

# SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY HEALTH FUND

## San Joaquin Valley Health Fund: A Catalyst for a Regional Advocacy Network

*“It is an honor to be part of something so powerful in the Central Valley.  
This collaboration pushes us to do more in our community. It drives real and lasting change.”*  
— SJVHF Policy Committee Member

The San Joaquin Valley Health Fund (SJVHF) is a community-driven funder collaborative managed by The Center at Sierra Health Foundation to create a more equitable distribution of resources and opportunities in the region. Each year, the SJVHF community partners—through the SJVHF Policy Committee—develop and adopt a policy platform that guides the year’s activities. The committee is made up of six subcommittees, which represent the priority policy areas of immigration, health, housing, education, environmental justice, and land use and planning.



In early 2021, The Center, with funding from Blue Shield of California Foundation, contracted with Engage R+D to conduct a study of the SJVHF’s role in creating and strengthening the regional advocacy network in the San Joaquin Valley.

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*In 2017, Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice—one of the SJVHF’s first community partners—was familiar with 19 of the 61 organizations that participate in the Policy Committee. By 2021, that number increased to 60.*

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While more than 170 community-based organizations have been funded through SJVHF, the study focused on connections among the 61 members of the San Joaquin Valley Health Fund Policy Committee. Engage R+D used a social network analysis survey and interviews to gather the information. Fifty-eight (93%) of the Policy Committee members

responded to the survey and 12 members were interviewed.



THE CENTER  
at Sierra Health Foundation

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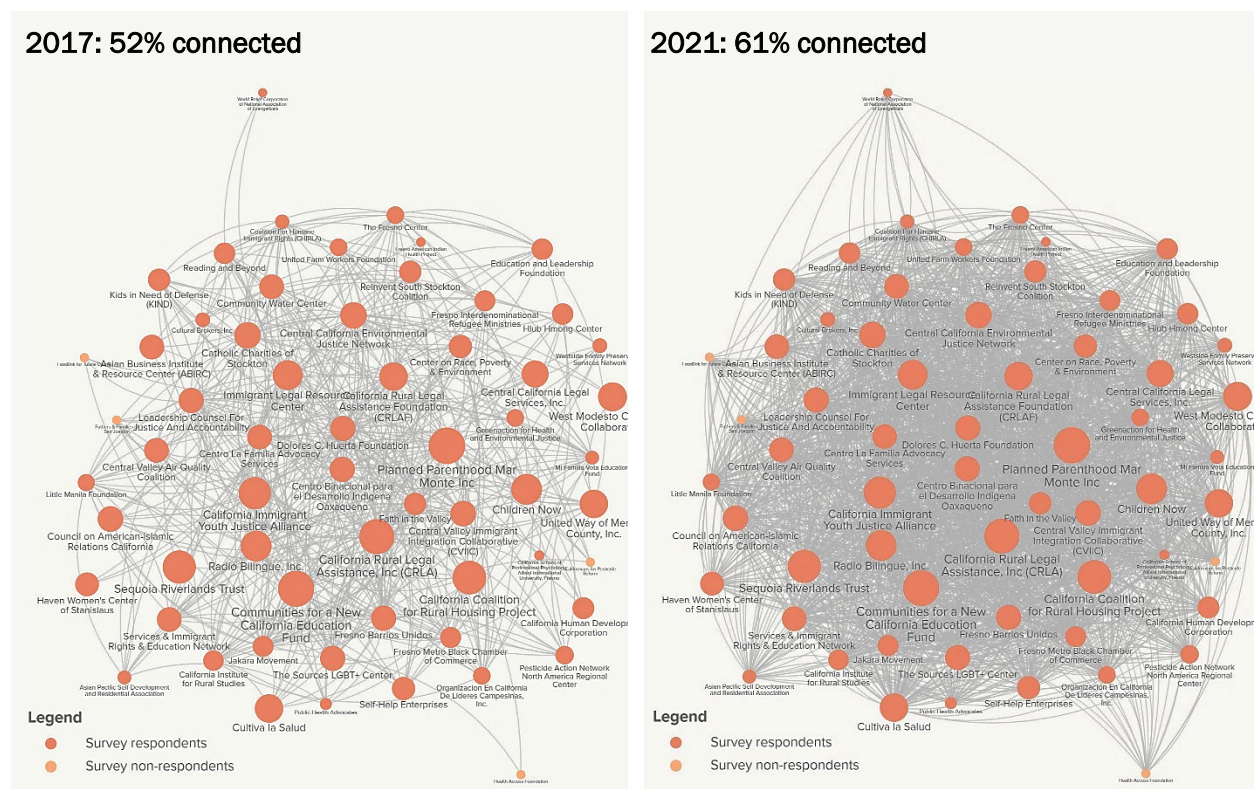
## Strengthening the Network of Advocates

*"Because of the connections from the meetings and bringing us together, we were able to network and I call that synergy."*

— SJVHF Policy Committee Member

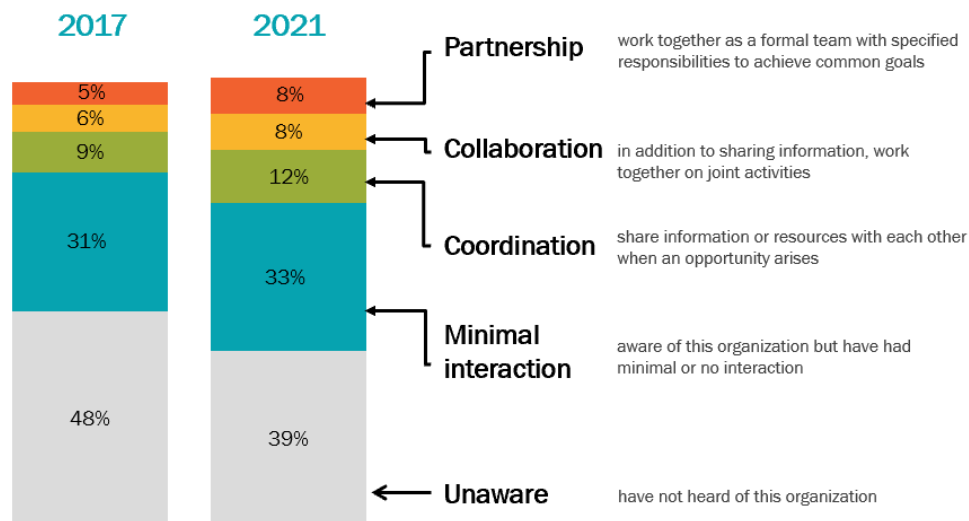
From 2017-2021, connections among Policy Committee members increased and deepened.

The network maps below show that network density<sup>1</sup> increased by 9%, or 326 new connections. In 2017, a network density of 52% means that there were 1,779 connections. By 2021, on average, each organization connected with six organizations they had not known about or interacted with before.



In addition to the increase in connections overall, the analysis found that community partners developed deeper connections over time. As shown in the figure on the following page, in 2021, 39% of all possible connections had yet to be established and 33% of the connections were still at the most basic level of communication. However, all other types of connections increased from 2017. These increases may look small but represent meaningful changes in relationships. For example, the 3% increase in Partnership represents 102 new one-way connections, which suggests that 51 new partnerships were created.

<sup>1</sup> Network density = the number of connections/all possible connections. A network connection is one-way. If each organization was connected in some way with every other organization, there would be 3,420 connections.



### Connections have increased across counties and within policy areas.

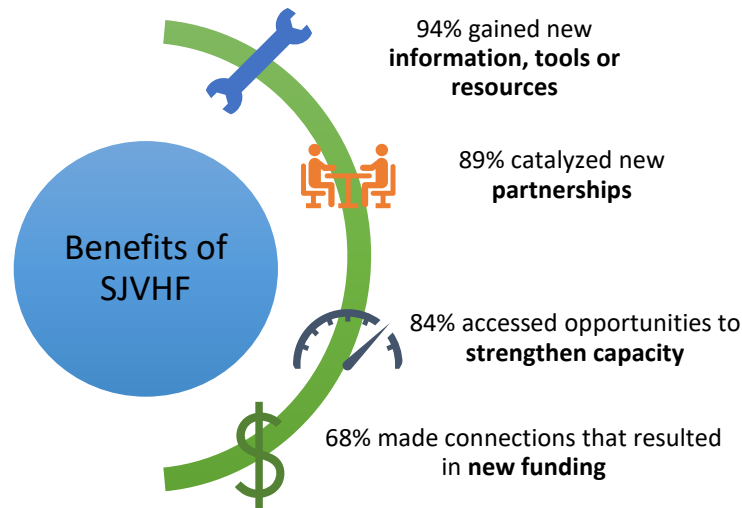
Between 2017 and 2021, cross-county connections increased by 9%. While some of the partners have worked across the region for years, others are just beginning to make connections to organizations engaged in similar work in other counties. The analysis also found increases in connections within policy areas, which are likely due to the connections of organizations involved in similar work in different parts of the region.

### Strengthening Community Partner Capacity

*“Because of the leveraging, the networking, and the collaboration that The Center provided in the [policy] platform, I was able to really help my community and the clients that I serve at a much higher level.”*

– SJVHF Policy Committee Member

In response to questions about their experiences with and the outcomes of the SJVHF network, most Policy Committee members indicated that participation in SJVHF was beneficial to their organization. In addition to the ways that are indicated in the graphic on the following page, some of the organizations that had traditionally identified as service providers and were newer to advocacy mentioned that they had been mentored by some of the more established advocacy organizations.



## Strengthening Regional Advocacy

*“The more we learn about each other, the more united we become.”*  
 – SJVHF Policy Committee Member

By building the capacity of community partners and expanding and deepening connections among partners, SJVHF seeks to strengthen advocacy for equitable and justice in the San Joaquin Valley.

### **SJVHF has brought organizations together for advocacy.**

The Engage R+D report states, “In interviews, members shared the way the SJVHF brings together multiple agencies in one place so they can work on issues *‘together instead of solo or alone.’* ...and how, through the committee approach, they were able to identify where their work overlaps and develop additional opportunities for collaboration.” Nearly two thirds of the respondents said they work together on advocacy, including signing on to letters, participating in educational campaigns, providing support at public hearings, sharing media communications, among other collaborations. The analysis also found a 9% increase in cross-county connections from 2017-2021. As one Policy Committee member said, *“We’re not on an island by ourselves and what we have, we can share... We have to be able to depend on other groups.”*

### **SJVHF increased the effectiveness of advocacy.**

Almost all—92%—of the Policy Committee members responding to the survey reported that, as a result of participating in the SJVHF, their organizations influenced policy in the San Joaquin Valley. Based on their interviews, Engage R+D linked this to connections organizations had made through the SJVHF, stating that “many interviewees described connecting with different organizations in **ways that have supported or expanded their work and reach throughout the region.**” Examples included organizations that had focused on urban communities expanding outreach into rural areas, those that had focused on one part of the region collaborating with SJVHF partners in other parts. Interviewees also spoke about having expanded resources for community outreach, referrals and services.



Policy Committee members also assessed the role of the SJVHF in the region. At least two out of three of the survey respondents agreed that the SJVHF:

- Works on goals that would be difficult for a single organization to do alone (88%)
- Uses resources more efficiently by working together (79%)
- Does what no other organization is trying to do (75%)

Engage R+D concluded that “The SJVHF has put a spotlight on the San Joaquin Valley to attract funding and collectively amplify [the partners’] voices.”

### Looking Ahead: Continuing to Strengthen the SJVHF Regional Advocacy Network

In addition to documenting what the SJVHF has achieved, The Center asked the consultants to gather input for the future of the SJVHF. Areas for improvement surfaced by the project include: support for implementation of the policy platform, clarification of the decision-making process, and cross-partner learning. Building on the recommendations of the Policy Committee, the SJVHF has launched plans for:

- Intra-regional town halls to increase opportunities to bring the policy platform to local decision-makers
- Possible restructuring of the Policy Committee to ensure the SJVHF stays community-driven even as it grows
- New leadership and capacity-building opportunities that leverage the knowledge and leadership of more experienced community partners and create capacity building opportunities for other partners

As Chet P. Hewitt, President and CEO of The Center at Sierra Health Foundation, often says, “Nobody does anything great alone.” The SJVHF is the embodiment of organizations coming together to advance the policy and systems changes needed for equity and justice in the region.

[Access the San Joaquin Valley Health Fund Social Network Analysis Final Report \(.pdf\).](https://www.shfcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/SJVHF_Social_Network_Analysis_Final_Report_2021_ADA.pdf)

[https://www.shfcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/SJVHF\\_Social\\_Network\\_Analysis\\_Final\\_Report\\_2021\\_ADA.pdf](https://www.shfcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/SJVHF_Social_Network_Analysis_Final_Report_2021_ADA.pdf)

