



SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY HEALTH FUND  
NETWORK MAPPING PROJECT:

# LEARNING FROM OUR PARTNERS

# INTRODUCTION

The **San Joaquin Valley Health Fund (SJVHF)**, which is managed by The Center at the Sierra Health Foundation (The Center), is a community-driven funders collaborative with nearly 170 community-based organizations and the support of more than 40 national and state funders and donors. Started in 2017, the SJVHF seeks changes to policy and systems that will create more equitable distribution of opportunity and resources to the most vulnerable communities in the San Joaquin Valley. The core of their activities is informed and driven by their **Policy Platform**. Each year, more than fifty representatives from funded partner organizations come together as the **Policy Committee** to discuss key policy issues and develop the platform. The 2020 Policy Platform, for example, identifies six priority areas (also known as IHHEEL): immigration, health, housing, education, environmental justice and land use and planning. The SJVHF, with the support of The Center, recognizes that the policy platform must be sustained and powered by community organizing, grassroots leadership development, civic engagement, and community mobilization.

In 2021, The Center partnered with Engage R+D, an evaluation and learning firm, to evaluate the extent to which participation in the SJVHF has initiated or strengthened collaborative relationships over its first three years (2017-2020). The purpose of this evaluation was to inform how The Center can further support the regional movement-building network and help members of the SJVHF plan their work going forward.

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# EVALUATION APPROACH AND LEARNING QUESTIONS

Learning questions inform why we are conducting an evaluation and what we want to learn and share from the data that is collected. The learning questions for this evaluation are shared on the right.

To answer these questions, Engage R+D implemented a mixed methods approach to network mapping. This included:

- A survey to gather information about the members of the SJVHF, including their connectivity to each other, as well as their participation characteristics and experiences
- Interviews to gain an understanding of context, nature of relationships and participation, and to capture stories and examples behind the numbers

Our engagement ended with a virtual interactive learning session, where we presented the network mapping findings to The Center and Policy Committee members, providing a chance to reflect on their experiences and engage with the data.

## Learning and Evaluation Questions



To what extent have **collaborative relationships been created or strengthened** over the last three years?



What **role**, if any, may **participation in the SJVHF** have played in changes in these relationships? Some areas of interest include:

- The role of the **Policy Committee** and policy subcommittees
- The annual **Equity on the Mall** advocacy event
- SJVHF **convenings and capacity-building** activities



What **conditions** may have facilitated or hindered the **development or strengthening of relationships**, including local contexts, the political environment and changes in policies?

# METHODS

As described earlier, there were two main components to the evaluation. Those methods are described below:



## **Survey of 57 SJVHF members**

A non-random, collaborative sampling method was applied to ensure that the final sample was representative of the specific purpose and organized structure of the SJVHF. Several factors were considered in the sampling including new and long-time participants, small and large organizations, urban and rural communities, geographic diversity, and policy/topic areas. The survey was administered electronically, and the response rate was 93 percent (57 of 61 participants replied to the survey).



## **Interviews with 12 participants from the survey**

Following the completion of the survey, 12 SJVHF members were individually asked to participate in interviews. All 12 agreed to participate. The purpose of the interviews was to probe further into the evaluation and learning questions introduced earlier, to understand the nature of the relationships and connections that were seen in the network mapping survey, and to capture stories and examples of their participation.

### **What is Network Mapping?**

Networking mapping, or social network analysis (SNA), is a methodological approach to measuring and mapping the relationships between entities. The analysis is often visualized as a network map that shows the entities in the network and the connections between them. By measuring the position and grouping of these entities, we can gain insight into the role participants play and how information flows between them.

While traditional evaluation focuses on the actions of individuals, network mapping can illustrate how actors influence one another, pass along information and resources, and mobilize for action. Organizations and individuals with a network mindset understand the web of relationships that they are a part of and how their work contributes to larger, more diverse, and more powerful efforts.

### **Limitations**

As with any study, there are limitations. First, baseline data relied on the participants' recall of relationships with organizations up to three years prior. This is a normal practice for this study and findings from this network analysis were consistent with other similar analyses. Second, the San Joaquin Valley Health Fund was not designed or intended to be a study from the start, meaning that we did not have the opportunity to collect primary data, do intentional sampling, or establish a control group prior to the start of the collaborative in 2017. For this reason, the study is not intended to determine causation. However, Social Network Analysis, as described above, is considered a standard method of examining relationships between and across organizations, including changes over time and strengths of relationships. The SJVHF includes many organizations, so a sufficient and representative sample size was established, data were uniformly collected, and the response rate was high. These factors make it possible to conduct a rigorous analysis.



# NETWORK MAPPING

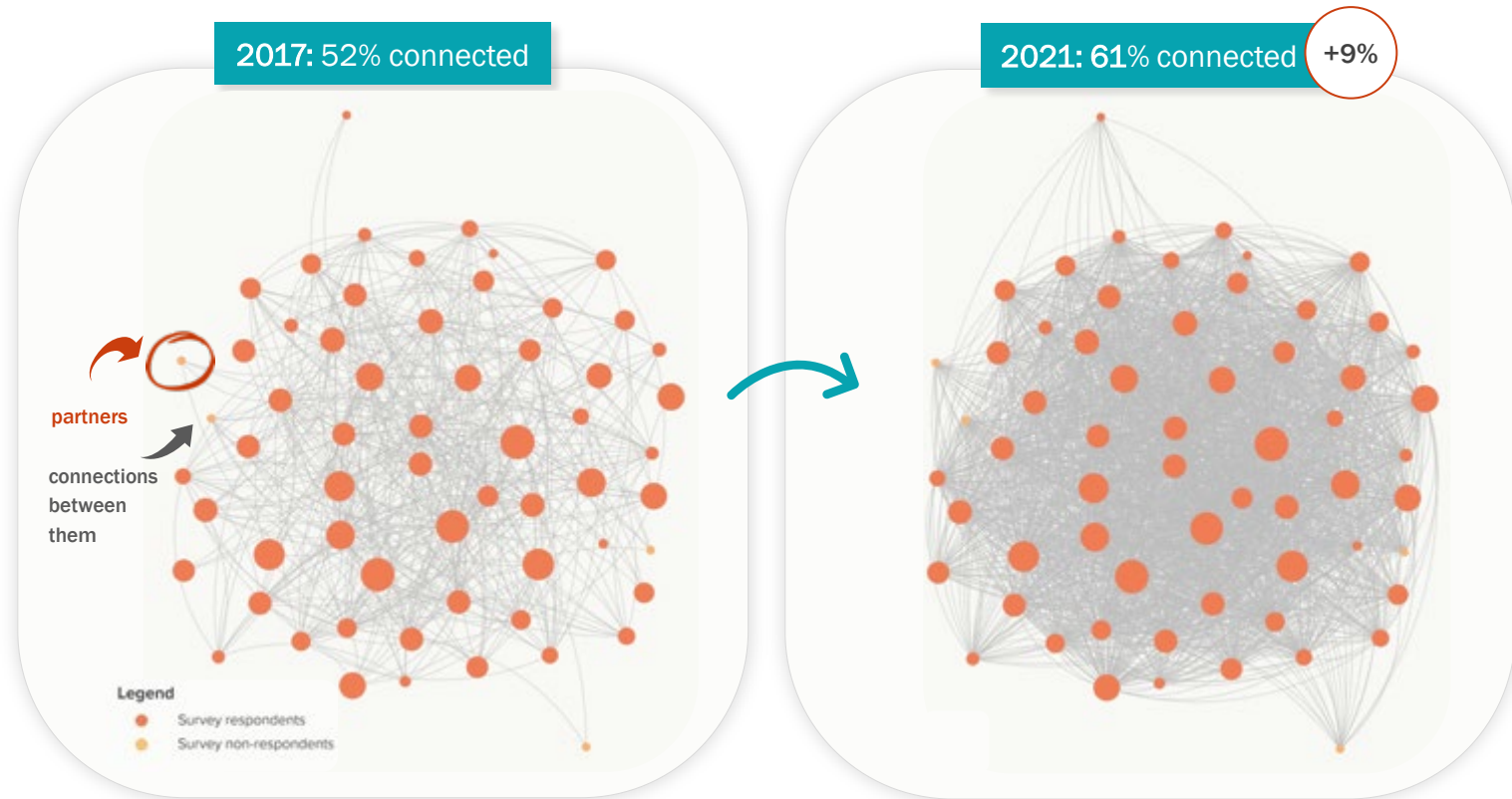


# CONNECTIONS BETWEEN MEMBERS ARE GROWING

The 57 community partners of the SJVHF provided information about who they were connected to in 2017 and in 2021 in order to help us better understand the primary evaluation question: **To what extent have collaborative relationships been created over the last three years?**

The survey showed that connections between members are growing. On average, members got to know other members from six more organizations in the SJVHF from 2017 to 2021.

The maps on the right show all the relationships between SJVHF members in the survey. In 2017, 52% of all possible relationships were occurring between members (100% would mean everyone knew everyone). By 2021, that connectivity grew to 61%: as indicated by many more lines connecting the partners in 2021 than in 2017.

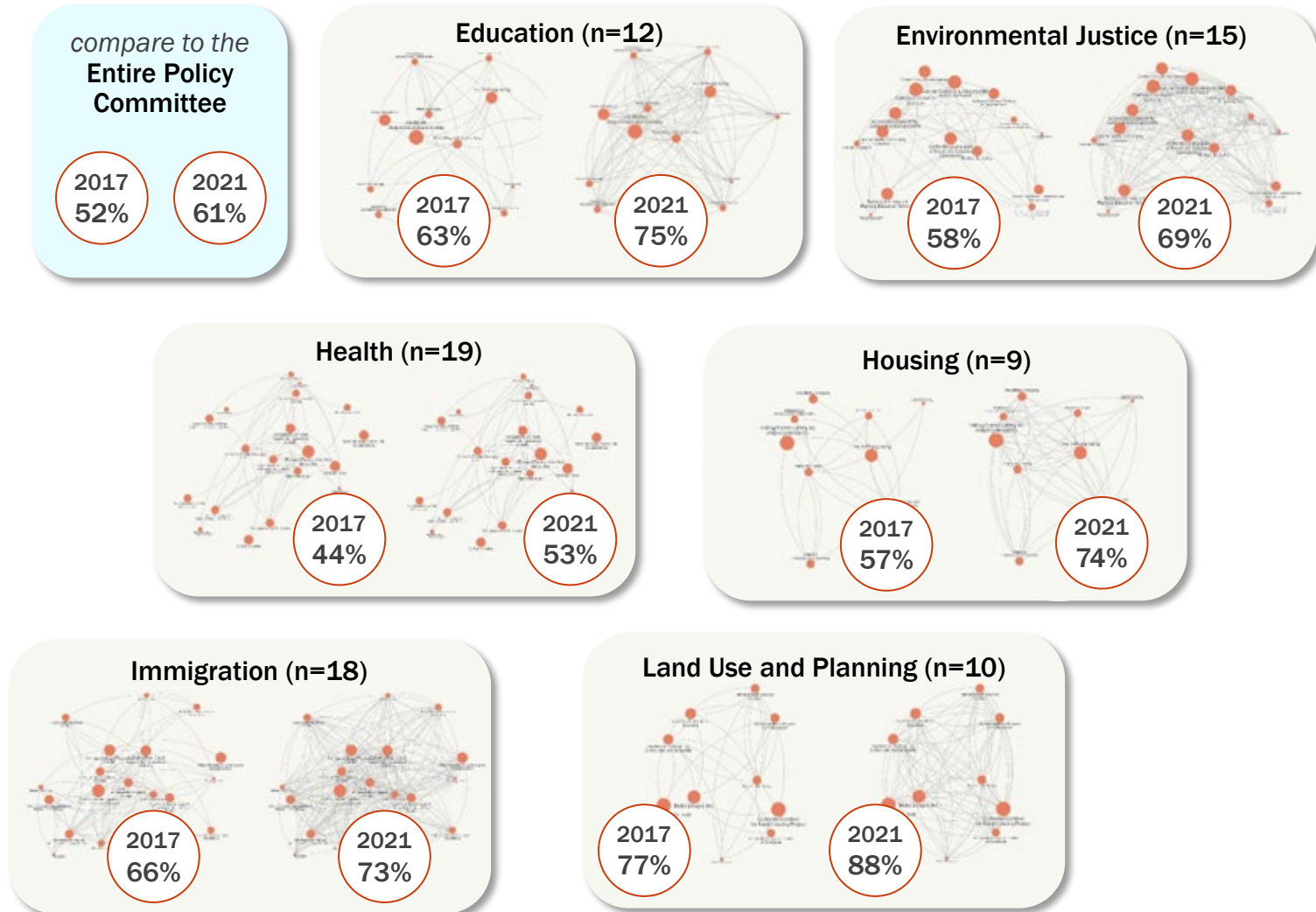


# MEMBERS ARE EVEN MORE CONNECTED IN SUBCOMMITTEES

The growth in connections between members was even more notable when looking at connections within SJHF subcommittees.

When we divided the map of all connections up by subcommittee, we found that members of most subcommittees were more connected than in the SJVHF as a whole. For example, those we surveyed in the Education Subcommittee were 63% connected in 2017 and grew to be 75% connected in 2021. In interviews, members gave examples of these relationships, including:

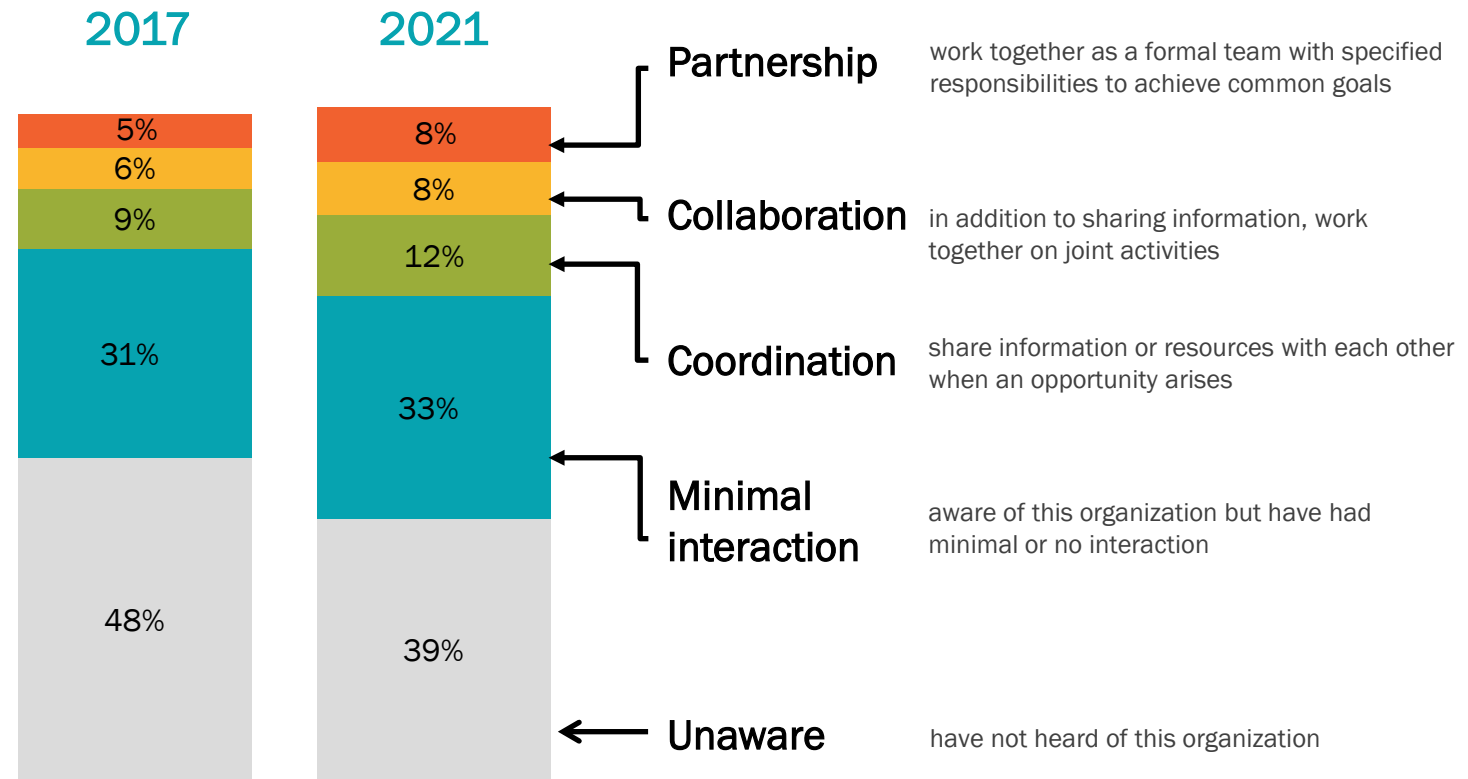
- **Environmental Justice:** Connecting one another to key political officials to advance policies in the legislature
- **Health:** Sharing upcoming campaigns with each other to advance issues across intersecting policy areas
- **Immigration:** Working together to map resources, collaborate for workshops, and align their work across regions.



# CONNECTIONS BETWEEN MEMBERS ARE DEEPENING

In addition to the *number* of connections between members, we also asked members to rate the *depth* of their connections to each other, from *no* or *minimal interaction* to *coordination* (sharing information and resources), *collaboration* (working together on joint activities), and *partnerships* (working together as formal team).

SJVHF members who took the survey reported that their connections had deepened from 2017 to 2021. The charts on the right show that, in addition to forming new connections (a decrease in the percent who were *unaware* of each other and an increase in *minimal* interactions), there were some increases in the percent of relationships characterized as *coordination*, *collaboration*, or a *partnership*.





# PARTNERS SHARED *HOW* RELATIONSHIPS HAVE DEEPENED OVER TIME



## Joining the Network

In interviews, we asked SJVHF members about their initial impressions of the fund. Repeatedly, interviewees said they joined the fund because they felt it offered valuable opportunities for their organizations.

However, some interviewees said they initially felt apprehension about joining. Some organizations said they were new to policy work and were concerned that they did not have the right expertise. Others noted that the group was very large, with many organizations with different experiences and areas of expertise.

## Evolving over time

Members shared that the SJVHF has become more organized with a clear policy platform over time. Members shared that they receive e-newsletters which loop them into upcoming activities and provide general updates from other organizations on a consistent basis. As they have developed relationships, some interviewees described deepening relationships where they are able to connect with people on multiple occasions across numerous spaces where community-based organizations come together. Despite the trepidation some experienced upon joining the group, they described a stronger understanding and value of the policy work over time.

## Connecting now

Finally, interviewees reflected on their current relationships and experiences with the SJVHF. They described an array of connections and actions which amplified a deepening of their relationships. For example, interviewees described how they support one another's respective policies. They have worked closely with other organizations to combine services or offer them for one another. Some newer organizations also described the development of mentoring relationships from more established organizations. In addition, they shared experiences of learning together in professional development sessions.

**“The more we learn about each other,  
the more united we become.”**

- Policy Committee Interviewee

# > MOVING FORWARD

## Additional Opportunities To Collaborate



Policy Committee members appreciated opportunities to work together. In interviews, they suggested additional ways they could connect, including:

**Creating more opportunities to get to know one another.** Some expressed wanting to get to know members of their own subcommittees better, while others were interested in meeting those within their region or from other policy areas. In the survey, for example, as not all members agreed that the group makes effective use of partners' skills, some participants believed that getting to know one another could help identify new opportunities for collaboration and symbiosis.

They suggested the group could use breakout rooms, conduct town hall-style meetings, and meet in person when safe.

The Policy Committee makes effective use of partners' skills

69%

**Working across subcommittees.** Some members felt that the policy work could benefit from bringing together the platform issues and working across policy areas toward a more unified campaign. *"We're not all going to be specialists in these different areas, but I think it would be important for our region to try to think in a more intersectional way,"* remarked one member.

**Sharing organized information about members.** Several members suggested opportunities to better curate and distribute information about who members are and what they are working on. Some recommended having a newsletter issue dedicated to partner information that is separate from Policy Committee news. Others wanted to see tabling events to get to know each others' work, a directory of organizations, or dedicated time at meetings to share out.

At the same time, some acknowledged the time constraints and burden that meetings can have on small and lean organizations. Many shared that meetings were too long or too frequent and that it would be helpful to prioritize what is shared during versus outside of meetings.



# EXPERIENCES WITH THE POLICY COMMITTEE

# PERCEPTIONS OF THE SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY HEALTH FUND

In the survey, members generally agreed that the SJVHF had elements of a healthy network, including having shared goals and accomplishing more together, using resources efficiently, and creating a safe space for debate and discussion.

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.”* They shared how, through the committee approach, they were able to identify where their work overlaps and develop additional opportunities for collaboration.

**“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.”**

- Policy Committee Interviewee

## Surveyed members agreed that the San Joaquin Valley Health Fund...





## HOW PARTICIPANTS DESCRIBED THEIR EXPERIENCE



# > MOVING FORWARD

## Ways to Support Committee Work



In interviews, participants shared ways that The Center could continue to support their work in the Policy Committee:

**Support for capacity building.** Several members said they were new to policy and advocacy work or that it was not the main role of their organization. For this reason, many would like more support in this area, such as introductory and onboarding information for new members, more advanced training, and support for activities such as sample agendas and talking points for Equity on the Mall.

**Flexible funding opportunities.** Members were also interested in ways that funding from The Center (and other funders) could better support their work. Several participants mentioned the need for multi-year grants, while others were interested in general support grants, more transparency around the availability of and eligibility for larger grants, and smaller grants to support smaller organizations.

### **More transparent process for decision-making.**

Relative to other survey items, fewer members agreed that the Policy Committee had a clear process for collaborative decision-making. In interviews, members shared that the “downside” to a large and diverse membership is that it can be trickier for “everyone to be heard,” to come to a consensus, and that this process is not explicit or shared widely with the group. As the SJVHF matures to become a more established group and continues to grow, it may be helpful to re-visit the governance structure and processes.

The Policy Committee has a clear process for collaborative decision-making



# KEY OUTCOMES TO DATE

The network survey (see right) and participant interviews showed how the SJVHF helped members **gain new information, tools, and resources** by providing training and capacity building opportunities including regional convenings and collaborative opportunities such as the Census and COVID-19 projects.

Interviewees also shared the way they have worked collaboratively with other member organizations to **advance legislative policies** that have had an effect in the San Joaquin Valley region.

Policy committee members have also **catalyzed new partnerships**. For example, an interviewee described how after connecting with an organization they met through the network, their organization expanded to include staff who speak Spanish to ensure they can serve more constituents in their community. Some organizations have co-hosted workshops or serve as subject matter experts to consult with the staff of other member organizations and on research projects. These activities have **strengthened their capacity** as well as that of partner organizations.

Interviews also revealed how policy committee members appreciate how The Center has modeled the importance of funding organizations in the Central Valley. This has helped to attract **new funding** for some organizations.

Gained new information, tools, & resources



94%

Influenced policy affecting the SJV



92%

Catalyzed new partnerships



89%

Furthered their organizational goals



87%

Achieved a noteworthy success



85%

Accessed opportunities to strengthen capacity



84%

Made connections that resulted in new funding



68%



# THE IMPACT OF THE NETWORK ON RELATIONSHIPS

Many interviewees described connecting with different organizations in ways that have supported or expanded their work and reach throughout the region.

The San Joaquin Valley includes a mixture of rural, urban, and suburban communities. One organization noted the way that their engagement in the SJVHF allowed them to connect with organizations to expand their presence and programs into rural communities. Other organizations were able to partner with groups in the northern or eastern parts of the valley that traditionally are lesser known than organizations in Fresno. These are examples of how smaller organizations serving specific populations with whom they typically would not have known are now an expanded resource for community referrals, services and collaborations.

Alternatively, the SJVHF has also created a space for organizations with whom they are already connected with to connect in new ways creating more organizational stability in the Central Valley to strengthen and/or deepen relationships.

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

- Policy Committee Interviewee

The SJVHF has put a spotlight on the San Joaquin Valley to attract funding and collectively amplify their voices.

In interviews, members enthusiastically described how funding and organizing of the SJVHF has put a spotlight on and raised awareness of issues facing communities in the Central Valley and the organizations working to address them.

They received the attention of funders due to the convening of Central Valley organizations and their resulting collaborative efforts. For example, one organization received *“funding from the state for an immigration fellowship program to fund new attorneys to be trained and placed at nonprofits”* in their region. For many organizations it has *“been really huge to have a funder that's focused on the Valley.”* Additionally, the SJVHF has given a voice to the Central Valley *“highlighting the issues of equity in the Valley”* to *“help people to articulate their needs through the organizations”* and advocate at local and state levels. As one interviewee said, *“The fact that they have networked so many organizations working for health and equity across this underrepresented part of California is everything.”*

Some found the shift to virtual meetings has helped to deepen connections.

Given the size of the region, the movement to virtual spaces for meetings eliminated commute times and has allowed some organizations to have a more consistent presence in meetings and develop connections to one another. An interviewee shared that the SJVHF has been doing a lot to keep them connected in ways that they were not able to in the past.



# ➤ MOVING FORWARD

## Ways to Deepen Impact



In interviews, participants offered ideas for ways to further deepen their impact, including:

**Work together on collective projects.** Members appreciated participating in special funding opportunities such as the Census work and COVID relief funding. Some were interested in additional opportunities to work on collective projects across policy areas.

**Make more effective use of Equity on the Mall.** Several members commented that they were surprised that not many of their proposals were taken into consideration by members of the legislature. They wanted to find ways to be more effective in their planning and participation in the event. Some suggested sharing draft talking points with each other and better tailoring their policy goals to the amount of time they had with elected representatives. Others were interested in ways to better coordinate the work between members meeting with the same elected officials and ensure that the work was not duplicative with members' own events.

**Develop implementation plans for the policy platform.** A few members were concerned that, once policies are passed, their community is not always equipped with implementation plans to support enforcement and successful policy implementation. They wanted to see committee members prepare action plans to support the implementation of new policy.

**Engage more voices from the community.** Some members said that they would like to encourage more opportunities for community voice in their work with the Policy Committee. In addition to Equity on the Mall, they'd like to see members conduct surveys, take part in civic engagement opportunities, conduct community workshops, or otherwise engage the community in the IHHEEL process.



# APPENDIX