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# ¡Se ve! ¡Se Siente! ¡El Pueblo está Presente!

An Analysis of a Region in Transition from the  
Perspective of Inland Empire Latino Organizational Leaders

A REPORT BY

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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE



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## About the USC Center for Latinx & Latin American Studies

The USC Center for Latinx & Latin American Studies (CLLAS) is dedicated to interdisciplinary and transnational collaboration that enhances the economic, social, and political well-being of all individuals in the Americas. By partnering with diverse academic, legal, medical, financial, and social entities, the Center seeks to establish a platform for education that fosters collaboration. We champion hemispheric strategies that acknowledge and celebrate the diversity of Latinidad throughout the Americas. Additionally, we support initiatives that promote justice and equity in areas such as education, housing, food, and employment.



## About the CIELO Fund

Launched in 2022 at the Inland Empire Community Foundation, the Cultivating Inland Empire Latino Opportunity Fund (CIELO Fund) is dedicated to uplifting and investing in the Inland Empire's Latino community. The CIELO Fund supports organizations, initiatives, and innovations that are led by—and serve—Latinos in Riverside and San Bernardino counties. The CIELO Fund also invests in the next generation of leaders through the CIELO Fund Scholarship Program, commissions original research, and works on efforts that promote positive narratives for Latinos in the IE. Learn more at [iegives.org/cielofund](https://iegives.org/cielofund).

*Disclaimer: The CIELO Fund is proud to support research that contributes to important and complex regional conversations about the Latino experience in Riverside and San Bernardino counties. We thank the researchers at the USC Center for Latinx and Latin American Studies for sharing their insights and findings in this report, and thank the select Latino organizational leaders who shared their time and perspectives. The contents of this report reflect the views of the authors, who are responsible for the facts and the accuracy of the information presented herein.*



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

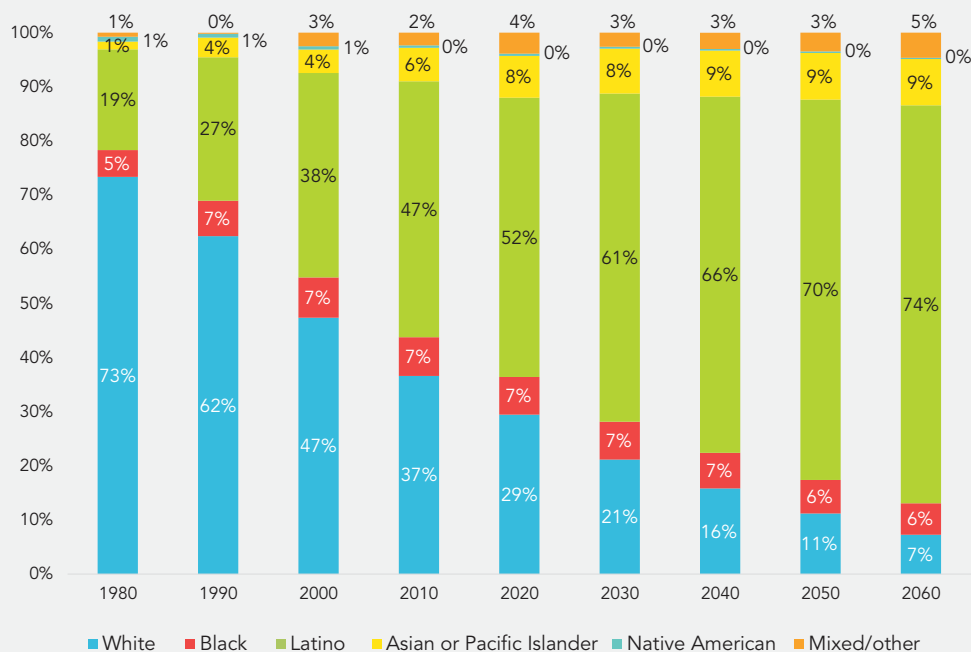
## A Region in Transition

Riverside and San Bernardino counties, collectively known as the Inland Empire, have undergone a historic demographic transformation. According to the 2020 Census, Latinos now constitute more than 50% of the population in both counties. This significant shift marks the culmination of the IE's transition from a predominantly white to a predominantly Latino region – and projections suggest that the region will be nearly three-quarter Latino by the middle of this century. Given this demographic shift, what happens for Latino well-being really matters for the region as a whole. This report outlines what must be done to ensure that the region and its new majority (and future super-majority) can achieve success and well-being in the immediate future.

Many of the leaders who participated in our study pointed out that even as Latinos have become the region's largest ethnic group, they must overcome a long history of racial inequities. Recent demographic and political changes have given some local leaders a sense that the IE is ripe for change. We argue that swift action must be taken to overcome the legacies of exclusion and to build a more inclusive region. Our recommendations are based on the perspectives of Latino nonprofit and community organizations, who clearly detail the primary challenges and opportunities facing the Inland Empire's growing Latino communities.

GRAPH 1

### Demographic Past & Future for the Inland Empire, 1980-2060



Source: National Equity Atlas <https://nationalequityatlas.org>

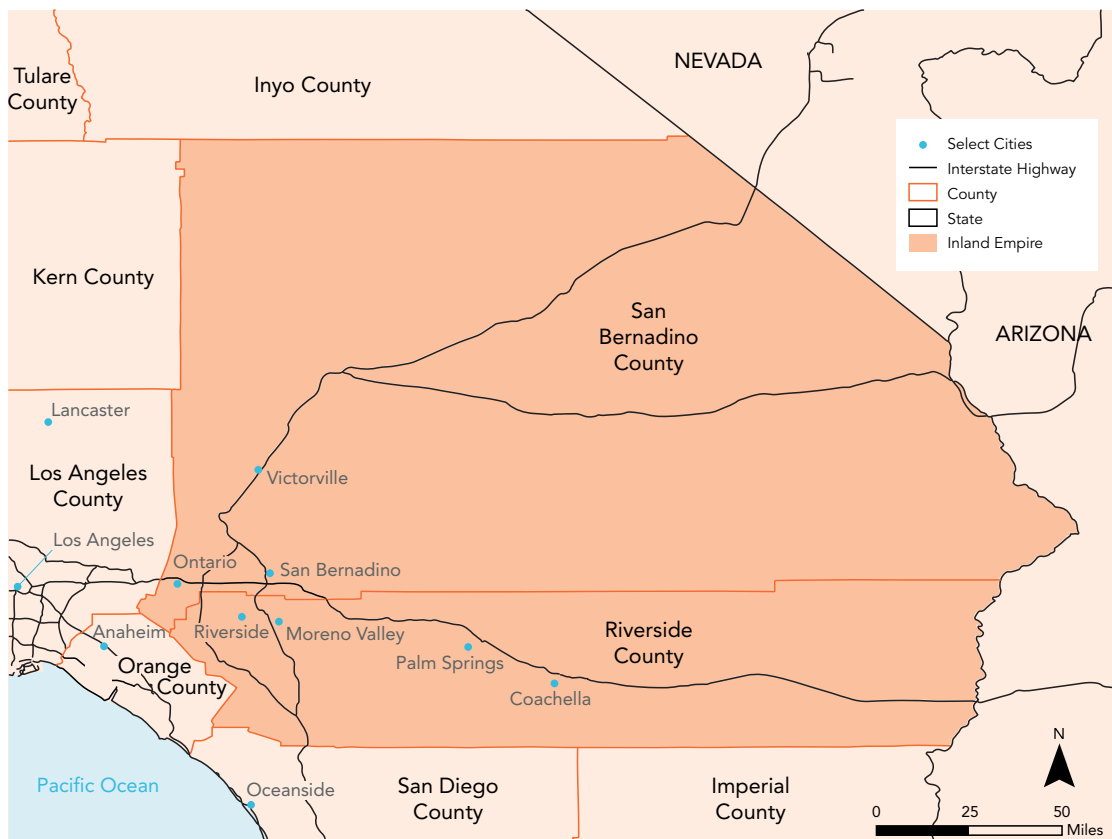
## Ready for Change

For decades, in fact “for far too long,” as one participant in this study emphasized, the Inland Empire has not had a high-road strategy for equitable development. A recent infusion of \$5 million dollars from California’s Community Economic Resilience Fund (CERF) has created new opportunities for regional leaders to build an Inland Empire High-Road Transition Collaborative. These efforts are important and should be applauded. Nevertheless, if Latino communities are going to benefit from these new high-road strategies, they must play a key role in shaping and implementing the region’s transition.

Change is even more important when we consider that the future of the IE rests in the hands of a relatively young population, which is also mostly Latino. The next generation will require more vibrant community services and sustainable career opportunities. If the

IE cannot provide those, it risks losing its educated and talented children to other regions. Support for Latino communities has increased in recent years, as more Latinos were elected to local, state, and federal offices. We commend this trend and suggest a more intentional regional strategy that focuses on developing local leadership capacity. Simply put, the IE must invest in a new generation of local leaders in both the private and public spheres.

Our findings show that improving Latino access, participation, and ownership in the region’s social, economic, political, and cultural spheres, will benefit the entire region. Conversely, neglecting these needs and perpetuating feelings of disenfranchisement could hinder the region from tapping into the vast resources and talents within Latino communities.



Note: In this study, we use "Latino" as a broad term to include those identifying as Latina, Chicano, Chicana, "Latinx", "Hispanic", "Latine", "Latin@", and more. The U.S. Census Bureau labels this group as "Hispanic or Latino." This includes people from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and other Latin American or Caribbean areas, regardless of racial background. We recognize the cultural and linguistic diversity of this community. Additionally, we acknowledge the significant presence and contributions of indigenous Latin Americans within Inland Southern California's expanding Latino community. Our definition of the "Inland Empire" or the "IE" region covers Riverside and San Bernardino counties. The U.S. Census designates this as the Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario metropolitan area.



## Key Findings

- **INVEST IN THE REGION'S FUTURE BY INVESTING IN LATINO COMMUNITIES:** If the Inland Empire is going to thrive in the immediate future, then it must invest in its emerging Latino majority. Such an investment should be seen as essential to the region's development as a whole. As we outline in this report, this investment should focus on economic sustainability, education, housing, the environment, and racial equity.
- **TRANSFORM INSTITUTIONS TO MEET EMERGING NEEDS:** Established institutions must evolve to meet the needs of Latino communities. Most of the existing governance systems and institutions have not prioritized Latinos, that is what many of our focus group and survey respondents expressed to us. Fixing this will require existing social services, public agencies, and civic organizations to expand access and services to these communities.
- **EXPAND LEADERSHIP CAPACITY:** Given the region's demographic transition, intentional investment in leadership capacity will be required for Latinos to play key roles in institutions they have historically been excluded from. A greater role within regional institutions will increase cultural competence in service delivery and governance for Latino communities.



- **CREATE NEW INSTITUTIONS AND COMMUNITY NETWORKS:** In some instances, the region's burgeoning Latino majority will require new institutions and community networks to adequately address its particular needs. Funders and policymakers should invest time and resources in innovative approaches, especially in future-planning strategies that focus on youth.
- **SUPPORT OUR YOUTH:** As research by Veronica Terriquez et al has shown, investment in youth-serving organizations is especially important given the region's relatively young population.<sup>1</sup> More than one third of the IE's total population is under the age of 25. Latinos are particularly young, with a median age of 29. Today's youth will play a key role in shaping the region's future. Investing in young people will benefit Latino communities and the IE in general.

# ABOUT THIS STUDY

In 2022, the *¡Aqui Estamos!* report, underwritten by the CIELO Fund, used 2020 Census data to shed light on a myriad of social, economic, and health disparities faced by Latinos.<sup>2</sup> This report aims to supplement quantitative data with a qualitative perspective, delving

into the insights of community leaders and organizers. Their firsthand experiences and observations offer a nuanced understanding of both the primary challenges and the potential opportunities that lie ahead for Latino communities in the Inland Empire.

To produce this study, we conducted 2 focus groups with 11 representatives of IE-based Latino organizations. We also administered a survey with 22 non-profit and community-based organizations in Riverside and San Bernardino counties. Most of these participants work on issues related to education, employment, the environment, immigrant rights, healthcare, civil rights, and the arts.

While over 66% of respondents indicated their organization primarily serves Latino communities, many also work with other racial and ethnic groups, notably Black and Indigenous communities. More than 63% of our respondents reported that they have five or fewer staff. Budgets for these organizations tend to be small, with 58% of responding groups saying they have annual budgets of less than \$500,000. When asked to define the nature of their work, nearly 50% of those surveyed described themselves as base building and community organizing groups. Nearly 80% of these organizations do their work in both Riverside and San Bernardino counties.

The findings and recommendations discussed in this report should provide valuable input for policy leaders, funders, and other advocates. For policy leaders, this serves as a roadmap, crafted by those intimately familiar with the daily challenges these communities

face. Funders receive guidance on where their resources can be most impactful, rooted in deep community engagement. And for other advocates, this underscores the ongoing nature of the work and the tangible challenges and opportunities ahead.

GRAPH 2

## Top 5 Areas Community Leaders Want to Strengthen



Source: Survey Results, 2023





# INTRODUCTION

Latinos emerged as a demographic majority in Riverside and San Bernardino counties, collectively known as the Inland Empire or IE, after the 2020 Census. This new majority status was conferred because of a tremendous population boom that transformed the IE from a majority white region to a majority Latino region between 1980 and 2020. While many Latinos

moved into the region during this period, some Latinos have deep historical roots in the IE that precede the arrival of white U.S. settlers. What follows is a brief overview of key datapoints about the region's Latino residents. A more detailed analysis of 2020 Census data can be found in the *Aquí Estamos* report listed in the references of this study.

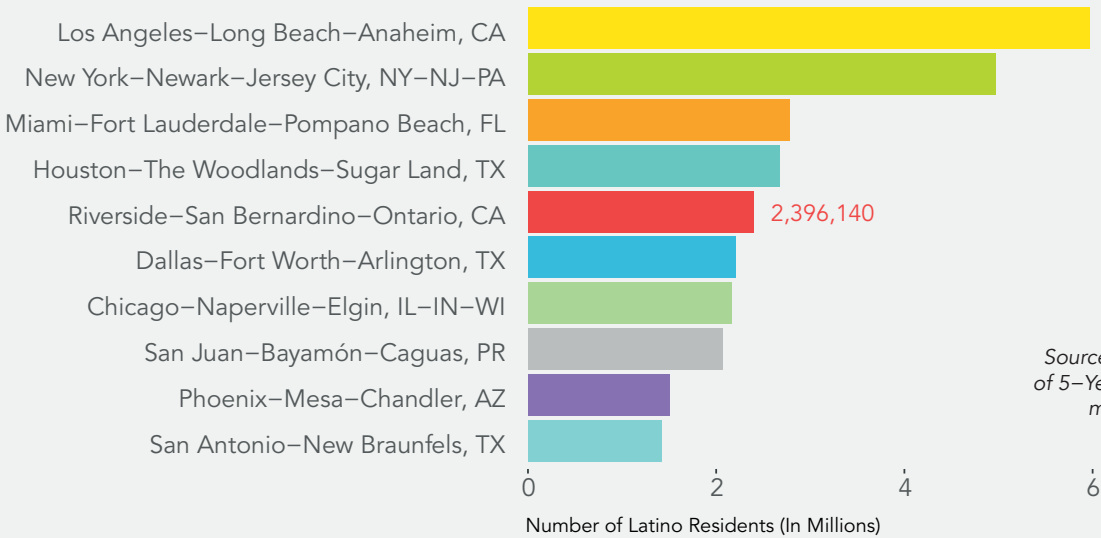
## Demographic Overview

The Riverside-San Bernardino metropolitan area is home to the country's fifth-largest population of Latinos in the United States. If considered as its own state, the Latino population in the IE would rank 37th in population, surpassing the entire population of

New Mexico. The overwhelming majority of Latinos in the Inland Empire are native born. In fact, 72% of all Latinos in Riverside and San Bernardino counties were born in the United States. Most Latinos in the IE, 86.2%, are of Mexican descent. Those of Central

GRAPH 3

### Top 10 Metropolitan Areas with Largest Number of Latinos



Source: Author's analysis of 5-Year American Community Survey, 2021



American descent represent the second largest group of Latinos in the region. (See Table 1.)

Latinos are disbursed throughout the region. Nonetheless, there are significantly higher concentrations of Latinos in the cities of San Bernardino and Riverside, near Moreno Valley, in the High Desert, and in the Eastern Coachella Valley (see Map 1). Additionally, we know that the population is younger when compared to other racial groups. As the chart on page 10 shows, the Latino population, with a median age of 29.1, is much younger than all other non-Latino residents in the IE.

TABLE 1

## Latino Population by Origin

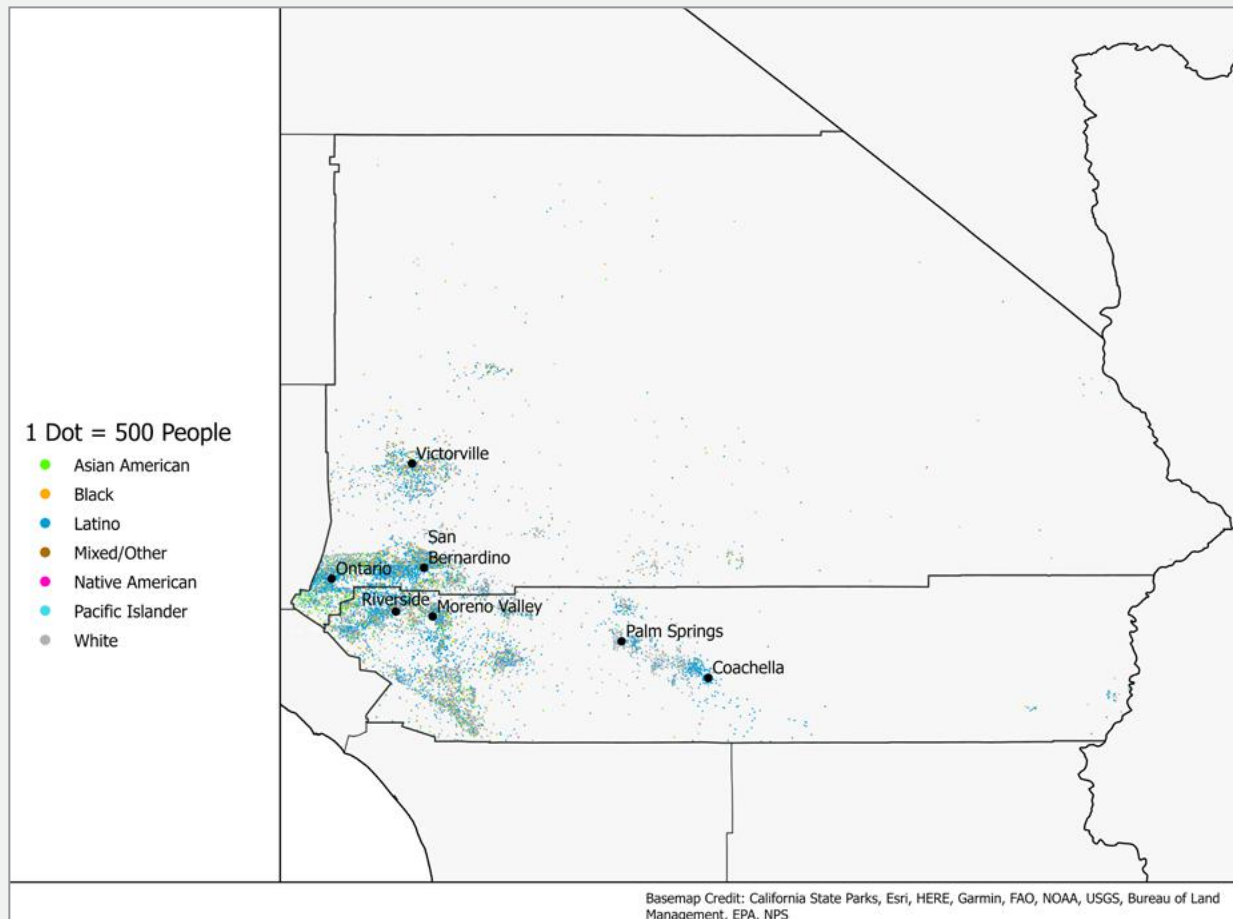
Inland Empire

Origin	Count	Share of Latino Population
Mexican	2,064,821	86.2%
Central American	140,889	5.9%
Other Hisp	89,342	3.7%
South American	43,265	1.8%
Puerto Rican	35,962	1.5%
Cuban	18,277	0.8%
Dominican	3,584	0.1%

Source: 5 Year American Community Survey, 2021

MAP 1

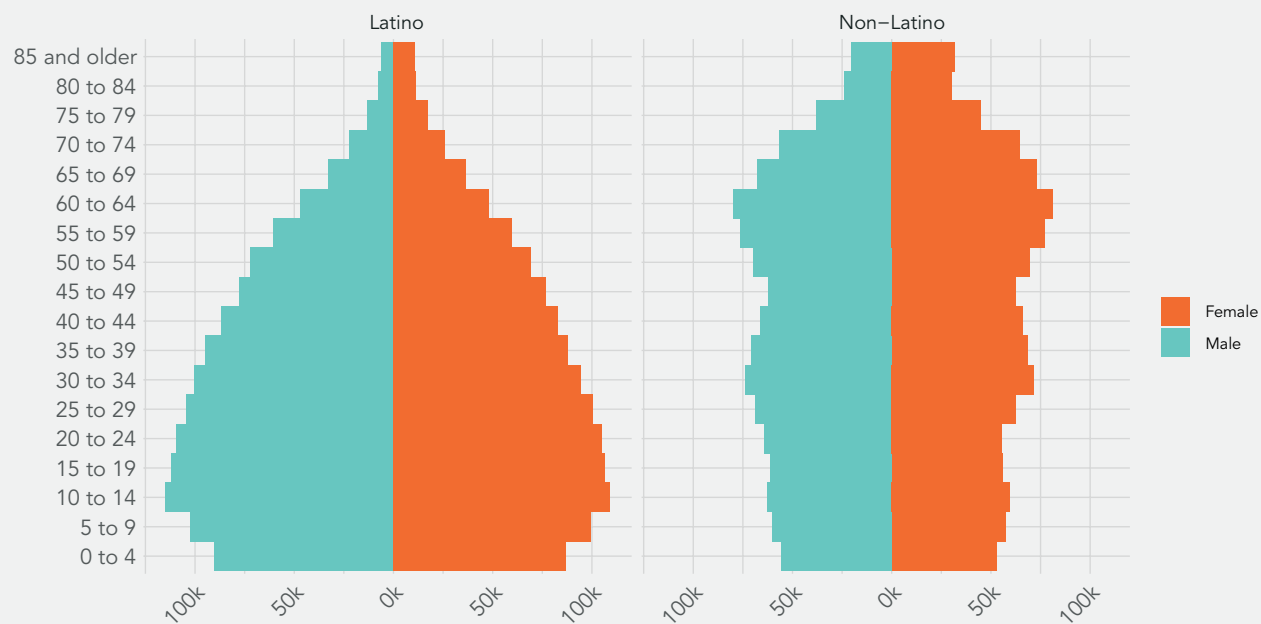
## Inland Empire Race and Ethnicity By Census Tract, 2020



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2020 census data

## Population Age Distribution by Latino Origin

Riverside and San Bernardino Counties



2021 Census Bureau population estimate

Source: US Census Bureau population estimates, Author: Juan De Lara

### Key Data Points

- Median household income for Latinos was **\$67,885** compared to \$73,424 for the region, and \$80,433 for the white population.
- The median age for Latinos in the IE is **29** compared to 47 for the white population.
- **72%** of all Latinos in Riverside and San Bernardino counties were born in the United States.





# KEY PRIORITIES FOR LATINO COMMUNITIES IN THE IE

In interviews and surveys, we asked Latino leaders to identify the top three issues that will affect their communities in the next ten years. Leaders chose economic security, education, and affordable housing

as the primary challenges for Latino communities in the Inland Empire. Environmental issues and racial discrimination round out the top five. We'll delve deeper into each of these areas in the sections below.

## 1. Economic Sustainability

Economic security was the number one concern for Latino communities in the IE, as identified by study participants. These leaders emphasized that regional economic prosperity hinges on the ability of Latinos to flourish. It was evident through our conversations that traditional metrics of job creation and growth did not equate to economic security. One prominent leader explained it like this: "The main idea should be to make this region a sustainable region. To make sure that we're able to live here, work here and retire here, and build the communities that we really need." Thus, for him and the majority of those in this study, economic security for Latinos should serve as an indicator for regional success and sustainability.

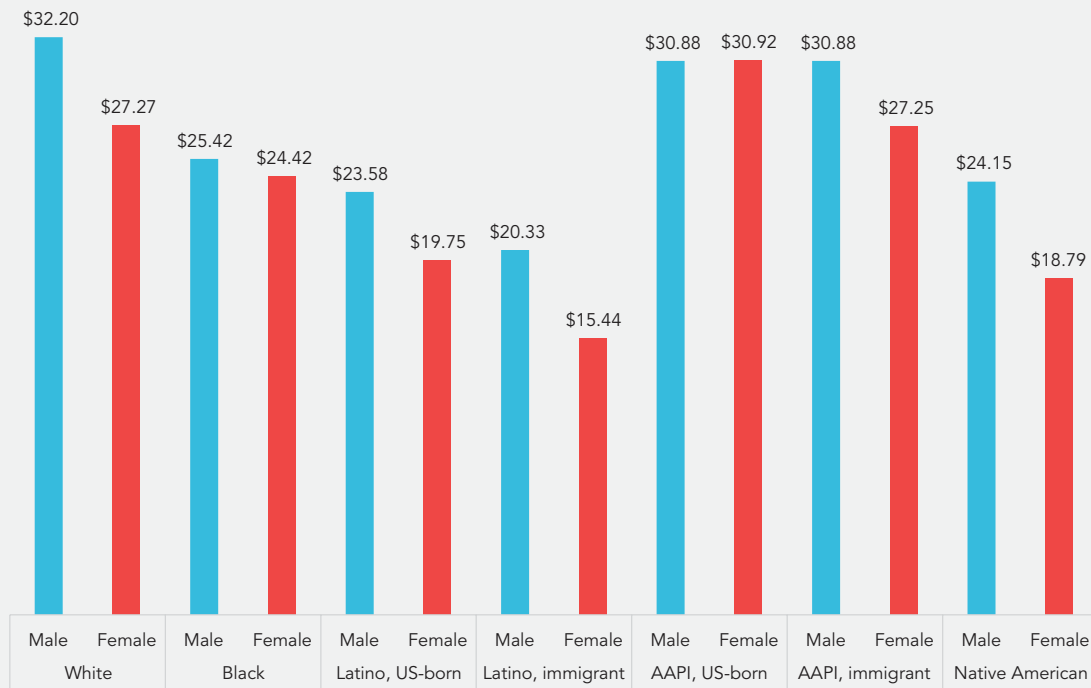
Job quality and wages were a major issue for study participants. As can be seen in Graph 5, Latino

workers – even those who are working full-time year-round – make substantially less than white workers with the same employment profile, with wages particularly low for immigrant Latinos and a sharp gender gap penalizing both immigrant and US-born Latinas. While some of this disparity reflects difference in education and immigration status, there is also remaining discrimination in labor markets – and addressing both education and fair treatment of immigrants is an important issue for Latino residents of the Inland Empire.

Several study participants argued that Latino communities have been hurt by low-road economic development strategies that market the region as a place to earn profits by taking advantage of the region's current low wages and low land values. This cheap dirt and cheap labor model was especially appealing to



## Median Wages for Year-round, Full-time Workers, Inland Empire, 2021



Source: Analysis of the 2021 American Community Survey by the USC Equity Research Institute (ERI)

Southern California's warehousing sector. One participant in our study gained considerable support from fellow focus group members when they claimed that "the Latino community has been exploited by that. By the warehousing industry and the other industries that have settled here."

Latino leaders have offered an alternative development model. This includes efforts to build a new trade technical college. According to participants, this project will open new pathways for Latinos to access living wage jobs. For instance, the new trade college will create apprenticeship and certification opportunities for Latinos to access trade union jobs that have not always been available to them. The vision and motivation to move this project forward was made possible by the Inland Empire Labor Council. For the first time in recent history, the Labor Council is led by a Latino. Under this new leadership, the Labor Council formed a partnership with the Riverside Community College system. Together, the partnership plans to open a new trade technical college in Jurupa Valley. The intent, according to one of the key architects of this plan, is to "start building the future workforce for this region to entice other industries to come into this

area, to bring in manufacturing, bring in stuff that's going to be more sustainable than just warehousing." Graduates will finish the program with certificates and degrees they can use to secure union jobs.

Several of our participants emphasized the need for immigrant entrepreneurship and micro-businesses. They argued that informal business sectors such as street vending can often provide a safety net for people who are unable to secure more formal employment. Unfortunately, anti-immigrant sentiment has sometimes blocked access to these options in the IE. One focus group participant noted that, "street vendors were being targeted and harassed in Riverside." In another case, "even the swap meet there didn't want to allow people to sell food". This changed when community members advocated in support of the vendors. The same person said, "now they bring truckloads of frozen goods and fruit and vegetables and stuff, and it's just more accessible, healthier food." Immigrant entrepreneurs often provide a vital service to local communities by meeting needs that are otherwise ignored by mainstream markets. The question is: how can the region create opportunities to benefit from this entrepreneurial energy?

## 2. Education

Our participants ranked education as the second-highest priority for Latinos in the region. This aligns with demographics: Latinos constitute about 64% of school-aged children in Riverside and San Bernardino counties. However, only 12% of Latinos aged 25 and older hold a bachelor's degree, which is significantly lower than the statewide average of 35% for Californians of all races.<sup>3</sup> What accounts for the dramatic difference between the number of K-12 students versus those with a BA? Part of the answer can be found in the success of Latino students from High School to college. According to data from the State of California, only 38% of Latino high school students in the Inland Empire met college prep (A-G) requirements, compared to the statewide average of 51%.

To address these challenges will require a comprehensive education strategy that meets the specific needs of the region's Latino communities. This means accounting for all the ways that economic, social, and cultural inequities affect access to and success at all educational levels. Education retention and support is also critical. Supportive services for students should



focus on increasing the school to college pipeline, including support once they get into college.

Additionally, a comprehensive strategy should include new ways to leverage the resources that Latino communities bring to the table. This includes building relationships with youth-led organizations and other community-based organizations. One participant suggested that strengthening connections between local organizations and educational institutions can help shape a comprehensive educational path that includes trade and professional schools, as well as adult education.

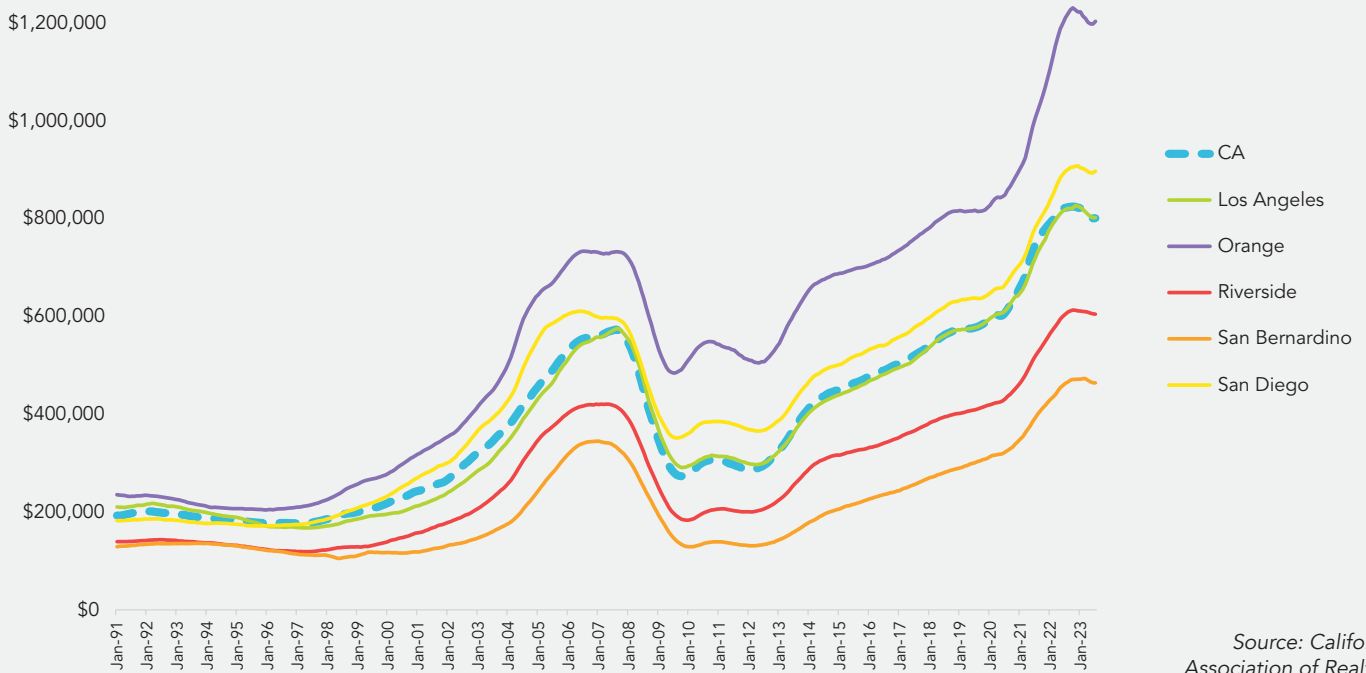
## 3. Housing

Many attribute the region's significant population growth to its lower housing costs. For decades, the area has attracted those who were pushed out of higher-price housing markets in Los Angeles and Orange counties. But the pressure has become particularly severe in recent years. As can be seen in Graph 6, the financial crisis of 2007-2009 led to significant declines in the coastal housing market but since then prices have soared and the gap with housing prices in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties has become even larger in absolute dollars; for example, the difference between the 12-month moving average median housing price in Orange County and Riverside County is nearly \$600,000; the gap with San Bernardino County is well above \$700,000.



GRAPH 6

## Housing Prices in the Inland Empire Compared to the State and Key Southern California Counties, 1991-2023 (12 month moving average of median housing price)



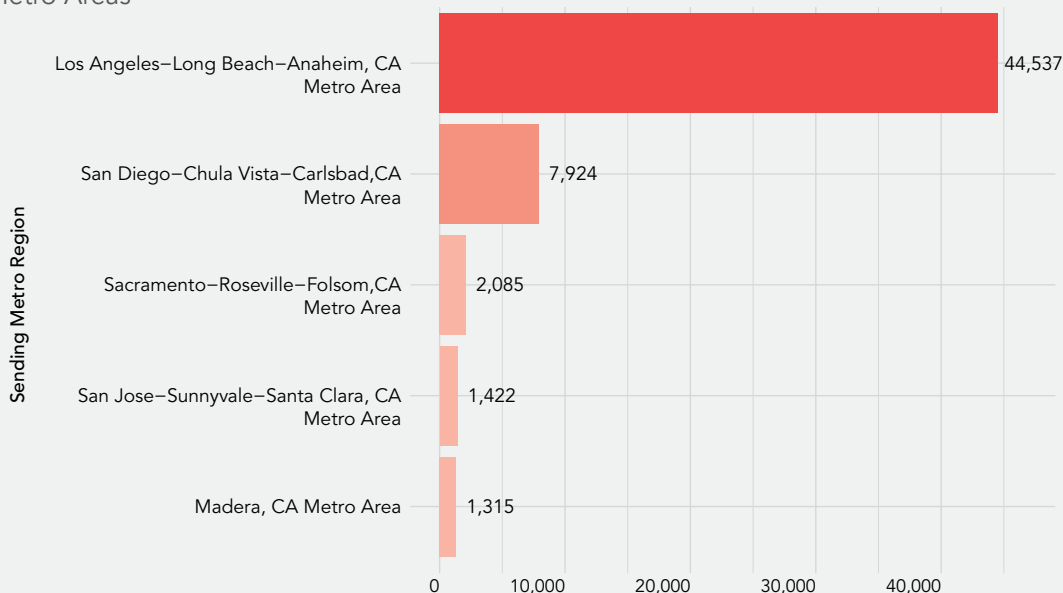
Aside from lower housing costs, the inland region has also been attractive to urban residents in search of a less crowded and slower-paced suburban life.<sup>4</sup> Both of these reasons are reflected in Graph 7, which

shows that most of the net migration into the Inland Empire between 2016 - 2020 came from the Los Angeles metropolitan area (which includes both Los Angeles and Orange Counties).

GRAPH 7

## Net Migration into the IE

Top 5 Metro Areas



Source: American Community Survey, 2016 - 2020

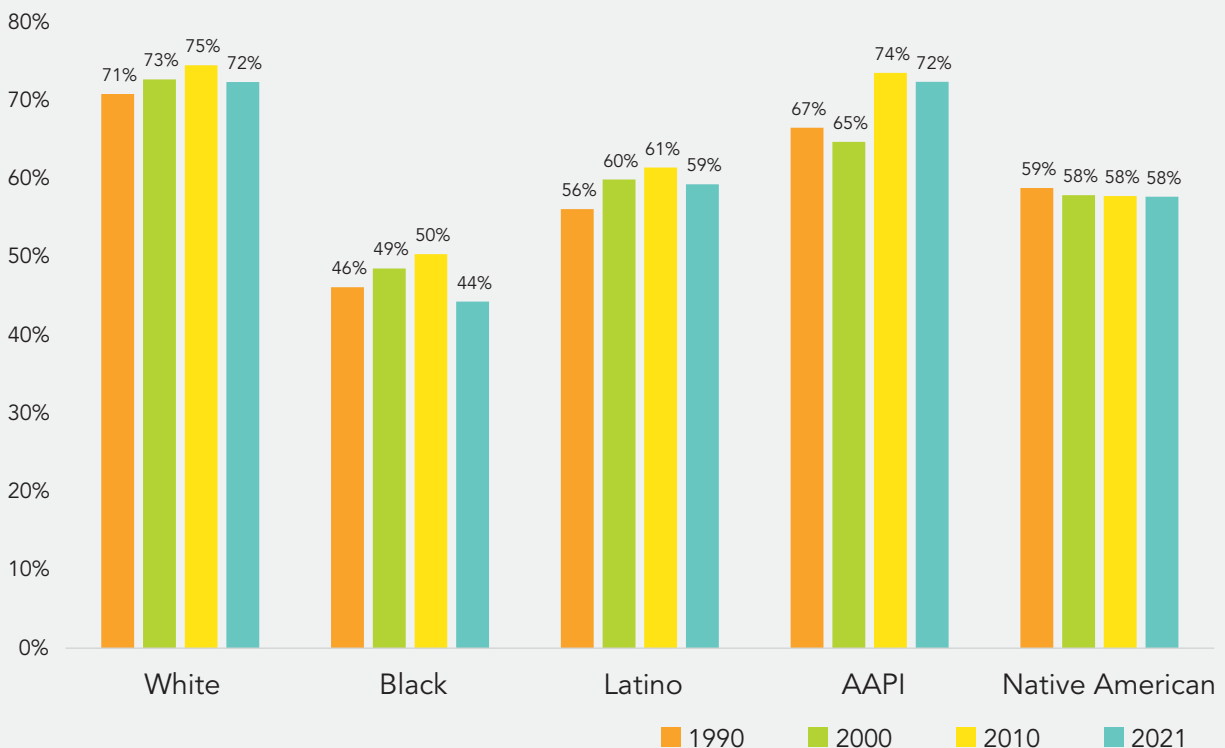


Compared to other metropolitan areas, Latinos in the IE boast relatively high homeownership rates and these have grown over time. However, Latino home ownership rates still lag behind white home ownership (although the situation is even worse for Black owners who were hit especially hard by the foreclosure crisis of 2008-2010). Moreover, Latinos hold less

home equity than white households. In 2020, while 21% of white homeowners in the IE owned their homes outright, only 13% of Latino homeowners did.<sup>5</sup> Such disparities in home equity can translate into economic inequity. In fact, the combination of low homeownership and increased debt can reduce intergenerational wealth and class mobility.

GRAPH 8

## Homeownership Rates by Race & Ethnicity in the Inland Empire, 1990-2021



Source: Analysis of Census and ACS data by the USC Equity Research Institute

Housing will be even more important in the immediate future, as the relatively young Latino population enters the market. Young Latinos will need to confront a housing market that disproportionately rejects Black and Latino applicants for home loans.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, Latino households are more likely to receive predatory mortgages. While it is true that homeownership can improve generational wealth and upward class

mobility, buying a home is not an option for everyone. We were surprised to find that our respondents listed affordable rental housing above homeownership as a key priority. Affordable rental housing should therefore be part of a comprehensive housing strategy. Additionally, racial discrimination and tenant's rights must also be accounted for in the region's plan to provide affordable housing.

## 4. Environmental Equity and Climate Change

San Bernardino and Riverside are amongst the most polluted counties in the country. The American Lung Association ranked the Inland Empire as the worst in the nation for ozone pollution and among the ten worst regions for particulate matter pollution, a type of toxin that can cause cancer.<sup>7</sup> Our respondents identified the region's poor environmental record as part of a much longer history of environmental inequity, which has caused undue health burdens for Latinos and other people of color. These claims align with what public health researchers have described as the deadly link between environmental toxins and the social determinants of health.<sup>8</sup>



Immigrant Latinos face even greater environmental harms because of their social status. For example, research shows that undocumented Latinos (Indigenous migrants in particular) are more vulnerable to environmental disasters. One focus group participant captured this connection between the environment and other social conditions when they described what it's like to live in the IE: "You're working at a warehouse to sustain your family, but then your job is also killing you and your family. We have really bad asthma. We have heart problems that are all linked to environmental issues (including heat). We have schools next to

warehouses and, you know, kids are breathing in those fumes."

For IE residents, environmental concerns cannot be removed from the larger social, economic, and political context of the region. This much broader take on environmental crisis and climate change led some of our participants to make explicit connections between environmental equity and economic sustainability for the region. One focus group participant explained that sustainability needed to include a clean environment and equitable economies. This is how she described the relationship, "we got a CARB grant [from the Community Air Resources Board] to teach kids about electric vehicle infrastructure. I want more future career opportunities, future industry, future jobs, like the sustainability that the state is forcing industry to electrify, to adopt cleaner technologies. Our kids deserve to have access to all of that." Other focus group participants echoed these sentiments.

Participants in our study felt that the Inland Empire has been routinely short-changed by funding programs meant to mitigate the negative effects of Southern California's logistics economy. The same person elaborated, "we have poor air quality. We're a logistics hub. We get the brunt of all the trucking, you know, the goods movement in and out of the city. And so if the future is to move to sustainability, like this is where all the magic should happen. We should be an example. I think that would be a more equitable process for the Inland Empire instead of only focusing on LA or the ports."

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## 5. Racial Equity and Immigrant Vulnerability

Most Latinos in the IE are native born (72.6%). But many feel connected to immigrant communities because they either live in mixed-status households and/or because their parents or grandparents were immigrants. Our participants cited these close ties between Latinos and immigrants when they identified racial equity and immigrant vulnerability as one of their top five priority areas for the region. Participants claimed that they felt attacked by anti-immigrant policies and practices because immigration status is often racialized as an anti-Latino cudgel.

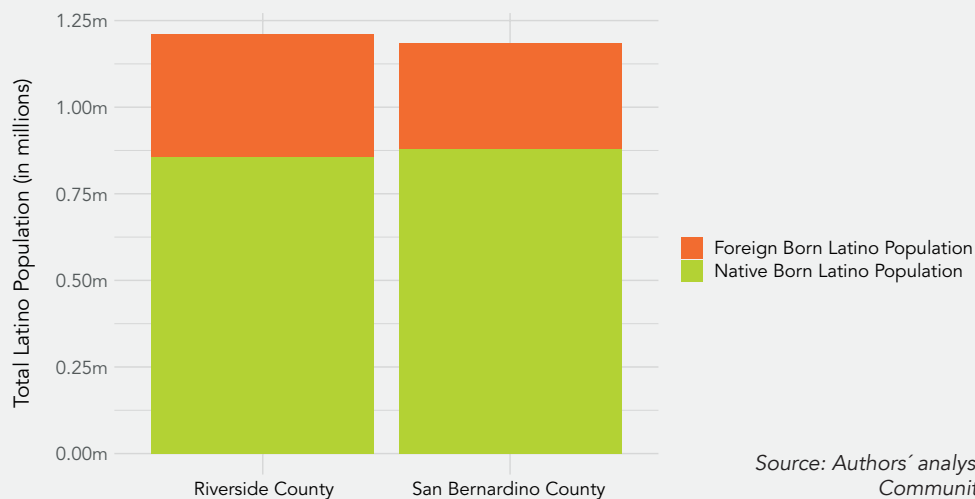
In addition to the political vulnerability attached to immigration status, many of our focus group participants gave examples that illustrated how immigrants are routinely subjected to economic and social stress. For instance, community leaders explained that immigrants are particularly vulnerable to housing insecurities. This happens in several ways. In some instances, immigrants may be less familiar with or hesitant to advocate for housing rights because of their legal status. Landlords can prey on this. Consequently, immigrant families may be forced to live in substandard housing while feeling like they don't have any recourse because of their status. In other cases, immigrants may be ineligible for housing resources. Several of the nonprofits and service providers who participated in our study claimed that they are regularly prevented from assisting immigrants because funding for supportive services often disqualifies

people with unregularized citizenship status. As a response, these same community leaders expressed the need for unconditional funding that could be used towards community members regardless of their immigration status.

Sometimes immigrant vulnerability and racial inequity take place because immigrant skills and talent are not recognized and valued. As one participant described this process, "I don't think we value our immigrant community as much as we should. There are folks coming here with degrees in engineering, with professional skill sets and experience, and we forced them to start from nothing. The fact that we don't value the education and expertise of people from other places is terrible. We miss out on all that talent." The negation of this talent devalues the region's immigrant community. A youth organizer who participated in our study used this point to describe how current conditions and inequities limit the possibilities for people to build thriving communities. For this young leader, a thriving Latino and immigrant community means nourishing potential rather than focusing only on basic needs and problems, "I don't think there's a lot of priority about tapping into talent because Latinos need to make sure that we're surviving. Folks are in survival mode." If the IE and its new majority is to succeed as a region, then it must move beyond survival mode. To do so, these communities will need to tap all their talents in order to thrive.

GRAPH 9

### Native and Foreign Born Latino Population in the IE



Source: Authors' analysis of 2021 American Community Survey 5-year file





# RECOMMENDATIONS

For the Inland Empire to thrive in the immediate future, it must invest in its burgeoning Latino majority. This includes support for a robust civil society that can rebuild regional institutions to better serve community needs. Many of the organizations that serve Latino communities in the IE are small and relatively new. Some of this can be explained by the rapid growth of the population. On the other hand, the short supply of civic organizations may also be

due to the historic underfunding of Latino organizations by public and private sectors.

Participants in our study not only said that they needed more support, they also told us what such support should include. Community organizations we surveyed said that they needed support in the following key areas:

## Key Areas for Support

- Leadership development (61%)
- Achieving financial sustainability (61%);
- Capacity building and community organizing (50%)
- Strengthening their ability to influence decision-makers (50%)
- Coalition building across the region (44%)



We conclude our report by presenting specific recommendations to strengthen Latino communities in the IE:

# 1. Remove Barriers That Exclude Latino Communities from Existing Resources and Opportunities

## Improve Access to Information by Building Culturally Competent and Community-Based Communications Strategies

In many cases, study participants pointed out that resources exist but are for some reason not available to Latino communities. Sometimes this is due to lack of information. As one respondent mentioned, “a lot of the opportunities are there we just don’t know about. And why is that? Because of the disconnect

with our community.” Other participants agreed and expressed the need for culturally relevant communication strategies. For example, one of our respondents described how institutions and organizations can fail to serve Latinos by ignoring community needs, “how are we making information accessible to the senora that sells tamales, to a lady who is monolingual and doesn’t speak English?”. The point was clear, community-informed messaging must be part of a larger strategy to increase access to resources.



## Identify and Eliminate Institutional Practices that Reduce Utilization of Benefits by Latino Communities

Latinos can be blocked from accessing existing resources because of intentional and unintentional practices. In some cases, existing bureaucracy, and lack of familiarity with the system can dissuade Latinos from accessing resources to which they have a right to use. As described by one participant, “it’s not only about accessing resources, but when you do access the resources, sometimes there’s a lot of bureaucracy. And by that I mean if folks can’t contact agencies, they might get the runaround between whoever is taking their call versus another person. They might not hear back from them like in a month or two because it’s so inaccessible to them that they’re like, okay, well, I tried. I’m not going to try it again. And so there’s a lot of discouragement, a lot of bureaucracy when actually these people should be helping our communities tap into those resources

that are meant to be for community members.” Sometimes institutional barriers exist because local agencies do not employ enough staff who have the skills needed by Latino community members. Language was just one of the examples raised by this participant, “the language barrier is a problem. Sometimes they have somebody who speaks our language, but that person might be gone. There’s no accurate and reliable point of contact.” In other cases, lack of familiarity with local institutions can limit access. This was reflected by a study participant who claimed that “the institutions that are meant to provide the resources have all these convoluted processes ... it’s not working.”

”

The institutions that are meant to provide the resources have all these convoluted processes ... it’s not working.

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## 2. Strengthen Community Capacity

### Nurture Community Care Networks

Building community capacity means expanding the ability of community organizations and organizers to build greater community care networks. As one community leader explained: “We don’t need hand-outs. We need community care networks.” This same person linked the need for greater community care to the long history that immigrants and racialized communities have in building mutual assistance associations to improve their opportunities. Community care and mentorship are especially important to communities who have been historically excluded from education and employment opportunities. Here is how one person described this need, “Pull yourself up by your own bootstraps. I’m heartbroken when people feel like that. What helped me when my parents could no longer help me in my educational journey was community. It was the adults in the community who cared about me, who helped me navigate the system. Who

saw something in me and said to me, why don't you apply for this scholarship? Or, why don't you apply for this internship? It was the people in the community that built the pathway. And that, I think, is what we have to have in the IE ten years from now. We have to have avenues for people to be able to jump into what they're passionate about and be able to have a thriving life. That's what I mean by community.” This definition of community care networks differs from what is typically meant by community involvement in governance and civic life. Participants argued that what is usually defined as community participation is useless and disempowering because people feel like even when they speak up, nothing changes. As described by this respondent, “They invite all the people to do the talking. The people tell you exactly what they want. They have their plan. The problem is, then something happens and there's no execution.” Community care networks can provide new approaches.

### Invest in Mentorship and Training

Many of the participants in this study come from community organizations that are relatively young. Respondents made the case that consistency and leadership was key to building community empowerment. Here is how one of our focus group members described this need: “to bring about change in the community is going to take ten years. But if you don't have consistency in leadership, you won't have anybody that starts year one be there for year ten.” This quote alludes to the practical issues related to effectiveness as well as the negative effect that high turnover in community building efforts can have on intergenerational leadership. One of the community leaders in our study expressed the following about how his ability to become the executive director of a prominent community arts organization was made possible because he was mentored by a more senior community advocate: “For me, mentorship has been really powerful. The people that started this group, they were mentored by an organizing nonprofit. If they hadn't gotten mentorship and organizing training, without those skills, they wouldn't have been



able to branch off and create their own thing. Being able to provide that for youth is super important. Just giving them that skill set. Because if they want to do something on their own, then they have that capacity. They can make their own business, they can create their own nonprofit, they can do whatever they want as long as they have that skill set.” Stories like this emphasize the need for mentorship.



## Create New Career Pathways for Community Leadership

Mentorship and training are also key to expanding the number of young Latinos who pursue community-based work and civic participation as potential career paths. For many, the lack of civic infrastructure (meaning the dearth of adequately funded community non-profits and labor unions) creates a type of brain drain that forces engaged young people to move elsewhere. As the director of a civil rights group

explained (she used her own example of getting a degree and then taking a job elsewhere in public service because she did not have the same opportunities in the IE) "I think there is this idea that you can't find it here, so you have to go elsewhere." What might a civically minded career path look like? One suggestion from our participants involved apprenticeship programs for youth to pursue community-based careers while they receive mentorship and training from more established community leaders.



## Provide Funding for Regional Collaboration

Building community capacity requires greater investment in regional collaboration because many of the issues that affect Latino communities will compel communities and advocates to operate at multiple jurisdictional scales. Thus, collaboration across the region is key to successful long-term strategies. Additionally, collaboration can also result in greater efficacy. A respondent described the current lack of collaboration this way: "We're all doing our own thing, thinking that we're all doing good. We are right, but a lot of the times we trip each other up." Unfortunately, many current funding mechanisms for community-based work do not provide resources for regional collaboration. One of the participants

described how a lack of funding made forming a regional immigrant coalition much more difficult, "Back in 2008, we finally got a working coalition, the Inland Coalition for Immigrant Justice. Through that coalition, we have been working together. And you know, something that we did for years without any funding, no funding at all. It was just volunteers. Foundations finally came and said, you know, you guys have been doing good work, we want to support you. So now, you know, we have a working coalition that has a staff." Support for collaboration should not take more than a decade. Especially because greater collaboration can generate more resources that enable community groups to scale-up their work. One organizational leader noted that, "a lot of grants call for collaboration. And so and when you're looking at real funding, like millions of dollars, kinds of funding, you need collaboration."

## Reinforce Emerging Latino Youth Cultures

Another example of collaboration can be found in the growing web of community-based arts networks that have developed what they call arts-based community building or activism. Our participants underscored the need to emphasize Latino culture and art when building the region's community infrastructure. One respondent argued that, "credit should be given to artist and creatives for creating a community of collaboration. There are amazing things happening in Riverside right now. For example, artists are tied with the Eastside Art House and they're doing great

things. They're doing murals that are revitalizing our community in Riverside." He continued to describe how the community building is happening through art. "Artists are like pollinators in the community. They don't stay in one place. They go around, city to city, community to community. A lot of the artists that are doing work in Riverside, I know them because they come to San Bernardino and, you know, and they collaborate with other people. Artists create this community of collaboration and synergy." Another youth organizer agreed and added that young artists are using their community networks to "bring about social and political change" by working "on topics that people might be afraid to touch on."



## Support Intersectional Work and Multi-Racial Collaboration

Strengthening Latino communities will involve developing partnerships with other racialized groups in the Inland Empire. This is especially true when it comes to resource sharing. For example, one Latino leader noted that forging multi-racial alliances can yield benefits for all communities: "collaboration is difficult because sometimes we are tapping the same funding sources and sometimes the problem with funding is that it is a competitive process, you have to be fighting, you know, and that doesn't really help us to grow.

We have to start being more intersectional, not just seeing these as Latino issues. We need to work with the African-American community, with the Muslim community. This will make us more successful."

”

People need to know that there are hardworking and resilient families here. The frustrating part is the lack of opportunities for economic mobility."

”



### 3. Build New Institutions and Networks

#### Enable Youth to Envision Innovative Solutions

In some cases, existing institutions, and ways of doing things may not work for the growing Latino community. New institutions and organizations will be needed. Youth will play a key role in shaping socially innovative approaches to meeting community needs. Our participants noted that the region's young Latino population can use their skills to tackle pressing community issues. As expressed by one leader, "the new generations, they have all this knowledge that can be used. We can use popular education to start looking at alternatives, such as cooperatives." In part, we can draw connections to social innovation through projects that create new pathways for young people to become civic leaders and problem solvers. Youth leaders are ready for this. New institutions and approaches are sometimes the only way for youth to actively participate in social change and community building because they feel excluded from more established adult-led organizations. This can lead to frustration, as expressed here by a young organizer, "You know what? We don't mess with that. You don't want to bring us to the table, that's fine. We'll create our own table. But this is the change that we want to see and this is how we're going to organize to see those changes." Young people need collaborative spaces in order to imagine what they want to build for their future. Here is how this process was described,



"Let's think outside the box and create our own change with our own campaigns and our own way of things. That's where a lot of the community gardens come from. That's where activism comes from. That's where digital organizing comes from. It comes from young people getting together and skill sharing. It comes from thinking outside of the boxes that we were offered. We don't see ourselves being fully represented." This drive for innovation and change must be nurtured.

#### Provide Seed Funding for Innovative Non-Profits

Many of our respondents commented about the need for a more robust civil society. While there are established non-profits, most have not built deep connections with Latino communities. This was confirmed by several participants, including one who claimed that, "most institutions don't have a connection with the community. That applies also to nonprofits. There are a lot of nonprofits that don't have a connection to the Latino community." In cases like these, Latino-led organizations should be supported as part of a larger strategy to expand community capacity in the region.







# CONCLUSION

As we draw this report to a close, the findings about the Inland Empire are clear:

**Demographic Shift:** The region has experienced a momentous demographic change with Latinos now forming over half of its population, and projected to reach 70% by 2050.

**Historical Challenges:** Despite becoming the region's predominant group, Latinos continue to grapple with longstanding racial disparities.

**Future Prospects:** The future vibrancy of the Inland Empire lies in the hands of its younger population, largely Latino. To retain this talent, the region must offer sustainable career opportunities that are rooted in community well-being.

**Leadership:** There's been a positive trend in Latino political representation. But emphasis must be placed on fostering leadership capacity amongst grassroots community members as well.

**Economic Model Rethink:** The outdated model, which marketed the region as a bastion of cheap labor and land, has had detrimental consequences. For the region to be successful, the old paradigm of low-quality jobs and devalued communities needs to be abandoned.

The Inland Empire is a unique and vibrant region in transition with immense talent and remarkable potential. For the Inland Empire to flourish, it must invest wholeheartedly in its communities, especially its Latino majority. The roadmap for the future is clear: uplift, invest, and progress.

# Addendum A

The following 44 organizations were invited to participate in our study. This list of potential study respondents was developed in conversations with the CIELO Fund. While this list does not capture all Latino-serving organizations in the Inland Empire, we believe that it represents a significant portion of such groups. Of the 44 surveys that were sent out, 22 were successfully completed.

- Alianza Coachella Valley
- Asociacion de Emprendedores
- California Immigrant Youth Justice Alliance (CIYJA)
- Casa Blanca Home of Neighborly Service
- Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice
- Centro Del Inmigrante
- Civil Rights Institute of Inland Southern California
- Clinicas Del Salud del Pueblo
- Danza Azteca Citlaltónac
- Eastern Coachella Valley for Change
- El Sol Neighborhood Educational Center
- Escuela de la Raza
- Galilee Center
- GANAS (Genuine. Animate. Navigate. Assist. Succeed.)
- Get in Motion Entrepreneurs – SEED 2.0
- Highlanders Boxing Club
- IE Labor Council
- Inland Coalition for Immigrant Justice
- Inland Empire Community Collaborative
- Inland Equity Community Land Trust
- Inland Empire Future Leaders Program
- Inland Empire Immigrant Youth Collective
- Inland Empire Health Plan
- Inland Empire Latino Lawyers Association (IELLA)
- Ives Torres Foundation
- Justice and Immigration Clinic
- La Red de Provedoras
- Lifting Our Stories
- LULAC Riverside
- Ontario-Montclair Promise Scholars
- People's Collective for Environmental Justice
- Pueblo Unido Community Development Center
- Read with Me
- RevComm Foundation
- Inland Empire Community Collaborative
- Riverside Art Museum/ The Cheech
- Riverside Latino Network
- San Bernardino Community Services
- Santos Manuel Student Union and Recreation Center
- The Garcia Center for the Arts
- TODEC Legal Center
- UCR Chicano Student Programs
- Unidos for La Causa
- Uplift San Bernardino

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