native Agriculture and Food Systems Initiative at First Nations Development Institute

[Robert K. Ross MD](#) - President and CEO of The California Endowment

[Dr. Carmen Rojas](#) - President and CEO of the Marguerite Casey Foundation

[Rini Banerjee](#) - President of the Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation

[Don Chen](#) - President of Surdna Foundation

Business

[Juan Pablo Sanchez](#) - Owner of Super Cocina and Founding Member of Business For Good

[Maya Madsen](#) - Founder of Maya's Cookies

[Brad Keiller](#) - Co-Owner and Co-Founder of Nomad Donuts

[Rafael Garcia](#) - President and CEO of Daily Harvest Express

[Phillip Esteban](#) - Chef and Founder of Craft Meals and White Rice

[Claudette Zepeda](#) - Former Executive Chef and Partner of El Jardín and Executive Chef at Allia Marea Beach Resort

**The individuals listed above represent a sample of local food business leaders of color. Many more BIPOC leaders are heading up food businesses locally, statewide, and nationally.*

Nonprofit

[N. Dian Moss](#) - Managing Director at Project New Village

[Janice Luna Reynoso](#) - Executive Director at Mundo Gardens and Resident Leadership Academy Facilitator

[Bianca Bonilla](#) - Executive Director at Botanical Community Development Initiatives

[Dr. Kyra Greene](#) - Executive Director at the Center on Policy Initiatives

[Mai Nguyen](#) - Co-Director of Minnow

**The individuals listed above represent a sample of local food system nonprofit leaders of color. Many more BIPOC leaders are heading up nonprofit organizations locally, statewide, and nationally*



In San Diego County, there are significant opportunities to further diversify current leadership across the food system and ensure that more Black, Indigenous, and people of color are reflected in local government, philanthropy, business, and nonprofit sectors.

Investing in future generations of BIPOC leaders is equally essential. Below are examples of local and national organizations that provide food policy leadership training, board training, philanthropic fund management training, and movement building training. They represent models for greater investment and replication in San Diego County.

| Organization | Description |
|--|---|
| The Kitchenistas of National City | The Kitchenistas are graduates of Olivewood Gardens & Learning Center's Cooking for Salud program . Graduates of the program are called Kitchenistas and they are passionate about the changes they are making at home, for their families and for their community. Kitchenistas continue their learning through free Olivewood classes, and lead community education programs across the region. In addition to community education, Kitchenistas are incredible advocates in their communities, mobilizing for important policy campaigns such as MEHKO , and advocating for changes in their community to improve health and wellness. |
| Boards and Commissions Leadership Institute | The Boards and Commissions Leadership Institute (BCLI) at the Center on Policy Initiatives is a six-month leadership program that provides the tools, skills, and support to help emerging leaders from low-income and underrepresented communities obtain seats on local and regional boards and commissions. The program gives community members more than a voice, but a vote on important decisions that affect their communities. By getting community members into board or commission positions, these community leaders will then be able to advance racial and economic equity in their own communities. |
| HEAL School of Political Leadership | HEAL Food Alliance's School of Political Leadership builds political power to transform food and farm systems, by supporting food and farm justice leaders who are reimagining and transforming their food systems. This six month long program gives community leaders the tools, knowledge and skills needed to run for office, manage campaigns, drive political change, and more. HEAL recognizes that in order to transform the system, better representation among decision makers and policy makers, and community-driven solutions are needed. |
| RISE Urban Leadership Fellows Program | The RISE Urban Leadership Fellows Program selects leaders with demonstrated capacity to bring impact and change to urban neighborhoods. RISE Fellows are offered the next phase of their development and training, enabling them to lead more effectively in the face of the complex, contentious, and seemingly intractable challenges present in their communities. |

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| <p>Food Leaders Lab</p> | <p>The Food Leaders Lab is a leadership training program offered by the Los Angeles Food Policy Council. The Food Leaders Lab trains community advocates and residents on the histories of food justice movements, political leadership, and strategies for a healthy, resilient and just food system in Los Angeles. Participants gain knowledge on inequities in the food system and political tensions, and grow in their ability to recommend policy, design community programs, and educate their communities.</p> |
| <p>WANDA</p> | <p>WANDA is building a movement of a million women and girls of African descent to become food heroes. In response to low numbers of dieticians and nutritionists of African descent, WANDA launched a fellowship program to fund, mentor, and provide community nutrition and wellness field experience to the next generation of women working to achieve nutrition equity in their communities.</p> |
| <p>Castanea Fellowship</p> | <p>The Castanea Fellowship is a two-year program for diverse leaders working for a racially just food system in any of the areas of: health, environment, agriculture, regional economies, or community development. Fellows build power to shift structures and culture toward the creation of a more equitable, sustainable, and healthy food system.</p> |
| <p>Native Agriculture & Food Systems Scholarship</p> | <p>The Native Agriculture & Food Systems Scholarship is part of First Nations' three-year GATHER project, designed to encourage more Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian college students to enter agriculture and agriculture-related fields, so they can better assist their communities with efforts to reclaim local food systems control and advance food sovereignty.</p> |
| <p>Boston Impact Initiative: Fund-Building Cohort</p> | <p>The Boston Impact Initiatives' Fund Building Cohort helps prospective and existing BIPOC fund managers grow and/or strengthen their funds, and move more funds into communities of color. The program provides the fund manager with the tools to structure, raise, and manage blended capital funds that restore economies in communities of color.</p> |
| <p>Community Food Funders</p> | <p>The Community Food Funders recently launched the Seeding Power Fellowship, a cohort-based program for leaders working across sectors to build equitable food systems. The program focuses on movement building skills and places racial equity and social justice at the core of their curriculum.</p> |



SPOTLIGHT

Mid-City Community Action Network (CAN)

The people who are most adversely impacted by governing body decisions on issues like justice, land use, and public policy are rarely at the table when those decisions are made. There are a lot of White, older men making decisions on issues that have tremendous effects on BIPOC communities.

"California isn't only one demographic," explained Consuelo Martinez, the Leadership Development Specialist at [Mid-City Community Advocacy Network \(CAN\)](#).

Mid-City CAN is addressing the issue by recruiting thoughtful, engaged, and knowledgeable members of the community to take part in six-week training programs that produce community advocates to serve on local boards and commissions.

"The people who are most impacted by these decisions should be in positions of power," Martinez said in regard to the communities of color being historically left out of official decision-making circles.

In many cases, she said that the causes are a lack of confidence and comfort stepping into rooms where no one looks or talks like them, not a lack of passion for the issues.

She said that the program to train community members to join governing boards began out of necessity.

"A lot of our campaign objectives require decision-makers," she said in regard to instigating changes in public safety, criminal justice, and land use. If the boards don't reflect the communities, the agenda of those boards don't reflect the community. The decisions of those bodies should not be completely in the hands of people whose families will not bear the consequences of those decisions.

"We don't believe in hoarding power. We should all be agents of change. We should all be able to contribute to a better quality of life," Martinez said.

When she was first a commissioner at 20-something years old, Martinez said that she had a lot to learn, but it didn't mean that someone who looks like her didn't deserve a seat at the table. It means that when inequity and exclusion are the prevailing force for so long, inclusion requires education and training.



"I didn't really know what my job was for a while," Martinez said. "I had an orientation and that was it. No one told you that you had the right to put something on the agenda. Or you could change the meeting schedule to be more accessible for the community. I was a quiet commissioner. I didn't know."

Slowly, she learned and developed her voice but she didn't see the need for others to endure the same learning curve.

COVID-19 is a perfect example of how governing bodies can have a tremendous impact on BIPOC communities. Those communities were hit the hardest. It's not always a given that a BIPOC candidate or official will make the best choice for a BIPOC community, but it radically increases the compassion and beneficial policies for BIPOC communities and the issues they face.

"I'm happy to know we have a Black woman in charge at the county level for public health. When there is BIPOC at this level of policy making, you change the conversation," Martinez said. "You lift up the inequities. You shed light on the inequities."

She said diverse agencies, boards, and governing bodies are not just about simple demographics. It is important to diversify where people live to ensure proper representation at a community level.

"It's not that there is a shortage of people who would want to participate," Martinez said. "We need better outreach."

Strategies

04

DEMOCRATIZE FUNDING DECISIONS

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Shifting funds to BIPOC communities and democratizing funding decisions is essential for building power across communities of color and creating greater equity in our food system.

As highlighted in the [Race to Lead report](#), funders need to examine their practices to better understand why organizations led by people of color so rarely have the resources they need to grow and thrive. As a result of systemic racism and decades of philanthropic redlining, BIPOC leaders and organizations often need greater support overcoming four key barriers:

- **Getting connected:** BIPOC leaders and organizations often do not have equal access to social networks that enable connections to philanthropies.
- **Building rapport:** Unconscious biases from funders can inhibit relationship-building.
- **Securing support:** Funders may lack an understanding of culturally relevant approaches to evaluating the capacity, fundability, or effectiveness of BIPOC-led organizations.
- **Sustaining relationships:** Lack of trust and unconscious biases may limit the ability of BIPOC-led organizations to secure long-term funding.³⁶

Participatory grantmaking offers one approach to reduce these inequities. While it encompasses a range of models and methods, at its core, this approach to funding cedes decision-making power about grants to the very communities impacted by funding decisions. In participatory grantmaking, community participants are seen as equal partners with—rather than constituents of or advisors to—traditional power brokers: “Nothing about us without us.” Participatory grantmaking acknowledges power imbalances, realigns incentives, and cedes control to community groups.³⁷

Locally, [Catalyst of San Diego and Imperial Counties](#) launched the [Social Equity Collaborative Fund](#), an equity-focused pooled grantmaking fund that supports collaborative grassroots efforts to improve the economic, social, and physical well being of San Diego County residents (See *Spotlight* for more information).

³⁶ Dorsey, Cheryl, Jeff Bradach, and Peter Kim, May 2020.

³⁷ Gibson, Cynthia, 2018, [Deciding Together: Shifting Power and Resources Through Participatory Grantmaking](#), *Grantcraft*.

Below are several examples of national participatory grantmaking initiatives that may provide inspiration to San Diego County’s philanthropic local food communities.

| Organization | Description |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Action Learning Seed Fund | The University of Minnesota Extension launched the Action Learning Seed Fund (ALSF) in 2019 to provide funding (up to \$50,000) to 14 community-based projects led by BIPOC seeking to build more power for their communities through food systems change. This fund grew out of University of Minnesota educators experimenting with participatory grantmaking efforts, seeking to leverage community knowledge and power in service of building a just and equitable food system. ALSF provides flexible funding through a participatory grantmaking process called ‘ shared gifting circles ’, which allows participants to allocate funding to one another. |
| Black Farmer Fund | The Black Farmer Fund is a start-up community investment fund that invests in Black food system entrepreneurs—such as farmers, food business owners, and distributors—in New York State, elevating active involvement of the community in financing options. The fund provides non-extractive blended capital financing to Black farmers, vendors, food distributors, caterers, restaurant owners, composters, and other food business actors. With 100% community driven governance, and co-designed investment processes, the Black Farmer Fund truly elevates community-led funding practices. |
| Boston Ujima Project | Ujima’s Capital Fund is the nation’s first democratic investment fund, raising capital to finance small businesses, real estate, and infrastructure projects in Boston’s working-class BIPOC communities. Ujima, uses a participatory budgeting process, along with traditional underwriting, to put economic development decisions in the hands of community members. Voting members are residents, grassroots organizations, business owners, and workers. Ujima’s pilot investment day in August of 2017 resulted in 185 people investing \$20,000 to 5 Black & immigrant owned businesses with 0% interest loans. |
| Common Future | Common Future , a national intermediary of financial transactions, sees the future of investment as a shared financial, social, environmental contract, one that is built together. Their initiatives are designed to grow their network of leaders, and shift capital and power. In particular, their capital intermediation democratizes decision-making and builds power by changing who is at the table, and elevating peer and community feedback in funding decisions. |
| Justice Funders | The Justice Funders is a nonprofit and network focused on ushering a Just Transition within the field of philanthropy, guiding funders to take an active role in redistributing wealth, democratizing power and shifting economic control to communities. Through thought leadership, leadership development, coaching and consulting, the Justice Funders seek to shift the dominant narratives of philanthropy. |

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Increase Leadership by Black, Indigenous, and People Across the Food System

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| Food and Farm Communications Fund | The Food and Farm Communications Fund is a multi-funder pooled grant program and advocate for the critical role of strategic communications and narrative in advancing equity, justice, and resilience in our food and farm systems. The Fund works to shift narratives, build power, facilitate collaborative grantmaking, and influence funding prioritization. |
| Fund for Shared Insight | The Fund for Shared Insight is a national funder collaborative that pools resources to provide grants, coaching, and community building. A core program, Listen4Good , helps nonprofits build client centered feedback loops to help them listen and respond to the people at the heart of their work. The Fund recently launched a \$1-million participatory grantmaking initiative to explore power-sharing around advocacy and policy work, involving people most impacted by climate change. |



SPOTLIGHT Catalyst of San Diego and Imperial Counties

It is impossible to separate equity from economics. Knowing that systemic exclusion has served as the backdrop of the American story for generations, [Catalyst of San Diego & Imperial Counties](#) works to bring about equity and lasting change in these regions, by funneling investments toward people and communities most impacted by racism.

Catalyst and its members aim to uplift the work of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC)-led organizations in San Diego and Imperial County communities, through relationship-building, trust-based grantmaking, and incorporating community leadership and accountability in funding plans.

For example, [Catalyst's Social Equity Collaborative Fund \(SECF\)](#) is a pooled grantmaking fund that supports collaborative, grassroots racial justice efforts where funding decisions are made directly by community members most impacted by exclusion, racism, and historic under-investment. In the past five years, SECF has distributed more than \$2 million to grassroots groups throughout San Diego County, including funding food sovereignty initiatives like Project New Village, and programs supporting farmers of color and propping up farming as a climate solution such as Solidarity Farm.

"The fund seeks to support community groups that are 'hard to find and hard to fund'," explains Megan Thomas, the interim president of Catalyst. "That is to say, they operate outside of the dominant nonprofit and philanthropy network, even though they are most connected to the communities of concern."

Thomas explains, "We are here to learn, be uncomfortable, and grow with funders and grantees."

Ten years from now, she says, Catalyst expects that funders of all backgrounds will center BIPOC leadership in funding opportunities. Furthermore, they will realize the efficacy of ceding power in funding decisions to BIPOC leaders and BIPOC-led groups.

Dismantling the inequitable power structures that dominate our society now requires intentionally moving away from the common narrative that classifies people exclusively as "those who have" or "those who need."

"All people deserve access to healthy and culturally appropriate food. This is critical for leading a joyful and dignified life," Thomas says.

SECF translates intention into action. It is overseen by a committee of community-based leaders and racial equity advocates building trusting relationships with and among community-based organizations.



Thomas says that for SECF, the path forward is three-pronged. In 2020, the group decided to:

- "Give everything we can now to Black-led work aimed at radical systemic change."
- "Draw on the relationships we've built to adapt our actions to what the community needs."
- "Use our privilege to bring significantly more funding to BIPOC-led work in the future."

Relief funds have flowed into marginalized populations during the challenges of 2020, but there is still a disproportionate, long-term impact on communities of color, making programs like the Social Equity Collaborative Fund critical. The goal of the group is to create lasting solutions, not quick fixes during crises that later fade away.

"When communities face food insecurity and have no food sovereignty, we often don't see a lack of just resources, but rather, a complete disconnect between community voices and needs, and investment or sources of funding," Thomas said.

Ensuring that our region is resilient to the uncertainties of the future requires sharing prosperity, and realizing that we are all interconnected. A truly sustainable food system is one that takes just as good care of producers, workers, and the eaters of one community as it does the eaters of another community. With this vision, Catalyst, its funders, and grantees are all forging a path toward health, sovereignty, and self-determination for all, together.

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Increase Leadership by Black, Indigenous, and People Across the Food System

Funding Indigenous Communities

San Diego County sits on occupied territory that was home to several distinct Indigenous communities for thousands of years prior to European contact in 1542, including Kumeyaay/Diegueño, Payómkawichum/Luiseño, Cahuilla, and Kuupiaxchem/Cupeño.

Today, the region is home to 18 tribal communities—the most of any county in the United States—who live on 4.3% of their ancestral homelands (125,000 acres or 195 square miles). The local Indigenous population now makes up only 1.6% (51,904 people) of the county.³⁸

The tragedies inflicted on Indigenous communities have never been rectified, nationally nor here in San Diego County, and the historic and ongoing disinvestment of these communities has resulted in stark inequalities.

There are many deeply-held systemic barriers

that have and continue to prevent sustained investment in Indigenous communities. Native-led organizations are often perceived as lacking the capacity to handle large investments, and investments are viewed as high risk.³⁹

An analysis of grant dollars awarded to Indigenous organizations from 2006 to 2014 found that annual giving by large foundations declined by 29% (\$35 million). Support by six of the 10 largest funders of Native organizations and causes has declined by almost 50% from 2006 to 2014, and only 0.15% of community foundation funding goes to Native causes annually.⁴⁰

The [Native American Agriculture Fund](#) highlights that “For too long, Native producers, communities, Tribes, and regions have not had the infrastructure necessary to create a resilient and thriving regional food system.” Their vision for the future of food and agriculture estimates a price tag of \$3.4 billion

³⁸ The U.S. Census Bureau counts 51,904 people (1.6%) of American Indian and Alaska Native race “alone or in combination with one or more other races” and 22,524 people (0.7%) who were American Indian or Alaska Native only. Most Indigenous people in San Diego County do not live on reservations.

³⁹ First Nations Development Institute, 2018, [Community Foundation Giving to Native American Causes](#).

⁴⁰ First Nations Development Institute, 2018, [Growing Inequity: Large Foundation Giving to Native American Organizations and Causes, 2006-2014](#).

⁴¹ Native American Agriculture Fund, 2020, [Reimagining Native Food Economies: A Vision for Native Food and Agriculture Infrastructure Rebuilding and Recovery](#).

to reimagine Native food economies with several major infrastructural and educational investments across 10 regions.⁴¹

To realize that vision, [six recommendations](#) were developed by the First Nations Development Institute to guide funding:

Develop a willingness and commitment to listen and learn from Native communities, with the goal of cultivating long-term partnerships with Native communities.

Ensure that community foundation missions and core values reflect a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, and that Native American communities are included in this commitment.

Conduct an internal analysis of why native communities are not significantly represented in local giving and have honest conversations about barriers and opportunities for partnership and collaboration.

Utilize state, regional or national Native American organizations as information resources and to connect community foundations to local Native organizations.

Analyze staff hiring, and organizational committee and board recruitment practices to ensure native people are included within hiring or board recruitment pools.

Ensure that native community organizations are authentically included when convening nonprofit partners.

On May 5, 2021, the San Diego County Board of Supervisors passed a [Board action](#) to fund a Tribal Liaison position to begin cultivating deeper relationships with our region’s 18 Tribal governments. Centering local Indigenous communities and increasing funding is essential to creating a sustainable and equitable food system in San Diego County.



From Increasing BIPOC Leadership to Building a Food Movement

Increasing community leadership and ownership, cultivating justice, and building resilience are all vital for building a local, sustainable, and equitable food movement in San Diego County. Diversity is the foundation of any movement. Developing a multi-racial food movement that has the power to shift the dominant food culture and narrative is highlighted in Objective 9.



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