

WE COUNT AND WE VOTE!



2021

Increasing census and electoral participation among underrepresented children and families in Contra Costa County.

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OVERVIEW



The program was led by volunteer parent advocates in the Central, East, and West County Regional Groups in Contra Costa County, California.

Regional Group members spoke with thousands of residents to understand their priorities, identify solutions, and facilitate participation in the 2020 census and general election.

Young children, low-income residents, immigrants, and residents of color historically have been underrepresented in national census counts and elections. This underrepresentation reinforces and exacerbates existing inequities and threatens community well-being. **We Count and We Vote!** describes our year-long, peer-to-peer mobilization program aimed at understanding the concerns and priorities of underrepresented families and increasing their participation in the 2020 US Census and general election.

The program was led by volunteer parent advocates in the Central, East, and West County Regional Groups in Contra Costa County, California. Volunteers contacted 6,529 residents through in-person and telephone conversations. Across all three regions, the top two needs expressed were “quality parks and safe streets,” and “affordable, stable housing.” Regional Group members successfully promoted the census and general election in typically undercounted areas of the county. We hope the results and lessons shared in this report will be useful in informing policymaking and community organizing in Contra Costa and in strengthening resident-led advocacy on behalf of low-income families with young children generally.

OUR PARTNERSHIP



The **Central, East, and West County Regional Groups**—comprising 200 volunteer, largely low-income parents of color—organize and advocate for healthy, safe, and equitable communities in the county’s three main regions. Regional Group members are seasoned advocates for early childhood and family well-being with a 15-year track record of building community power, strategic relationships, and community-driven policy advocacy. Regional Groups are sponsored by First 5 Contra Costa and organized by its Community Engagement program.



First 5 Contra Costa (F5CC) invests Proposition 10 tobacco tax revenues in local health and education programs for expectant parents and children birth to age five. F5CC funded programs help young children grow up healthy, ready to learn, and supported in safe, nurturing families and communities.



Healthy & Active Before 5 (HAB45) is a Contra Costa collaborative advancing health equity through local policy and environmental changes to support the health and well-being of young children and their families. HAB45 provides the Regional Groups with technical assistance and data support.

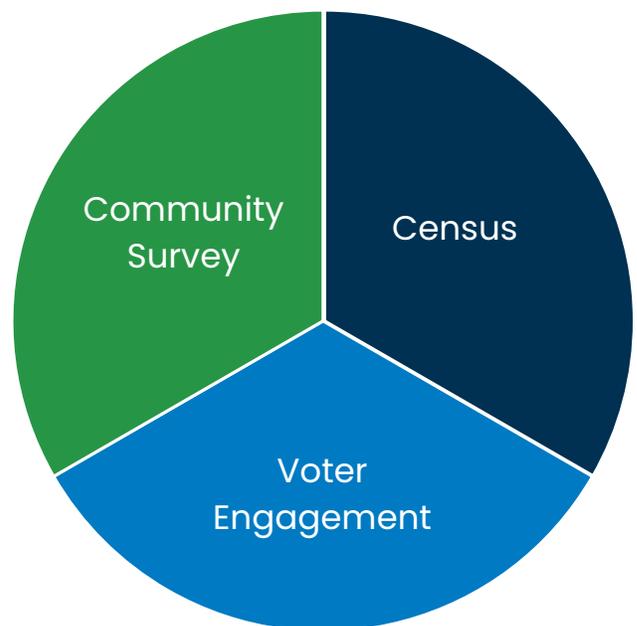
BACKGROUND

Persistent inequities in public funding and policymaking contribute to widespread socioeconomic disparities and jeopardize early childhood development and community well-being.

In Contra Costa County, inequitable public policies and investments have led to the imbalanced distribution of health, safety, economic opportunity, educational attainment, housing, and other resources. Women, children, low-income workers, immigrants, and Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) are most harmed by exclusionary policies and lack of political representation. Integrated voter engagement and grassroots outreach have proven to increase electoral and census participation, leading to more equitable policymaking and community investment.

In 2020, parent advocates with the **Central, East, and West County Regional Groups** (RGs) embarked on an intensive 12-month effort to build power and shape their communities by engaging and organizing underrepresented families across Contra Costa County to participate in three efforts to increase equity in representation, resource allocation, and investments:

1. The once-a-decade **national census** count that drives funding for public services and population counts for local, state, and federal electoral districts.
2. The **November 2020 election**, with national and local races carrying significant implications for the well-being of young children, low-income families, and BIPOC.
3. A county **community needs assessment** identifying pressing concerns and challenges for low-income communities, used to inform RG organizing and policy advocacy priorities.



BACKGROUND



Regional Group members spoke with thousands of residents to understand their priorities, identify solutions, and facilitate participation in the 2020 census and general election.

Community mobilization was focused in Concord electoral District 2, Richmond District 5, and throughout Bay Point. **First 5 Contra Costa** (F5CC) and **Healthy & Active Before 5** (HAB45) served as project partners, providing community organizing, leadership training, evaluation, research, and data support.

This report shares the process and outcomes of this effort, lessons learned about effective and equitable resident engagement, and the priorities identified in the needs assessment. We hope these findings will be used to inform advocacy and policymaking in Contra Costa County. We also share a local case study addressing the national effort to increase voter engagement and power-building in underrepresented communities of color.

ABOUT CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

According to 2019 US Census population estimates,¹ Contra Costa County is home to 1,153,526 people who identify as 42.7% White non-Hispanic, 26% Hispanic/Latino, 18.9% Asian or Pacific Islander, 9.5% African American/Black, 5.4% Two or More Races, and 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native. One in four residents (25.4%) is foreign born.

As with national trends, the county's demographics have shifted rapidly in recent years in response to a growing housing crisis, escalating housing costs in neighboring San Francisco and Oakland, and displacement of BIPOC and working-class families. As a result, historically white, segregated suburban communities have grown more racially diverse and low-income families face increasing housing insecurity, poverty, and marginalization.

BACKGROUND

The median household income in Contra Costa County is \$99,716; 7.9% live in poverty with great variations across the county. In Bay Point, 1 in 5 residents lives in poverty. Federal poverty measures do not adjust for the Bay Area's high cost of living and therefore underestimate the county's true poverty rate. The Insight Center for Community Economic Development found that 32% of county residents—and 45% of families with at least one child—had insufficient income to meet their basic needs.²

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated long-standing racial and economic disparities in Contra Costa. Despite making up only 26% of the county population, Latinx/a/oⁱ residents account for 42% of Contra Costa COVID-19 cases and 29% of deaths.³ A study from the Bay Area Equity Atlas and Raise the Roof Coalition found that over 14,000 Contra Costa households are at risk of eviction due to the pandemic and more than half of African American/Black and Latinx/a/o residents are rent-burdened.⁴ Recent findings from PolicyLink⁵ highlight the disproportionate economic impact of the pandemic on low-income, African American/Black, immigrant, and Latinx/a/o workers, who are more likely to face long-term unemployment. Together, these data underscore the significant and long-lasting repercussions of COVID-19 on economic and health recovery for low-income residents of color across the county.

Among Contra Costa's young children, systemic barriers to health and well-being, coupled with inadequate safety net services, contribute to health and educational disparities.

In 2018, a countywide assessment found that 34% of children in households with annual incomes below \$50,000 were not ready for kindergarten compared with 11% of those in higher income households.⁶ Low-income children and children of color face disproportionate health challenges as well; the asthma hospitalization rate for African American/Black children is almost 5 times that for white children in Contra Costa. Life expectancy for an African American/Black child born in Bay Point is 11 years shorter than for a resident of the more affluent town of Orinda.⁷

While Contra Costa County boasts vibrant multicultural, resilient, and innovative communities, it is challenged by deep socioeconomic and health inequity. The 2020 census and general election presented an important opportunity to mitigate these challenges by accurately documenting the county's demographic shifts and needs, generating funding to meet those needs, and mobilizing residents to shape their own future.

ⁱ In this report, we use Latinx/a/o to reference individuals identifying as Latinx, Latina, or Latino. We recognize that while this terminology aims to be inclusive it remains flawed, incomplete, and insufficient in honoring the diverse indigenous and African heritages, identities, and cultures of Latin America.

BACKGROUND

ABOUT THE PROJECT

In 2020, F5CC Community Engagement program (CE) staff and Regional Group members crafted joint strategies and goals for a successful community assessment and engagement of underrepresented families. They drafted a community survey tool and pilot tested it across the RGs. To support RG leadership and effectiveness, CE staff trained 110 parent advocates in door knocking and phone banking tactics, voter registration, and the historical and political significance of voting and electoral representation in the United States.

Staff and RG leaders identified 12 captains to coordinate linguistically diverse teams of volunteers in targeted neighborhoods of Concord District 2, Richmond District 5, and Bay Point. These areas are characterized by historically low voter turnout and/or census participation, face inequitable electoral representation and health outcomes, have a large number of young children, and are communities in which RGs have built significant trust. RGs are valued for their community based participatory research and advocacy addressing park and land use equity and housing security, which have resulted in multi-million-dollar park renovations and significant tenant protections. In each region, the RGs were well positioned to lead community organizing and civic engagement efforts in 2020.

RG members began the community assessment and census promotion with door-to-door interviews in November 2019. Following the March 2020 COVID-19 shelter-in-place order, they shifted to a phone banking strategy. RGs continued their community survey and census promotion by phone until June 2020, when they turned to voter education and engagement in preparation for the November election. Bilingual survey data was collected on paper forms and a digital Google form. HAB45 staff compiled and analyzed the survey data, providing regular reports to CE staff.



Regional Groups are valued for their community based participatory research and advocacy addressing park and land use equity and housing security.

BACKGROUND

RG members continued to volunteer with the project despite illness, job loss, economic and food insecurity, and lack of childcare right up until election day, November 3, 2020. Despite the myriad challenges, stress, and instability of 2020, RG members worked tirelessly to assess and mobilize their communities for increased representation and equity.

TABLE 1: ATTEMPTS TO REACH RESIDENTS

	CCRG	ECRG	WCRG	Total
Door knocking	1,343	1,145	742	3,230
Census phone calls	1,098	2,059	848	4,005
Voter outreach calls	663	7,501	1,948	10,112
Total	3,104	10,705	3,538	17,347

Table 1 summarizes all RG engagement activities from November 2019 to November 2020.

TABLE 2: CONTACTS WITH RESIDENTS

	CCRG	ECRG	WCRG	Total
Door-knocking contacts*	1,343	1,145	742	3,230
Census phone contacts	367	510	336	1,213
Voter outreach contacts	183	1,446	457	2,086
Total	1,893	3,101	1,535	6,529

**Note: Because all door-to-door canvassing attempts included sharing informational materials about the census, these were all counted as contacts.*

Table 2 summarizes residents reached with census and/or voter education messages through door-to-door canvassing and phone conversations between November 2019 and November 2020.

Reaching residents by phone posed more challenges than visiting their homes. While phone outreach allowed volunteers to make more attempted contacts in a shorter time period, less than 25% of phone calls resulted in conversations. The East County Regional Group made the most communication attempts and successful contacts. Across all regions, census calls were more likely to result in direct resident contact compared to voter registration calls.

The following is a discussion of the methods used as well as outcomes, analysis, and recommendations for the community assessment, census, and voter engagement efforts.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

Regional Group members and CE staff developed a community needs assessment to understand residents' pressing concerns in Concord, Richmond, and areas of Bay Point.

The RGs conduct regular needs assessments grounded in principles of community-based participatory research⁸ and community organizing to uncover community priorities, redress systemic inequities affecting families with young children, and build advocacy and power for transformed neighborhoods. This community driven approach ensures RG advocacy is responsive to, and informed by, families most harmed by structural inequities. Over the past decade, the RGs have led extensive assessmentsⁱⁱ



of community needs regarding parks, land use, and housing, and have built effective advocacy campaigns for optimal early childhood development and community change.

METHODS

RGs and CE staff selected a community survey as their primary assessment tool. They developed questions with input from non-profit leaders and evaluation professionals. Residents were asked to identify their top concerns from among six options: immigrant rights and safety, quality parks and safe streets, transportation, good local jobs, police intimidation, and stable, affordable housing. Residents were encouraged to select only one priority or to identify a concern not included on the list. Additional concerns or elaboration on priorities were captured in the survey notes.

Staff and RG leaders identified captains to organize linguistically diverse teams of volunteers for outreach in specific neighborhoods. Captains and outreach teams received extensive coaching, training, organizational support, and mentorship from CE staff.

ⁱⁱ Assessment reports available at www.first5coco.org

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT



RGs collected surveys and promoted the census through door-to-door interviews in selected neighborhoods from November 2019 to March 12, 2020, when a COVID-19 shelter-in-place order was implemented across the county. RG members conducted interviews in pairs, collecting responses on paper surveys in Spanish and English. CE staff collected and organized the surveys; HAB45 entered and analyzed the data.

In May, RG members shifted their outreach strategy to phone banking. Callers worked in pairs using a Google form to track calls in Spanish and English. HAB45 analyzed the call data, providing regular reports to CE staff. Because RGs were able to make more contacts by phone than in person, the survey area was expanded to include Concord's Monument community, San Pablo, and additional neighborhoods in Bay Point. These areas were selected using the original criteria of historical underrepresentation; health, economic and racial disparities; number of young children; and sites of RG focus with established community trust.

"I gained more confidence when speaking to people and also learned that many in my community are worried about the same issues that I'm worried about."

**Maria Elena,
WCRG member**

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

OUTCOMES

Regional Groups collected over 1,500 surveys from November 19, 2019, to June 8, 2020.

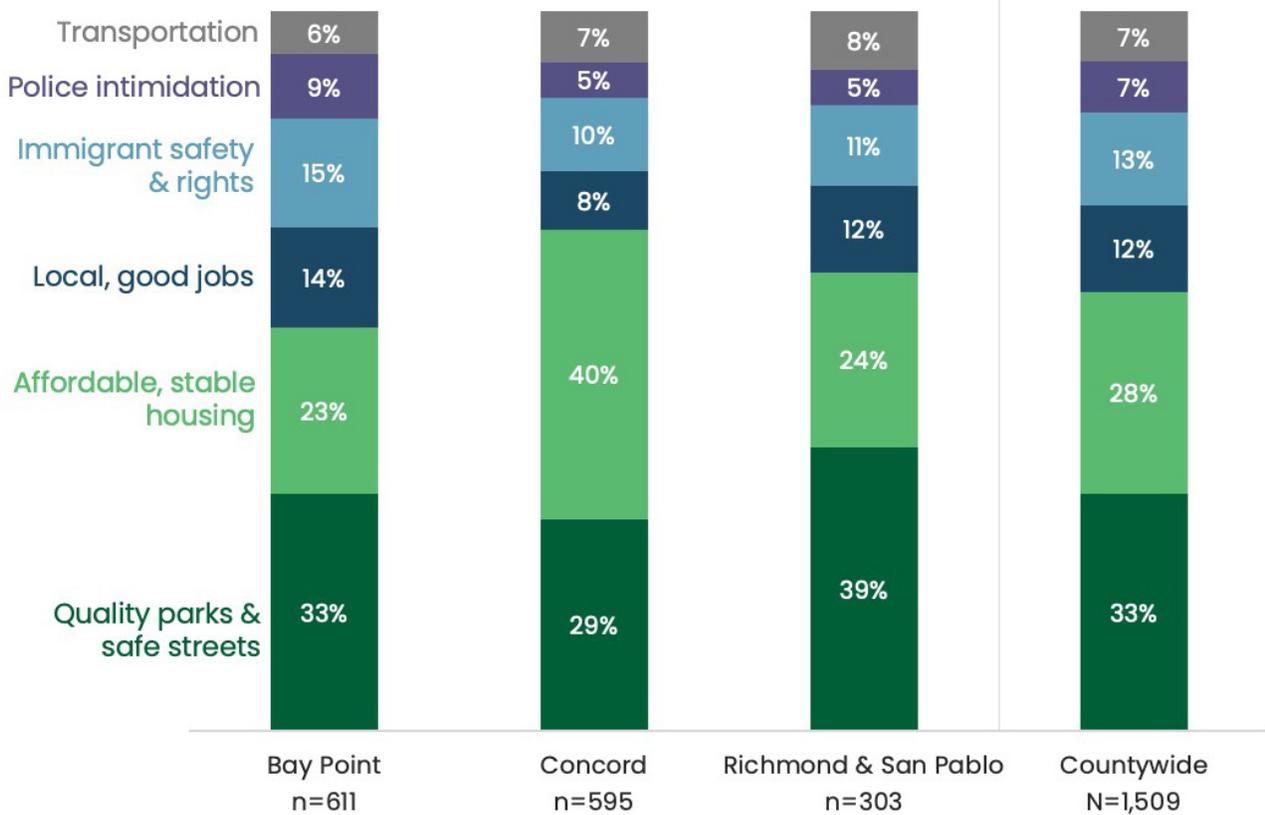
TABLE 3: COMMUNITY SURVEYS COLLECTED

	CCRG	ECRG	WCRG	Total
Surveys administered in person	399	387	192	978
Surveys administered by phone	196	224	111	531
Total Surveys	595	611	303	1,509

Table 3 summarizes the community surveys collected from residents through door-to-door canvassing and phone conversations between November 2019 and June 2020.

FIGURE 1: TOP COMMUNITY CONCERNS BY REGION AND COUNTYWIDE

Source: Community Survey



Note: Additional charts on Top Community concerns by region can be found in the Appendix.

Figure 1 summarizes survey responses for top priority concerns by region and countywide.



In all three regions, the top two concerns were “affordable, stable housing” and “quality parks and safe streets.”

In Concord, affordable, stable housing was the greatest concern (40%) followed by quality parks and safe streets (29%). For Bay Point, the balance tipped in the other direction, with one third of respondents (33%) selecting quality parks and safe streets and 23% affordable, stable housing; here, immigrant issues and jobs were also more significant concerns, at 15% and 14%, respectively. Richmond and San Pablo had the largest proportion of residents concerned about parks and streets as a top priority at 39%, with housing following at 24%. Here, too, jobs (12%) and immigrant issues (11%) were significant concerns. Concerns with police intimidation and immigrant safety and rights ranked higher in San Pablo than in Richmond.

“Most people said they were concerned about housing—specifically, the high cost of housing. Many people said they had 2 or more jobs in order to pay the rent.”

Blanca,
CCRG member

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Respondents in all areas indicated that quality parks, safe streets, and affordable, stable housing were top priorities. Despite consistency across regions, there are some notable differences worth highlighting.

As the most ethnically diverse region with the highest poverty rates of the areas surveyed,⁹ West County residents are particularly at risk for health problems linked to poor park quality, access, and neighborhood environments.¹⁰ Data and community input confirm that investments in local parks and streets are critical for health equity in Richmond and San Pablo. Indeed, numerous groups, including the West County Regional Group and city staff, have had significant success working together toward park equity.



We recommend building on these collaborative efforts to prioritize safe parks and streets in city budgeting and policymaking for optimal health citywide.

Concord residents had the greatest concern about affordable and stable housing, substantiated by data indicating that 57% of Concord renters are burdened by the cost of housing, with children and low-income families of color disproportionately struggling with housing instability, skyrocketing rents, and displacement.^{11,12} While housing inequity is felt across Contra Costa, Concord deserves particular attention and inquiry into the factors exacerbating housing insecurity. As representatives of the county's largest city, **Concord decisionmakers should explore policies and practices that promote affordability, habitability, belonging, and stability.**

Bay Point residents indicated widespread concern with quality parks, safe streets, and stable, affordable housing, with a greater percentage identifying immigrant safety and rights and good local jobs as priorities compared to other areas. In this unincorporated area with historical disinvestment, high rates of poverty, and a resilient immigrant community that is vulnerable to scapegoating and criminalization, survey results demonstrate that residents desire increased public services, investment, and opportunity. **We encourage multisectoral partnerships to explore strategies for renewed investment, employment, and safety that center resident concerns and well-being.**

Decision makers should strengthen partnerships with local residents and with advocacy, base-building, and service organizations to advance policies and programs that best address the expressed needs of underrepresented communities.

Decisionmakers, including the Ambrose Recreation and Park District Board, should also pursue park equity and quality by working with community groups and residents to identify investment priorities and effective policies.

While most surveys were collected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, responses remained consistent over the survey period. Priorities may have been magnified by the pandemic, with housing security and access to outdoor space becoming more essential.ⁱⁱⁱ It is worth noting that the vast majority of survey responses were collected before the tragic murder of George Floyd and the national movement for Black Lives and racial justice that gained momentum through summer 2020. Relationships between community and law enforcement may be viewed and prioritized differently as a result of these events.

Overall, **local policymakers should prioritize robust investments and policies for equitable parks, streets, and housing security to meet the priority needs of residents.** The county's Envision 2040 plan, the Concord Naval Weapons Station, and current housing development projects have significant implications for equitable development of future parks, housing, land use, and community safety. Ongoing community organizing and strategic partnerships are critical to shaping these projects to serve Contra Costa children and families. **Decision makers should strengthen partnerships with local residents and with advocacy, base-building, and service organizations to advance policies and programs that best address the expressed needs of underrepresented communities.** Such partnerships can support and guide elected officials toward effective strategies for neighborhood equity and well-being.

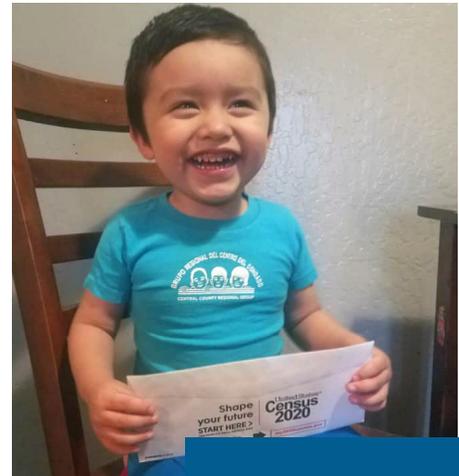
ⁱⁱⁱThese survey results are comparable with previous Regional Group community assessments and organizing efforts, which have identified park equity and housing security as pressing concerns for families across the county. Recent park reports by the Regional Groups, F5CC, and HAB45 provide community assessment results and recommendations for each area. The Housing Crisis Hits Home in Concord report prepared by EBASE, the Central County Regional Group, and F5CC offers an in-depth analysis and recommendations for supporting Concord residents' housing needs. These reports can be accessed at www.first5coco.org/funded-programs/regional-groupsparent-advocacy/.

CENSUS

The census is constitutionally mandated to count every person living in the United States every 10 years.

Census counts are used to allocate federal funding for vital infrastructure including roads and housing, as well as for public services benefiting children and families such as libraries, childcare, health care, Head Start, and the Women, Infants, and Children supplemental food program. Census counts are used to determine the boundaries of political districts at local, state, and federal levels. The census offers a once-in-a-decade opportunity for every resident to be counted, allowing for the equitable distribution of resources and electoral representation.

While the census is intended to include everyone regardless of age, race, ethnicity, religion, country of origin, immigration status, or primary language, historically many populations have been undercounted. This may result from discriminatory policies and practices, disinformation, and inadequate or ineffective outreach obstructing access to census participation, as well as from a mistrust of government that leaves some populations reluctant to participate. Consequently, historically undercounted groups—including families with children under age five, immigrants, BIPOC, renters, and low-income residents—remain at risk of being denied essential services and representation that depend on accurate census counts. Mobilizing for a complete census count provides a vital opportunity to build visibility and power among underrepresented communities.



Historically undercounted groups—including families with children under age five, immigrants, BIPOC, renters, and low-income residents—remain at risk of being denied essential services and representation that depend on accurate census counts.

CENSUS



Regional Group members played an instrumental role in census promotion as trusted messengers who could convey accurate, culturally and linguistically relevant information in their communities.

For a number of reasons, the 2020 US Census posed unprecedented challenges to an accurate count, particularly for underrepresented communities:

- The transition to an **online platform** highlighted inequitable digital access.
- The **federal government exacerbated mistrust**, using threats of a citizenship question and exclusion of non-citizens to undermine immigrant participation.
- The **COVID-19 pandemic** added logistical barriers and curtailed census promotion and outreach that normally rely on in-person engagement and community events.
- The **timeline** for completing the count shifted several times, causing uncertainty and confusion among residents and census promotion partners.

The Regional Groups, F5CC, and HAB45 were part of a broad regional census promotion effort to build trust in and knowledge about the census in historically undercounted areas of Contra Costa County. RG members played an instrumental role in census promotion as trusted messengers who could convey accurate, culturally and linguistically relevant information in their communities.

METHODS

In fall 2019, HAB45 trained RG members on the census, its impact on resources and representation, and how it would be administered in 2020. F5CC Community Engagement (CE) staff supported RG members to develop a mobilization strategy that included door-to-door canvassing, community events, and strategic outreach in public spaces. CE staff and RGs created an outreach script in Spanish and English designed to build trust, combat disinformation, and provide clear and culturally relevant information about how to complete the census. CE staff provided extensive training, coaching, and practice sessions with RG members to ensure safe, effective, legally compliant outreach and accurate

CENSUS



information delivery. CE staff prepared outreach and event materials while HAB45 worked with regional census leaders to obtain maps and phone numbers for historically undercounted census tracts.

RGs began door-to-door census promotion in November 2019 alongside their collection of community assessment survey responses. They continued through March 12, 2020, when a COVID-19 shelter-in-place order precluded in-person engagement. RGs knocked on doors in pairs, delivered information in Spanish and English, and documented their activities. While only Census Bureau employees are authorized to collect census responses, RG members served as trusted messengers to provide accurate information and respond to fears and questions.

In May, RG parent leaders moved their census outreach to the telephone. Callers worked in pairs using a Google form to track calls in Spanish and English. HAB45 staff analyzed call data and provided regular reports to CE staff. Because RGs were able to make more contacts by phone than in person, engagement areas were expanded to incorporate additional historically undercounted areas, including Concord's Monument community, San Pablo, and additional neighborhoods in Bay Point.

While the census self-response period was originally planned to end in August, the US Census Bureau extended the deadline due to the pandemic. After several changes and disputes over the proposed deadlines, census collection continued through October 15. During the final weeks, RG members added a census question to their voter outreach script as a final reminder to residents who had not yet completed the census.

“Once COVID hit, we were not able to connect with people on a physical and personal level the same way and most of us didn’t realize how much we appreciated human contact and speaking to people until we couldn’t anymore.”

Ayesha, WCRG member

CENSUS

Residents who were not home or did not answer calls received a printed flyer, voicemail, or text message encouraging their census participation. CE staff collected and organized tracking forms and HAB45 staff entered and analyzed the data.

OUTCOMES

More than 4,500 residents received census messaging through Regional Group activities.

FIGURE 2: CAN WE COUNT ON YOU TO COMPLETE THE CENSUS?

Source: Community Survey and Phone Bank

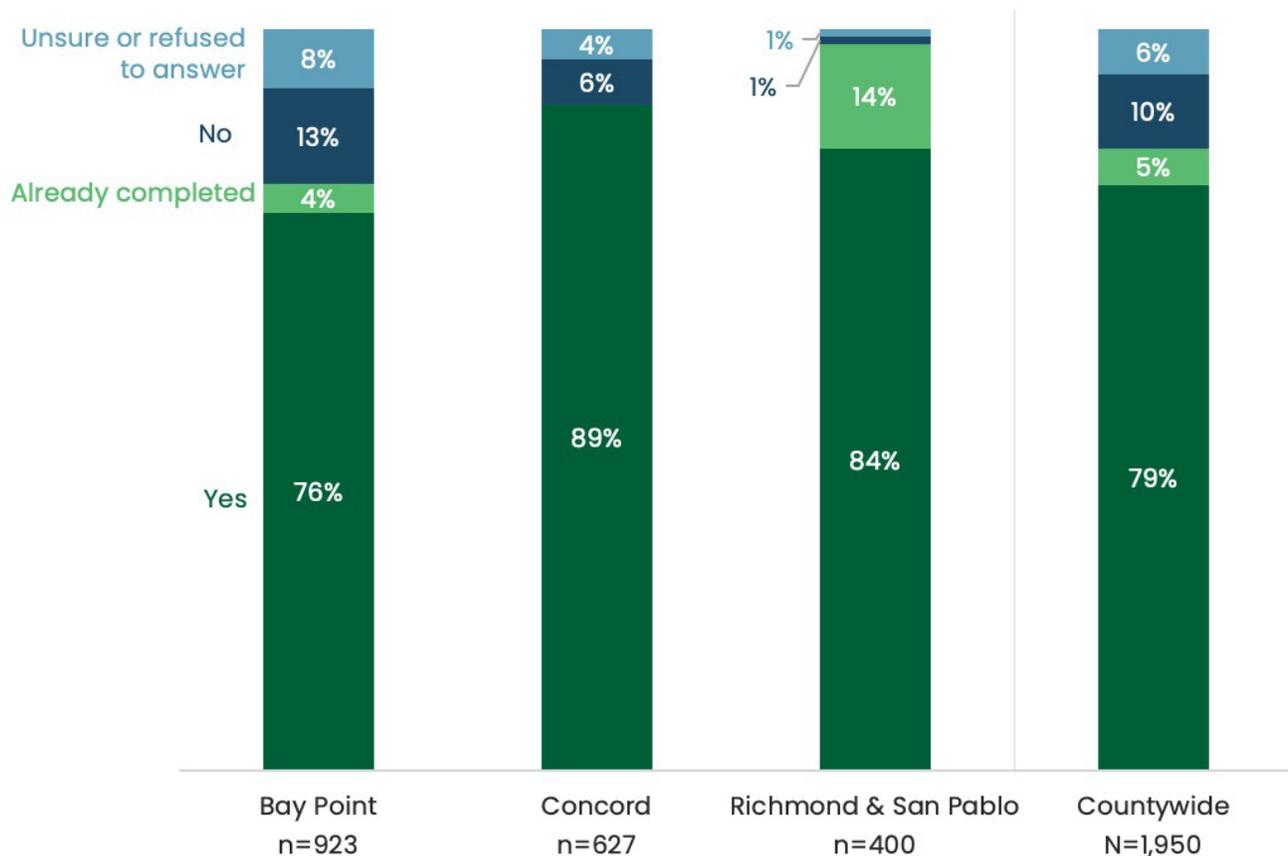


Figure 2 summarizes responses to the question, “Can we count on you to complete the census?” for each region and countywide.^{iv}

Across the three regions, 83% of residents queried said they would complete or had already completed the census. In fall 2020, 68% of respondents said they had already completed the census. This is highly encouraging given that the residents we reached were in historically undercounted communities.

^{iv}Because Regional Group members were volunteers and not federally authorized to help residents complete the census, information collected was self-reported only.

CENSUS

In nearly every region, census completion by phone or online (“self-response rate”) increased compared to 2010 census rates.

FIGURE 3: CENSUS SELF RESPONSE RATES 2010 AND 2020, BY NEIGHBORHOOD, REGION, AND COUNTYWIDE

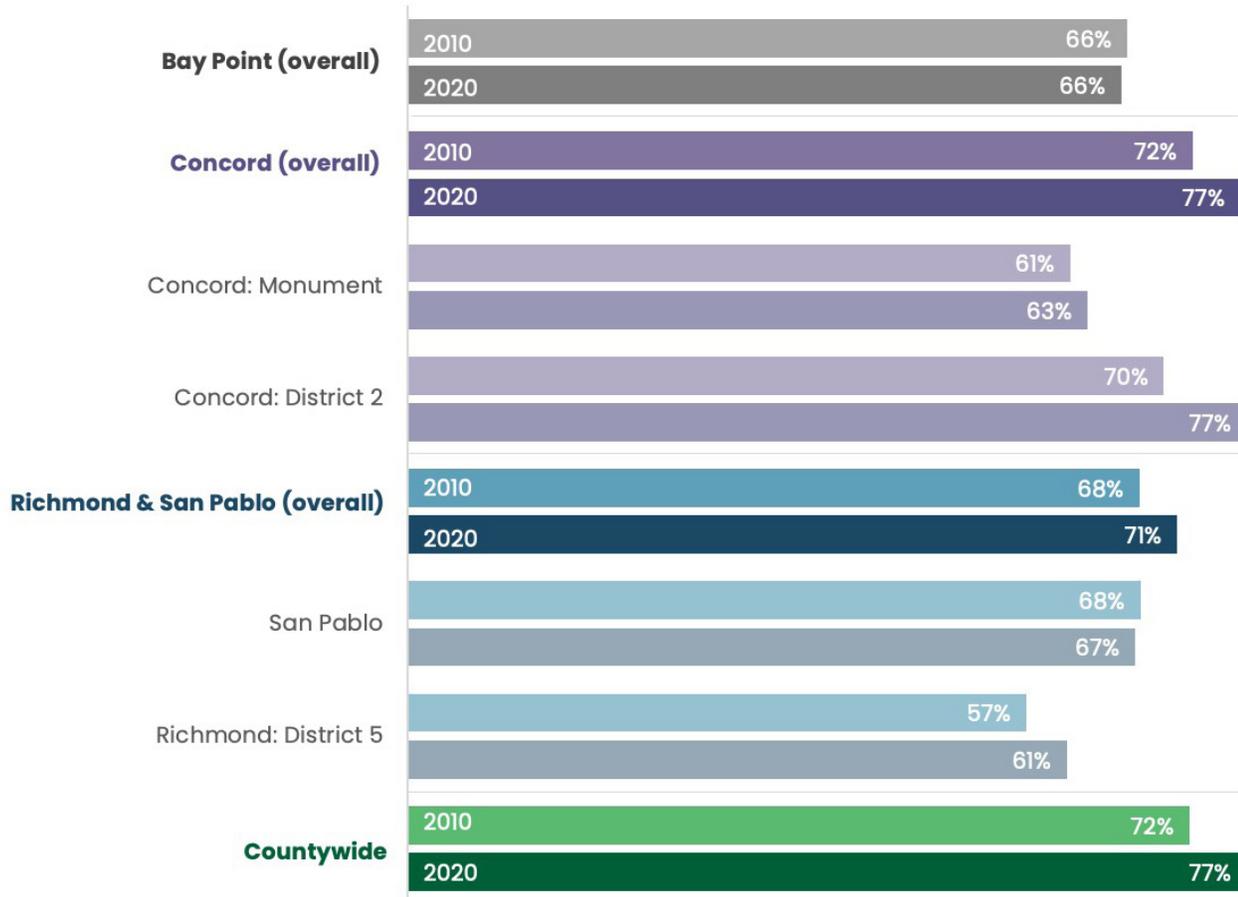


Figure 3 summarizes 2010 and 2020 self-response rates in RG outreach focus areas.

Concord City Council District 2 saw the greatest increase, from 69.8% to 77.4%. Bay Point and San Pablo saw a slight decrease of 0.6% and 0.5%, respectively.¹³ A possible explanation is that both communities have seen a marked growth in immigrant and Latinx/a/o residents over the past decade. Given aggressive federal intimidation and misinformation targeting Latinx/a/o immigrants this year, remaining within 1% of their 2010 self-response rates may still be considered a success owing to the effective work of RG members.

Overall, Contra Costa’s self-response rate increased from 72.1% in 2010 to 77.4% in 2020, the third-highest self-response rate in the state.

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Contra Costa County saw unprecedented, broad-based mobilization promoting the 2020 census. Public agencies and community-based organizations incorporated census messaging into their activities and embarked on dedicated census outreach campaigns to reach historically undercounted communities, including children birth to age 5, immigrants, BIPOC, renters, low-income households, and linguistically diverse families. Response rate spikes in Concord District 2 and Richmond District 5 point to the effectiveness of peer-to-peer outreach and trusted community messengers. The overall increase in the county's self-response rate and increases in many historically undercounted areas of the county suggest that **future census promotion campaigns should continue to partner with and invest in trusted community leaders to ensure that all residents are counted.**

The fact that some areas still had lower self-response rates compared to the county overall highlights challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic along with the ongoing marginalization of communities with high rates of poverty, language barriers, immigrants, and residents of color.

More must be done to build trust and remove structural barriers to civic participation and organization in these areas.

Ultimately, improved census response rates will lead to more equitable representation and distribution of resources that reflect and meet the needs of all residents.

"I remember a lady who worried about opening the door. I started talking to her in Tagalog and she immediately opened the door. She had never filled out the census before and had a lot of questions. She was so happy to have someone from the community she could trust and communicate with."

Jima, CCRG member

VOTER REGISTRATION AND EDUCATION

The November 2020 general election provided a critical opportunity to engage Contra Costa voters, influence significant national and local races, and shape the trajectory of early childhood health, racial and economic disparities, and systemic inequities for future generations.

Regional Groups conducted dedicated voter education and mobilization leading up to the November 3rd election in the priority areas of Bay Point, Concord, and Richmond. County election data show these areas historically have had low voter turnout compared to the county overall. The 2020 election offered voters new opportunities for representation:

- In Richmond and Concord, voters were tasked with selecting representatives for newly defined electoral districts rather than electing councilmembers at large. The new electoral system created an opportunity for voters to select representatives from their neighborhoods who potentially could be accessible and responsive to their needs.
- In the unincorporated community of Bay Point, voters chose seats for the Ambrose Recreation and Park District, which oversees park health and recreation programs for Bay Point and parts of Pittsburg. It is one of the only local elected bodies outside of the County Board of Supervisors for which Bay Point residents can vote.



VOTER REGISTRATION AND EDUCATION

In this election, voters weighed in on ballot measures related to tenant protections, criminal justice reform, and revenues for schools and social services.

RG members recognized the importance of increasing voter participation by their peers in underrepresented communities to achieve policy goals and transform communities.

In an attempt to facilitate voter participation amidst challenges posed by COVID-19, all California voters received mail-in ballots for the first time. Completed ballots could be mailed back free of charge, dropped off at public ballot boxes and early voting sites, or delivered in person to polling places on election day. While this change expanded opportunities to vote early and avoid exposure to the virus, it also created confusion and logistical barriers. For example, residents who had moved since the last election cycle were required to re-register in order to receive their ballot at the correct address. For communities with high rates of housing instability and mobility, the risk that many voters would not receive their ballots or be unable to vote posed a threat to voter turnout.

RG members crafted non-partisan, culturally relevant messages to address the questions and concerns of voters most likely to be disenfranchised. In an election so different from previous ones, such outreach was necessary and invaluable.

METHODS

In June 2020, RG members received training from the CE program and HAB45 on voter registration, logistics for the November 2020 election, and the history and implications of voter suppression and disenfranchisement. Focusing on the same geographic areas as for the community assessment and census outreach, trained RG members called residents in Bay Point, Concord, Richmond, and San Pablo, paying particular attention to newly created city council districts in Concord (District 2) and Richmond (District 5). In Bay Point, outreach was focused on the Ambrose Recreation and Park District Board jurisdiction encompassing all of Bay Point and a section of Pittsburg. RG members worked in pairs to collect responses on a Google form, tracking calls in Spanish and English. HAB45 staff analyzed call data and provided regular reports to CE staff.



VOTER REGISTRATION AND EDUCATION

Residents received information about how to register to vote, confirm their registration, and vote by mail, as well as on the importance of participating in local races and voting “down-ballot.” Residents who did not answer phone calls received voicemails or text messages that included resources for more information. F5CC and HAB45 also mailed Get Out the Vote postcards to over 9,000 Bay Point residents and text messaged over 1,000 residents countywide with information about voter registration, how to mail or drop off ballots, and local races. As the census deadline approached, callers included a reminder to complete the census in 2,573 calls made between August 28 and October 5. RG parent leaders continued voter education and outreach up until election day.

OUTCOMES

Regional Group members spoke to 2,086 people about the November 2020 election.

They confirmed registration information for 83% of residents reached by phone and were available to answer questions regarding voting by mail and local races. Of those not registered or needing to update their registration information, 58% registered with a member over the phone or committed to re-registering on their own with the information provided by RG members; 42% of residents not currently registered stated they were ineligible to vote.

FIGURE 4: CAN WE COUNT ON YOU TO VOTE THIS NOVEMBER?

Source: Community Survey and Phone Bank

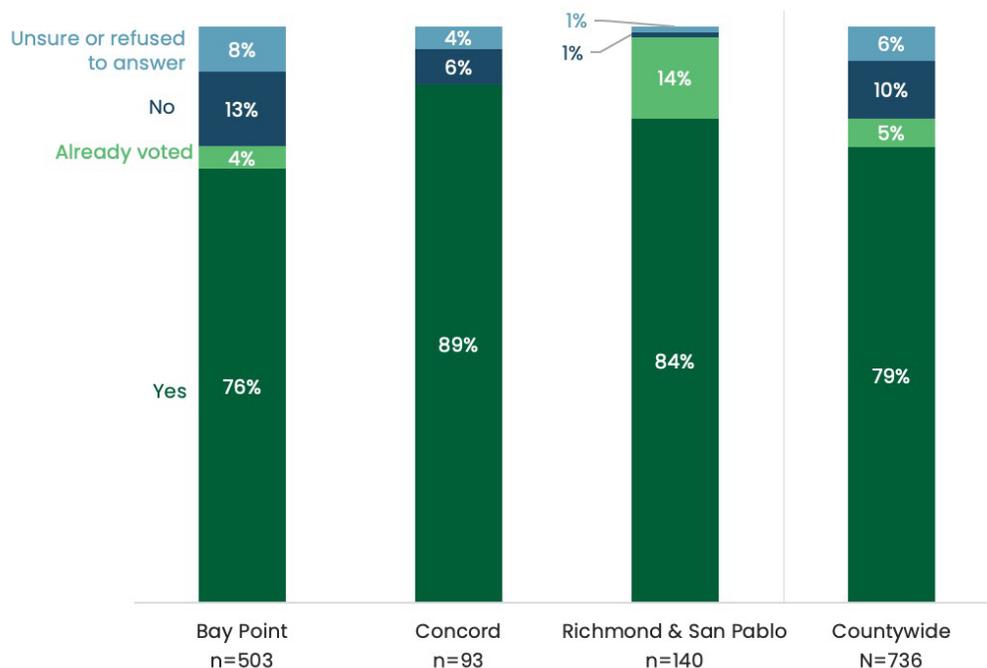


Figure 4 shows responses to the question of whether residents planned to vote, asked in October when ballots could be submitted by mail or in person at early voting centers and ballot drop-off locations.

VOTER REGISTRATION AND EDUCATION

West County had the highest percentage (14%) of respondents who had already voted during the early voting period. Across the three regions, 88% of respondents said they would vote or had already voted.

For the majority of residents who were already registered and planning to vote, RG members provided essential information about the new vote-by-mail logistics and local races in their communities. For example, callers informed Bay Point voters of the two seats up for election on the Ambrose Recreation and Park District Board, as well as the function of ARPD and the role of elected board positions. Similarly, most residents contacted were unaware of the newly formed electoral districts in Concord and Richmond. While these local races are commonly overlooked in a presidential election year, they often have the most impact on residents' daily lives and on communities, underscoring the importance of RG voter engagement.

As with the census promotion efforts, 2020 saw a groundswell of community-based organizations engaging in election outreach. Overall, voter registration in Contra Costa increased by more than 83,000 compared to 2018, rising to over 703,000 registered voters. RGs focused on areas of Contra Costa County with large numbers of young children, BIPOC, and low-income residents to increase participation among historically disenfranchised residents.

FIGURE 5: VOTER TURNOUT, 2016 AND 2020

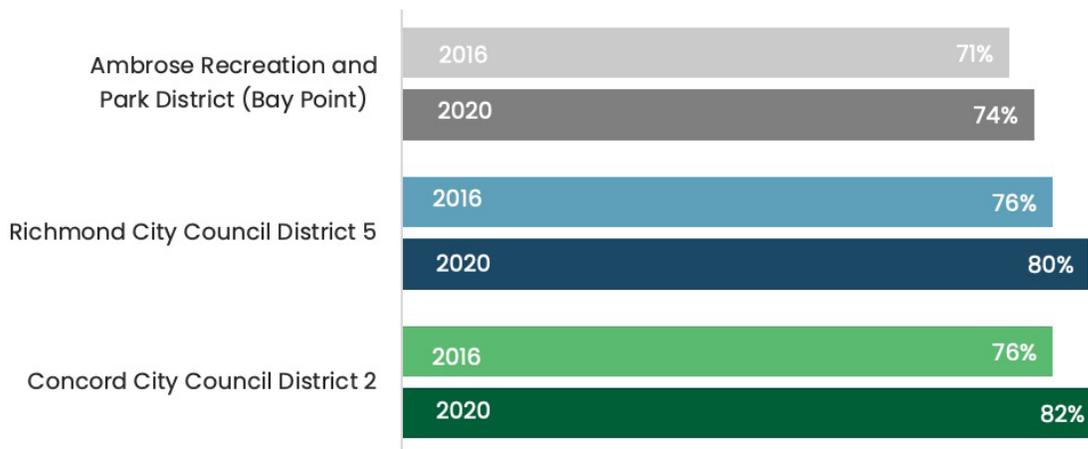


Figure 5 shows voter turnout in 2016 and 2020 calculated as the percentage of registered voters who cast ballots.

Countywide, voter turnout increased from 79% in 2016 to 84% in 2020, with **greater turnout in all three of the district races where Regional Groups focused their outreach.** Voter turnout increased by 45% in Concord District 2 and 36% in Richmond District 5 from 2016 to 2020. In Bay Point, a 3% increase in voter turnout reflects more than a thousand additional votes cast for ARPD board directors in 2020 compared to 2016. Election results show that far

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more Bay Point and Pittsburg voters selected two candidates for the ARPD on their ballots compared to in 2016, when many voters left the second seat blank. These results indicate that voters in the RGs' priority areas were prepared to vote on all local ballot items. In addition to voter turnout, the number of registered voters also increased in all three districts where Regional Groups conducted voter education and registration outreach.



ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In 2020, voters across the nation faced a highly charged election climate filled with misinformation, suppression, intimidation, and sensationalized accusations of fraud. In Contra Costa, new voting logistics, disparate access to accurate information, and general confusion caused by the pandemic threatened to lower voter turnout in underrepresented areas. Unfamiliar local district elections and ballot initiatives presented further potential for voter confusion. More than ever, the 2020 November election created a need for tailored, effective, one-on-one voter outreach across the county.

Given the extraordinary circumstances of the 2020 election, the increase in voter participation in Contra Costa is significant and underscores the powerful impact of coordinated voter registration and education across the county. Increased voter participation in Bay Point, Concord, and Richmond—all historically characterized by low voter turnout—points to the value of voter outreach conducted by trusted community leaders who can convey tailored, culturally relevant messaging. Election results in these areas also highlight the importance of mobilizing participation in local elections and “down ballot” voting. Drawing on this distinct and effective RG effort, **future efforts should be individualized, grounded in deep community relationships, and tied to relevant neighborhood priorities rather than a generalized public education effort.**

The success of RG election mobilization affirms resident-led organizing as an effective strategy that should be replicated in future efforts for increased voter participation, equitable representation, and responsive policymaking among historically disenfranchised communities.

More investment is needed to support community-based advocacy groups and base-building organizations with needed resources and infrastructure to increase civic engagement towards equitable democracy.

LESSONS LEARNED

This project underscored key considerations and practices for successful resident-driven mobilization and optimal civic participation.

Lessons from our engagement work on the 2020 US Census, general election, and local community assessment include the following.

- ◆ **Community Partnership and Support:** Authentic partnership between staff and Regional Group leaders was critical to ensuring that the project supported parents' short and long-term goals for themselves and their communities.
 - Shared values, established agreements, joint goals, communication, and transparency guided the project's overall approach.
 - An infrastructure of peer partnerships, group meetings, staff coaching, emotional support, and the encouragement of team 'captains' resulted in high participation rates despite the pandemic's devastation on RG members and their communities.
 - Project objectives were informed by parent leaders' collective priorities and centered around their larger community goals.



Authentic partnership between staff and Regional Group leaders was critical to ensuring that the project supported parents' short and long-term goals for themselves and their communities.

LESSONS LEARNED



- ◆ **Collaborative Strategy and Flexibility:** Project staff and parent leaders selected the community mobilizing strategy together and were nimble in shifting operations in response to COVID-19.
 - Door to door outreach was the Regional Groups' preferred method as it allowed for higher quality conversations with residents and greater participation of RG members' older children.
 - Though less well liked, phone outreach allowed for more attempts in a short time period, felt safer to RGs, and was more convenient for RG members with young children and those unable to canvass.
 - Working in bilingual pairs facilitated greater reach, more efficient data collection, and increased response rates.
 - Linguistically and culturally diverse teams increased safety and peer support in the face of aggressive and racially prejudiced behavior from residents.
 - Regular collaborative communication fostered a swift response to pandemic-related restrictions and a smooth transition to a new strategy.

Project staff and parent leaders selected the community mobilizing strategy together and were nimble in shifting operations in response to COVID-19.

LESSONS LEARNED

“For the first time in my life, I really participated in the election process. I’ve never been so involved in an election on the local level before. It was nice to feel connected to the voting process and to take ownership of it. I learned a lot about my community and myself. The experience was empowering and gratifying.”

Deborah, ECRG member

- ◆ **Investment in Leadership Development:** Tailored and collaborative leadership training supported Regional Group members’ growth and effectiveness in the field.
 - Training on the root causes of systemic inequity supported parent leaders to connect the 2020 census and elections to their larger goals of equitable representation and community investments, and to impress those connections on residents.
 - Increased training on Google forms or any other digital data collection tracking tools would have been useful to promote greater leadership and efficiency.
- ◆ **Empowerment and Deep Transformation:** Regional Group parent leaders’ mobilization of their neighbors led to their feeling more engaged, connected to their community, and empowered themselves.
 - Peer-to-peer outreach increased receptiveness and trust among residents. Some residents joined the Regional Groups, forging stronger relationships with parent leaders and community action.
 - As a result of the project, parent leaders reported feeling more civically engaged in their communities, knowledgeable and confident to speak to their neighbors, and motivated to continue participating in the electoral process.

CONCLUSION

This project of parent leadership and mobilization illustrates the possibilities of collective empowerment, action, and community transformation.



The Regional Groups' tailored outreach and mobilization had a positive impact on engagement of underrepresented families and overall census and voter participation in 2020.

Our community assessment provides invaluable information about resident priorities across the county. We encourage advocates, community organizers, elected leaders, and other stakeholders to draw on and further explore the priorities named in the survey results; quality parks, safe streets, and housing security are essential to optimal early childhood development and health equity.

Communities across Contra Costa County are working toward racial, economic, and social equity to achieve improved health and well-being for current and future generations. Ensuring that public policies, investments, and political representation reflect community priorities is essential to reaching these goals. Authentic engagement of parents of young children, BIPOC, immigrants, and low-income families is vital for success.

We hope the recommendations and lessons shared here will inform stakeholders striving for equitable representation, responsive policymaking, and resource allocation in underrepresented communities. Contra Costa County stands to benefit from deeper engagement of, and partnership with, historically underrepresented residents in decisions and investments affecting their lives and communities.

Only with more equitable representation and democratic participation of underrepresented communities will Contra Costa reach its goals of health, well-being, and optimal childhood development for all young children and families.

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Alejandra Plascencia | East County Community Liaison/Organizer

Carolina López-Flores | Program Assistant

Natalie Blackmur | Communications Manager

Brian Kelley | Communications Specialist

■ HEALTHY & ACTIVE BEFORE 5

Chelsea Rae Sudweeks | Program Associate

■ REGIONAL GROUPS

Similar to low-income communities of color across the nation, the pandemic had a disproportionate impact on Regional Group parent leaders struck by illness, job loss, lack of childcare, disparate access to resources, and heightened stress. RG members struggled with the same barriers to census and voting participation they worked to mitigate—housing instability, misinformation, lack of time, and disenfranchisement. We acknowledge the current and former RG members who demonstrated extraordinary resiliency and dedication to this project.

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NOTES

¹United States Census Bureau (2019). QuickFacts population estimates for Contra Costa County, CA retrieved January 2021 from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/contracostacountycalifornia,US/PST045219>

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¹¹Bay Area Equity Atlas. Housing Burden: Concord City, CA vs. California. Retrieved January 2021 from <https://bayareaequityatlas.org/indicators/housing-burden#/?geo=07000000000616000>

¹²East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy, Central County Regional Group and First 5 Contra Costa (2016). The Housing Crisis Hits Home in Concord

¹³Contra Costa County Self Response Rate Report. Retrieved November 2020 from www.cococensus.org

APPENDIX

FIGURE A1 | N=595
TOP COMMUNITY CONCERN: CONCORD

Source: Community Survey

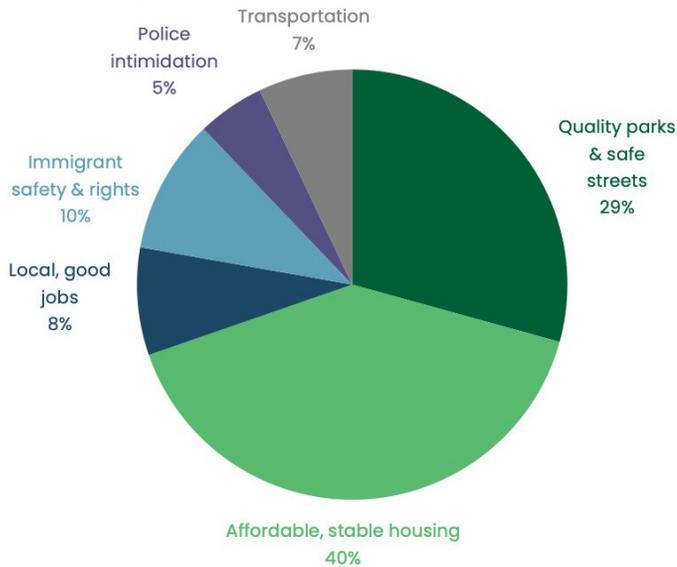


FIGURE A2 | N=611
TOP COMMUNITY CONCERN: BAY POINT

Source: Community Survey

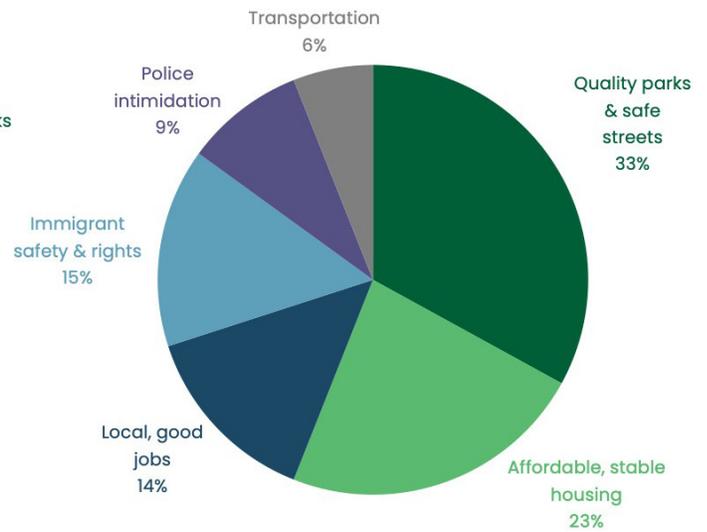
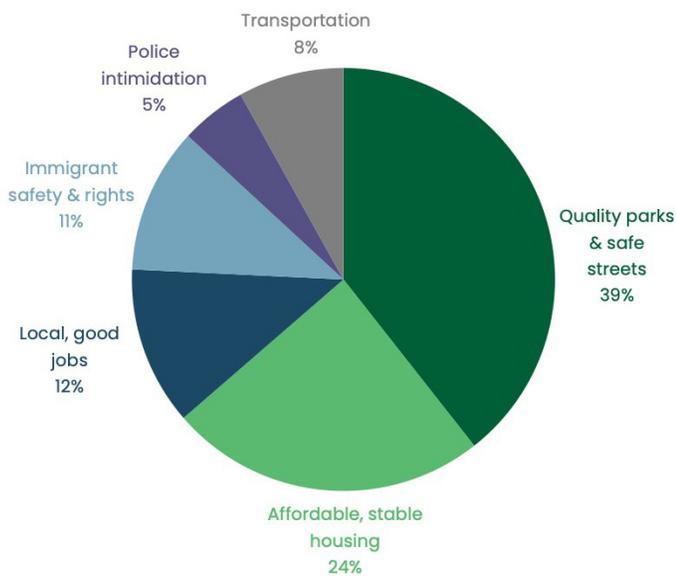


FIGURE A3 | N=303
TOP COMMUNITY CONCERN: RICHMOND & SAN PABLO

Source: Community Survey



WE COUNT AND WE VOTE!

Increasing census and electoral participation among underrepresented children and families in Contra Costa County.

