

Community Organizing Around Resilience

Guide



TreePeople

CALIFORNIA
RESILIENCE PARTNERSHIP

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INTRODUCTION

This *Community Organizing Around Resilience Guide* was developed through the [California Resilience Partnership](#) (CRP), which is led by [Resilient Cities Catalyst](#) (RCC), an independent nonprofit organization that is dedicated to resilience-building partnerships that address cities' urgent challenges (find out more about RCC's work in LA [here](#)). This guide was developed by [TreePeople](#), an environmental nonprofit that inspires and supports the people of Southern California to come together to plant and care for trees, harvest the rain, and renew depleted landscapes, in partnership with six LA-based community organizers: Jacquelyn Badejo, Cristina Basurto, Carmen Chang, Alfonso Ruiz-Delgado, Manny Gonez, and Adriana Pinedo.

With over 45 years of community organizing experience across Southern California, involving more than 2 million people in planting and caring for more than 2 million trees, TreePeople unites with communities to grow a greener, shadier, and more water-secure city in homes, neighborhoods, schools and in the local mountains.



TreePeople is committed to engaging in direct organizing efforts to **inspire, engage and support climate resilient communities**. To be true partners in these communities, many of which are facing ongoing economic and environmental stresses, we thoughtfully engage in understanding their unique needs and working alongside them to achieve the shared goals of creating safer, healthier, more fun, sustainable and resilient communities across Southern California and the world.

As the impacts of climate change become more severe, it is imperative that we support, organize and mobilize communities around resilience and provide life-saving information to community members through authentic partnership and collaboration. **Community organizing is fundamental to building resilience—especially in low-income communities of color that are most vulnerable to climate threats**. At a project level, grassroots organizing can help to identify needed priority projects that prepare communities for these threats, and advance implementation of these urgent efforts. More broadly, organizing drives communities with strong stakeholder engagement, consistent feedback loops among diverse stakeholder groups, and embedded mechanisms that empower community members. For these reasons, community organizing is an essential building block that strengthens community cohesion—fostering communities that are inherently more resilient both on an everyday basis, and no matter what shocks and stresses emerge in the future.

This guide provides strategies, best practices, and lessons learned by TreePeople and our valued community partners throughout Southern California. Through in-depth conversations with experts throughout the field of community organizing, TreePeople was able to gather key insights on what it takes to organize communities, especially around concepts like climate resilience, which may at first seem complex or less urgent to some audiences. In addition, we have explored other organizing efforts related to diverse priorities and representing other regions, and included them here to provide additional inspiration and lessons for future organizing efforts around resilience.



Community organizing and education help ensure that communities are prepared and connected to each other and to the resources that are crucial to surviving and thriving in the face of climate threats. Too often, however, grant funding avenues do not include adequate resources for organizing and mobilizing communities, and too narrowly restrict supported activities. Without proper resources, individuals are less incentivized to become organizers, diminishing overall organizing capacity. Besides sharing best practices that can support and inspire community driven resilience efforts across the country, an additional aim of the *Community Organizing Around Resilience Guide* is to underscore the importance of organizing and of meaningful and consistent community engagement throughout resilience building efforts, helping to make the case for additional grants and programs that support this critical work.

How to Make the Most of this Guide

Key Takeaways highlighted in the sections below underscore common lessons amplified by experts.

“A few questions to ask” call out boxes underneath each Key Takeaway offer practical guidance for organizers to apply these lessons.

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

4 - OFFER INCENTIVES TO ENSURE DIVERSE REPRESENTATION

All the recent agreements agreed that community and historical relationships are essential in making a community resilient to a crisis. However, without access to grant funding or resources, members tend to come out of the organization quickly, further limiting their capacity to organize and sustain. This common barrier among community groups stresses the need for organizers to develop and adhere to a financial strategy allowing for incentives.

Greenleaf Organizer Justin Baskop suggests that children, food, information and translation are all needs for community events. Other incentives like safety, reusable utensils, water bottles and other tangible items can not only




A few questions to ask:

- What incentives are being offered to community members and partners?
- What is their response to the incentives?
- How can incentives continue to be beneficial to community organizing?

The Additional Resources section showcases numerous useful resources for organizers.

Case studies highlight the Key Takeaways in action.

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CASE STUDY EXAMPLES

The following case studies, drawing upon local and national examples, both highlight the above takeaways and provide real-world examples useful for future organizing around resilience in low-income communities of color that are environmentally stressed.

In SouthPeak's local tree care project in Huntington Park, gathering community input, offering incentives, and incorporating trusted messengers were all pivotal in building a thriving urban forest for a healthier and more climate-resilient community in the recent natural disaster of New Year's Day and early winter of 2024. SouthPeak's Resilience Institute leads to form the local tree care project messengers and a deep community connection. This was key to building a game-changing urban forest of new trees. From a private tree care business, these messengers can lead right on how to better engage and uplift marginal and green-based communities.

Urban Forestry in Huntington Park

In 2024, SouthPeak began working with the City of Huntington Park to improve the urban forest by engaging local climate offices, schools, churches, businesses, nonprofits and key community leaders in a project to plant and care for 1,000 trees in the 3.5 square mile area of Southeast Los Angeles. Through our Community Engagement Team, led by our Regional Manager and Coordinator, SouthPeak has been able to build trust, build relationships and commitment to caring for the urban forest, which in turn creates a more climate-resilient community through reducing the environmental stressors caused by urban heat and air pollution. Our strategies and engagement includes and material for the general public, training public works staff on urban forestry best practices, offering hands-on workshops to the at-risk community, engaging youth and residents at workshops in tree planting events, and being staff from local community to engage their neighbors.

Community engagement is central to this project as well as all of SouthPeak's work. The trees planted during our urban forest days depend on coordination and engagement and care for their long-term health – just as an engaged community is necessary in the face of climate change. The project is particularly in largely underserved, providing a valuable opportunity for local high school and college students to build their confidence and knowledge skills.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Organizing Methods

<p>UNION ORGANIZING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How Do Unions Win Elections: Campaign/Civil Work at the 2022 Ohio Gov. Election Harvard Business Review: How to Win Through a Union Campaign 	<p>POLITICAL CAMPAIGN ORGANIZING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> South Works! Update: Two Years and National Voter Registration Day The Alliance for Youth Organizing
<p>COMMUNITY ORGANIZING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 30 Principles for Successful Community Outreach Mutual Cooperation: A Guide Resources for Organizing during COVID-19 What is Mutual Organized? How to Use the Best of Both Worlds: SACI Union as a Justice An Evolving Model for Working with Youth Community Organizing: Youth Development, Youth Organizing Leading Lincoln: A Community Power Building Approach to Structural Change Reflections on Movement Community Power 	<p>COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AROUND CLIMATE ADAPTATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Making Equity Real in Climate Adaptation and Community Resilience Policies and Programs: A Guidebook Adaptation Planning Guide: A Guide to Equitable, Community-Driven Climate Resilience Planning Making Resilience Real

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all those that contributed to this guide. Community organizing takes years of dedication and commitment. We hope this guide will lead to more support for community-based organizations and organizers with decades of experience advocating for their communities.



TreePeople acknowledges that building resilience requires not only bolstering community engagement efforts, but also strengthening understanding of the environmental injustices that these communities face as well as how those issues intersect with and are caused by long standing economic and social disparities and injustices, including a lack of adequate mental and public health services, a lack of affordable housing, increasing gentrification, failure to fully embrace and integrate immigrant communities, intergenerational trauma and violence, among other issues. With that knowledge, TreePeople understands that our presence in communities, while well-intended, can have adverse effects on the population by contributing to issues of green gentrification and displacement. In designing our community engagement plans, TreePeople is mindful of this dynamic and is deliberate in our efforts to mitigate the unintended negative impacts of our work.

To be supportive partners in these communities, many of which are facing ongoing economic and environmental stresses, we thoughtfully engage in understanding their unique needs and work alongside them to achieve our shared goals. That is why TreePeople's community organizing approach is guided by the understanding that building climate resilient communities requires long overdue investments that are directly informed, guided and led by community members. These efforts must be supported by cross-sector and multidisciplinary partnerships aimed at addressing the economic, environmental and health issues these communities face.

TreePeople's mission will not be done until those that suffer the most adverse impacts of pollution, lack of trees and climate change have access to fresh air and clean water, to safe open spaces and shaded streets, to healthy food and green jobs.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ORGANIZING IN BUILDING MORE RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

TreePeople and RCC are focused on climate resilience and the threats communities across Southern California face resulting from urban heat, fires, air pollution, soil and water contamination, as well as how each of these impact physical and mental health. As climate change continues to worsen, listening to, connecting with, supporting, organizing, and mobilizing communities around resilience helps to deliver life-saving information to community members, in an easily accessible way, that can help them mitigate and better withstand future shocks. In addition, community organizing is key to building resilience especially in communities more susceptible to climate threats, because it helps to create a stronger feedback loop among residents, government, and other neighborhood institutions. This feedback mechanism equips residents with tools to shape their neighborhoods both during crises and on an everyday basis, ensuring that projects and policies reflect their choices and needs.

Despite its significance, community organizing is too often under-funded and under-valued. We hope this guide will benefit other communities by amplifying the strategies that work while serving as an advocacy tool to mobilize funding required to support these strategies.



COMMUNITY ORGANIZING IS KEY TO BUILDING RESILIENCE

Community organizing is a critical tool in making change happen and strengthening residents' ability to shape their community's future. Communities are fundamentally more resilient to diverse shocks and stresses when they have strong social cohesion, and when governance structures are informed and shaped by community members. Organizing is one important way to build this capacity. Supporting organized community groups today can foster new partnerships while building the essential community cohesion that strengthens preparedness, regardless of the shocks or stresses the future might bring. An organized community therefore is a more resilient community.

The most successful organizers understand that communities are already organized—and therefore work to empower community voices and uplift existing community structures.

Community organizers work on-the-ground in the communities they serve. They generally come from these communities and draw upon deep knowledge of racial inequalities, economic disparities, public health concerns, environmental problems, lack of government resources, and other challenges.

Organizers can bring communities together around these challenges, acting as bridges that connect residents to governments and other institutions. The most effective organizers listen to community needs, identify struggles and concerns, elevate prioritized needs to key institutions, and translate responses in a way that is culturally and linguistically relevant.

This guide aims to provide insight on innovative organizing tactics that build interest among communities in climate resilience and help organizers become more adaptable and locally connected to resources.

What is Resilience?

Building Resilience-LA identifies resilience as the ability to be flexible, adaptable and locally connected. This means having the capacity to mitigate and prepare for future challenges, while being able to “bounce back” when inevitable shocks do occur. 100 Resilient Cities, which supported development of the Resilient Los Angeles Strategy, considered resilience to be

“the capacity of individuals, communities, institutions, businesses and systems to survive, adapt and grow, no matter what kind of chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience.”

Building resilience strengthens the ability to recover quickly after a trauma or disaster and thrive on an everyday basis. With a heightened risk of susceptibility to the impacts of climate change, aging infrastructure, and greater inequity, increasing resilience among all communities—especially among communities that have been historically environmentally and economically distressed—is essential to create a safer, more thriving Los Angeles. Some researchers think about resilience across three interwoven domains: economic, physical and social. If communities are able to strengthen each of the three domains, they can prepare for threats and thrive despite shocks or stresses that may occur. The appendix includes more information on key climate threats, shocks and stresses that Los Angeles faces.

BEST PRACTICES IN COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

TreePeople met with six expert Los Angeles-based organizers from economically and environmentally distressed communities in order to capture their insights on successful strategies. These leaders include high-level election campaign managers, field campaign personnel, and on-the-ground environmental organizers, who all shared best practices for organizing communities, particularly around resilience.

While every community has unique needs and thus requires an individualized approach when organizing around a shared goal, several common themes have emerged and are summarized in the following pages.



TreePeople interviewed the following experts:

Jacquelyn (Jackie) Badejo

Grassroots Organizer

[Watts Clean Air & Energy Committee](#)

Cristina Basurto

Community Engagement Coordinator

[KYCC \(Koreatown Youth + Community Center\)](#)

Carmen Chang

California State Organizing Director

[California Immigrant Policy Center](#)

Alfonso Ruiz-Delgado

Project Coordinator

[Mayor of Los Angeles, Census 2020 Initiative](#)

Manny Gonez

Director of Policy

[TreePeople](#)

Adriana Pinedo

Community Engagement Specialist

[ActiveSGV](#)



Fair Compensation for Organizers

Community organizers, particularly womxn of color, work hard to gather insight and knowledge on the communities in which they are working, often without compensation. Historically and systemically, many people feel they can ask womxn of color to leverage their relationships and knowledge without compensating them. For example, one expert community organizer shared that potential employers sometimes ask potential employees for their community organizing strategies, and then proceed to utilize these strategies without hiring them.

It is important that the organizer's relationship with the community is mutually beneficial. Many of the community organizers interviewed for this guide

reported frequently paying out of pocket for materials without compensation for their work to gain trust from community members (for example, ordering food from local restaurants, donating to local projects, or volunteering their time). One organizer reported that annually, they pay around \$300 out of pocket for work-related costs.

TreePeople acknowledges that many community organizers traditionally have not always been appropriately compensated for their work or time and is committed to supporting our community partners in whatever ways we can.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 – OFFER INCENTIVES TO ENSURE DIVERSE REPRESENTATION

All the expert organizers agreed that incentives and reciprocal relationships are essential in mobilizing a community around a cause. However, without adequate grant funding or resources, incentives tend to come out of the organizers' pockets, further limiting their capacity to organize and mobilize. **This common barrier among community groups elevates the need for organizers to develop and adhere to a financial strategy allowing for incentives.**

Grassroots Organizer Jackie Badejo suggests that childcare, food, interpretation and translation are all needs for community events. Other incentives like t-shirts, reusable utensils, water bottles and other tangible items can not only



help to promote key organizing goals, but help community members to move away from plastic and disposables to more sustainable alternatives.

Other incentives can include mini-grants, which Alfonso Ruiz-Delgado reports have been beneficial in helping smaller local organizations host their own events. He suggests another way to offer incentives is through providing people with titles, even if they are volunteering; for many, any opportunity for a promotion goes a long way. He also brought up providing certificates to attendees upon completing an event. Though simple, certificates resonate with many community members and help to pull people in. According to Ruiz, older folk and youth applying to college are typically most enthusiastic about these certificates.

Reciprocal relationships look at the give and take of the community members and leaders engaging with the community organizer, and was a topic that constantly came up in conversations with each of the expert organizers. Organizers cannot simply preach their message to a community and expect residents to readily accept their word. Incentives are key—often along the lines of time and buy-in. Financial incentives, or in-kind resources like childcare, are tools that enable participation in organizing activities from community members who otherwise might be unable to participate—and whose important perspective would otherwise be unrepresented

To better engage communities, community organizing efforts should allocate resources for these kinds of incentives. As noted above, organizers often will use their own money to gain trust from community members with little to no compensation from their organizations.



A few questions to ask:

- ❑ What incentives are being offered to community members and partners?
- ❑ What is their response to the incentives?
- ❑ How can incentives continue to be beneficial in community organizing?

2 – EMPLOY TRUSTED MESSENGERS TO BUILD SUPPORT

Trusted messengers can include constituents from local institutions, such as pastors, hairdressers, teachers, caregivers, and restaurant owners. Alfonso Ruiz-Delgado of the Census 2020 Initiative has defined trusted messengers as those who help mobilize support for an organizer’s mission among community members, especially if the trusted messengers have energy and buy-in. Though they may not represent a community organization, these leaders wield power within the community and can often garner support for a mission more easily than a volunteer. Trusted messengers usually come from the communities in which the community organizing is taking place, and can be community leaders or other individuals who are well-connected within the community.

Recruiting external volunteers to go out in the community to have those conversations can increase reach, but mobilizing those who know the community and can get them on board is more effective. Reaching a larger audience through canvassing is less important than the quality of relationships.

Carmen Chang of the immigrant rights organization California Immigrant Policy Center suggests featuring someone recognizable from the community during outreach, or alternatively featuring someone who looks like and represents the community to help them relate to one another and the organizer’s work. In BIPOC communities, trusted messengers often share a common background, which may consist of racial identity and language, and lean into these similarities to build rapport for the organizer’s cause.

It is important to note, however, that the trusted messenger relationship should be reciprocal. Since the trusted messenger is helping to organize and share the organizer’s mission with the community, it is essential to look at how the trusted messenger also benefits from the relationship.



A few questions to ask:

- ❑ Who are trusted messengers in the community?
- ❑ Who are the community leaders that could be trusted messengers?
- ❑ Who best relates to the community?
- ❑ What is being provided to the trusted messenger to make the relationship reciprocal?

3 – ENSURE COMPREHENSIVE UNDERSTANDING OF THE COMMUNITY

The most successful organizers complete a thorough analysis of the communities they work with before launching organizing activities in order to deepen their understanding. Jackie Badejo, Grassroots Organizer of Watts Clean Air & Energy Committee, explained how important it is to take into account historical, environmental, and overall holistic components of the community before organizing to better understand what has impacted residents over time.

Many of the expert organizers are from or have had similar experiences to the communities they work in—and are therefore able to represent, look like, and have more insight on the audience and their needs. Cristina Basurto, Community Engagement Coordinator at KYCC (Koreatown Youth + Community Center), explained how having someone who lives in the city, connects to people at every level, and is seen throughout the community carries more weight compared to a relative newcomer who is less familiar with the community and might leave. Elevated levels of trust, in turn, help facilitate deep engagement and understanding of community needs.

Carmen Chang, California State Organizing Director of California Immigrant Policy Center, also suggests that engaging with community leaders can also be a helpful tactic: researching what boards they sit on and priority advocacy efforts can create helpful connections and promote a deeper understanding of the community.



A few questions to ask:

- ❑ What are the demographics?
- ❑ What is the history of this community?
- ❑ What environmental impacts are there in this community?
- ❑ Who do people seem to trust in the community (i.e. faith groups, community groups, etc.)?
- ❑ Who are the community leaders?

4 – ENGAGE MEANINGFULLY WITH ALL FACETS OF THE COMMUNITY TO BUILD TRUST

Building trust was a common thread that came up in conversations with each of the expert community organizers, and can be particularly developed through one-on-one discussions with community members. These kinds of conversations are a critical tactic in building relationships with the communities served.

Jackie Badejo, of the environmental justice organization Watts Clean Air & Energy Committee, maintained that organizers should not assume that communities do not understand complex or less familiar topics. In her role, she has a firsthand understanding of how communities feel the climate getting hotter and see the impacts pollution has had on the physical wellbeing of their neighbors. In fact, assuming community members do not know or understand something can be destructive, and can quickly lead to community distrust. Talking to people, without shying away from more difficult or complex conversations, carries a lot more weight than talking at them—while helping to build trust.

Alfonso Ruiz-Delgado, Project Coordinator at Mayor of Los Angeles, Census 2020 Initiative, recommends attending community leaders' meetings and presentations alongside community members. Organizers can build upon existing rapport with community leaders, reach out to them, and talk to them about their initiatives. After attending meetings, one-on-one meetings can elevate new efforts and how they relate to their work. He also suggests meeting people where they are and talking to them about their priorities.

Building awareness on where community members tend to gather is essential in knowing where and how to talk to people. For example, Jackie Badejo goes to schools, pocket stores, county buildings, and wherever else the need is at the time. Badejo elevates schools as a critical gathering place in particular, regardless of an organizer's area of focus. She recommends not only speaking with a school's administration, but with teachers as well because they are on the ground working with the students.



A few questions to ask:

- ❑ What is the best way to build trust in the community?
- ❑ Where do community members typically gather?
- ❑ What feedback do teachers have on the community?

5 – AMPLIFY COMMUNITY PRIORITIES THROUGH LISTENING

Gaining a deeper understanding of community needs helps to establish alignment between community members and organizers. **Strengthening understanding of community priorities first requires a firm grasp of languages spoken, respective cultural norms, and preferred communication outreach methods.** Adriana Pinedo, who oversees community engagement at the sustainability advocacy organization ActiveSGV, utilizes community organizing methods like gathering as many resources as possible to further immerse herself in issues before meeting with respective communities. She listens to what community members have to say and the issues they are facing in their day-to-day lives, providing them with local resources that may be beneficial, even if they are unrelated to the work she is doing. By having this knowledge and going the extra step to humanize the community member’s experience, Adriana shows that she is listening, which also helps to build rapport.

When trying to get community members interested or involved in the issue the organizer is discussing, it is important to listen first to what community members are saying and meeting community members where they are at. Cristina Basurto at KYCC suggests attending and listening to the public at community meetings—even when they are not related to the organizer’s mission—and joining collaboratives where many relevant community issues are less likely to be ignored. Listening and being present with community members encourages them to open up and discuss other topics or challenges they may be facing.

Once that trust has been established and community members have expressed their concerns, it is important to meet community members where they are. For example, this means leveraging issues that are already important to a community member to help make a community organizer’s message more relevant. Adriana Pinedo makes the point that everyone is impacted by the climate, but when folx are more impacted by food or housing insecurity, the environment becomes less important as an issue. Pinedo suggests engaging in easily accessible educational conversations, breaking down why people should care, and having solutions available.



A few questions to ask:

- ❑ What are communities saying?
- ❑ Are you meeting community members where they are, with what issues are most pressing in their daily lives?
- ❑ Do you have solutions available?
- ❑ Is the message that is trying to be communicated by the community organizer relevant?
- ❑ If it is not directly relevant, can it become relevant?

LESSONS LEARNED ON VIRTUAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

COVID-19 has presented major obstacles to traditional community organizing, pushing community groups to quickly employ creative ways of engaging constituents. Community organizing during the course of the pandemic offered several lessons that can be applied to a post-COVID-19 world, specifically regarding virtual community-building and engaging hard-to-reach populations.

One major throughline across all interviews was that organizing online is much harder than traditional, in-person face-to-face community organizing. A silver lining, however, is that the reach is much wider, which helps to expand an organizer's network. Adriana Pinedo reflected on how through phone banking and calling thousands of people from home, she was able to talk to all the people that did not usually come out of their homes, further growing her agency's reach. These specific groups encompassed people who were homebound, older folk, or individuals who may not be physically engaged in the community.

Carmen Chang's virtual tactics included social media and building on existing relationships. Although building new relationships and partnerships is harder online, it requires persistence—for example, introductions through emails and phone calls, and making the time to meet with people for one-on-one connections. Another takeaway is to not be afraid to leverage existing relationships and ask for introductions to community leaders. Alfonso Ruiz-Delgado found Zoom and G-Chat to be the most impactful in organizing community events online, although he does not think they are quite as effective as in-person events.

Transitioning to remote and virtual community organizing has encouraged community organizers to be creative and try different methods of reaching people that are often overlooked: strategies that can continue even after the pandemic. In the future, one might envision a world where community organizing takes on a hybrid approach in that elements of virtual engagement become permanent fixtures, balanced with more traditional, in-person methods.



LESSONS LEARNED ON BUILDING URGENCY AROUND RESILIENCE

TreePeople asked every expert organizer how they recommend building interest in topics where community members may not feel immediate urgency or importance. This is a continual challenge in climate resilience, as community members struggle to prioritize issues that may not be as explicit to them as other pressing issues like houselessness and food insecurity.

Every organizer recommended listening to community members to better understand their key priorities and challenges, and showing connections between these priorities and climate resilience. Carmen Chang told TreePeople that issues like climate change should be top of mind to most folk, especially with the increasing threat of wildfires. She said she always tries to relate the message to how it impacts them directly. Specifically, she believes that storytelling and asking community members if they know of any wildfire victims through personal anecdotes is much more effective than simply relaying facts.

Jackie Badejo explained how research and including medical professionals in the conversation is essential to providing a comprehensive, science-backed angle that can build more rapport amongst the community.

Alfonso Ruiz-Delgado recommends paying attention to a community's particular environment. For example, if there are environmentally hazardous buildings like steel factories, recycling facilities, and tire shops, one can ask community members how much that impacts them. If they do not seem to notice an impact, it may be worth asking about the community's health, because these residents are often at the highest risk for health disparities such as asthma.



Adriana Pinedo brought up the importance of learning from current issues that are happening and having relevant, engaged discussions with community members. She brought up the recent winter storm in Texas and how communities were not prepared for the storm that left many without power, drawing on this example to engage her respective constituents in the San Gabriel Valley. Cristina Basurto discussed the importance of educating and helping connect communities to their most pressing needs.

ADDITIONAL TIPS

TreePeople's community organizing approach is guided by the understanding that building climate resilient communities requires long overdue investments that are directly informed, guided and led by community members. These efforts must be supported by cross-sector and multidisciplinary partnerships aimed at addressing the economic, environmental and health issues these communities face.

1 Hire Local Staff who Deeply Understand the Community

- Organizers should be from and of the communities they are organizing. They should also be well paid and supported.

2 Incorporate Research to inform Decision Making

- Dedicate significant time to research to ensure a complete understanding of the community.
 - Look into the shocks and stresses each community has historically and continues to face.
 - Understand the history of a community and how it has changed over time.
- Develop an action plan that is rooted in listening to what community members have shared on what motivates them to be engaged.

3 Prioritize Relationship Building throughout the Course of the Engagement

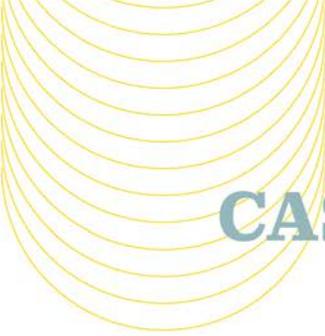
- Involve community in all aspects of a project, including planning.
- Cultivate meaningful and sustained relationships based on community needs.

4 Promote Community Activation and Mobilization Events to Maintain Consistent Engagement

- Provide (or participate in) regular community gatherings where community members can discuss issues and have their voice heard.
- Provide community activation events that are meaningful, fun, engaging and action-oriented.
- Ensure consistent re-engagement by adapting to community needs over time and being flexible.
- Provide incentives and celebrate/acknowledge people's time and dedication.

5 Diversify Outreach Strategies to Deepen Understanding of the Community

- Reach out to many different types of community institutions/leaders, who can offer a multitude of perspectives.
- Utilize multiple avenues of outreach that are centered on where the community already gathers.
- Invest in a range of outreach strategies, across platforms and audiences.



CASE STUDY EXAMPLES



The following case studies, drawing upon local and national examples, both highlight the above takeaways and provide real-world examples useful for future organizing around resilience in low income communities of color that are environmentally stressed.

In TreePeople's local tree care project in Huntington Park, gathering community input, offering incentives, and incorporating trusted messengers were all pivotal in building a thriving urban forest for a healthier and more climate resilient community. In the recent national example of how Stacy Abrams and voting activist groups helped flip Georgia's Republican Senate seats to turn the state blue, using trusted messengers and a deep familiarity with communities were key to mobilizing a game-changing untapped source of new voters. From a climate resilience context, these learnings can shed light on how to better engage and uplift marginalized groups toward successful outcomes.

Urban Forestry in Huntington Park

In 2014, TreePeople began working with the [City of Huntington Park](#) to improve the urban forest by engaging local elected officials, schools, churches, businesses, nonprofits and key community leaders in a project to plant and care for 1,400 trees in the 3.5-square mile area of Southeast Los Angeles. Through our Community Engagement Team, led by our Regional Manager and Coordinator, TreePeople has been able to [raise local understanding of and commitment to caring for the urban forest](#), which in turn creates a more climate resilient community through reducing the environmental stresses caused by urban heat and air pollution. Our multi-layered engagement includes print material for the general public, training public work staff on urban forestry best practices, offering hands-on workshops to the at-large community, engaging youth and thousands of volunteers in tree planting events, and hiring staff from that community to engage their neighbors.

Community engagement is central to this project as with all of TreePeople's work. The trees planted during our volunteer work days depend on continued resident engagement and care for their long-term survival – just as an engaged community is necessary in the face of climate change. This project in particular is largely student-led, providing a valuable opportunity for local high school and college students to build their confidence and leadership skills.

TreePeople eventually hired three of the local student volunteers upon graduating high school as a means to continue our dedication to the community.

Volunteers gain practical forestry knowledge that can pave the way to a variety of green careers. Hands-on training in a real-world setting covers: planting trees; caring for trees; proper watering techniques; pruning; mulching; pest and disease identification; and emergency drought response—all of which contribute to creating more resilient communities. TreePeople conducts extensive outreach to engage community and student groups, and students who act as trusted messengers also recruit their peers, bringing new classes into the program each year. Local leaders, too, frequently participate in TreePeople’s events, including city mayors, councilmembers, and other elected officials, and leaders from local community-based organizations such as East Yards, Communities for a Better Environment, and From Lot to Spot.

We have ensured that our Huntington Park project is effective and impactful because it is highly localized and harnesses the power of community support, rather than costly equipment or outside contractors. We continue to link every layer of the community by engaging them, listening to them, and guiding them as they work to make their neighborhood more resilient and healthier. TreePeople has planted all 1,400 trees and is now in the tree care phase of those trees for the next two years. We are happy to report that we have seen an over 90% survival rate of the trees and sustained community involvement in watering and caring for the trees, committing ourselves and Huntington Park to become more resilient.



Huntington Park Tree Planting

Georgia's 2020 Senate Races

In January 2021, Democrats flipped Georgia's two Senate seats, turning a historically red state blue. Roughly [225,000 new voters turned out](#) who did not vote in the November presidential election between Joe Biden and Donald Trump—which itself saw high turnout. Those new voters were disproportionately people of color, and many came out due to effective community organizers, rendering the action of organizing a critical lever to developing more informed and engaged communities.

Groups such as the [Asian American Advocacy Fund](#), [Georgia Association of Latino Elected Officials \(GAELO\)](#), [ProGeorgia](#), and [Georgia STAND-UP](#) collaboratively worked to turn Georgia blue, reaching voters who have historically been neglected and ignored: voters of color and other marginalized communities. These organizations knew their audiences, often living alongside the communities in which they were working, talking to the community members and listening to their needs.

Among those leading this groundbreaking effort was Stacy Abrams, who served as the Minority Leader in the Georgia House of Representatives from 2011-2017. Abrams and her determination to [flip Georgia](#), strategically recruiting, training, electing, and defending Democrats to prevent a Republican supermajority in the House, is exemplary among how community organizing should be done. She has documented meetings with families and small businesses in more than 150 counties across Georgia, listening to their needs and relating the coming elections to their priorities. During her campaign in 2018, Abrams took a [no-door-unknocked approach](#), starting more than a year before Election Day and ultimately transforming the Georgia electorate - showing her true dedication to hear every voice in the counties she targeted.



Malika Redmond, Chair of ProGeorgia Civic Engagement Table and founding Executive Director of Women Engaged [noted](#): *"I really see our work as a weaver and weaving... what ProGeorgia does is be a hub for all of us organizations that are trusted voices, trusted messengers, trusted within our communities not only on voter engagement but on the number of issues that are important to our lives. We get to come together from our different vantage points and weave together a collective work plan to get out into the state in the broadest and the deepest sense to all of our communities. by drawing on key lessons in this guide of employing trusted messengers and instilling a deep familiarity of communities, this national context speaks to the power of large-scale mobilizing to activate, educate, and develop more autonomous and develop more autonomous traditionally disenfranchised communities."*

Georgia STAND-UP volunteers. Photography by Georgia STAND-UP.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Organizing Methods

UNION ORGANIZING

[How Do Unions Win Organizing Campaigns? Let's Look at the 20 Year Old Data That Told Us](#)

[Harvard Business Review: Step by Step Through a Union Campaign](#)

POLITICAL CAMPAIGN ORGANIZING

[Youth Virtually Engage Their Peers on National Voter Registration Day](#)

[The Alliance for Youth Organizing](#)

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

[20 Principles for Successful Community Organizing](#)

[Virtual Organizing Hub](#)

[Resources for Organizing during COVID-19](#)

- [What is Virtual Organizing?](#)
- [How to fill the gaps when volunteers can't show up in person](#)

[An Emerging Model for Working with Youth: Community Organizing + Youth Development = Youth Organizing](#)

[Leading Locally: A Community Power-Building Approach to Structural Change](#)

[Reflections on Measuring Community Power](#)

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AROUND CLIMATE ADAPTATION

[Making Equity Real in Climate Adaptation and Community Resilience Policies and Programs: A Guidebook](#)

[Adaptation Planning Guide](#)

[A Guide to Equitable, Community-Driven Climate Preparedness Planning](#)

[Mapping Resilience Report](#)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all those that contributed to this guide. Community organizing takes years of dedication and commitment. We hope this guide will lead to more support for community-based organizations and organizers with decades of experience advocating for their communities.

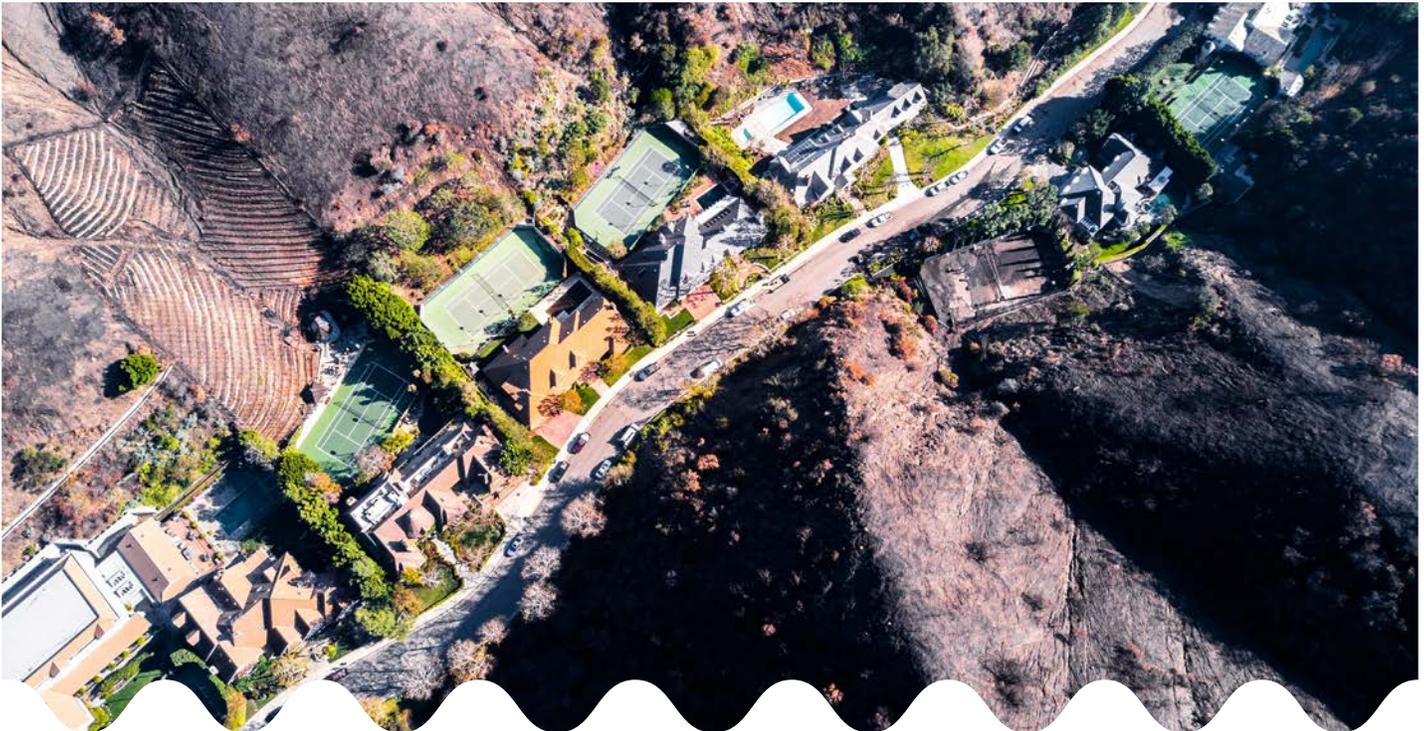
APPENDIX

Climate Threats in Southern California

Aside from the major shocks like earthquakes, fires and floods, Angelenos confront ongoing environmental stresses of extreme heat, power outages and air pollution. Often, people overlook the urgency and need to prepare for shocks and stresses or they believe there is not anything they can do to prevent or prepare for climate threats. Many people view major shocks as seasonal occurrences, not planning by putting preparation plans in place to lessen the impacts or ready themselves for outcomes such as displacement. This is a story all too familiar for many residents in the region, primarily regarding the normalcy of the public health issues of [extreme heat](#) and [air pollution](#), which often lead to detrimental outcomes such as heart disease, asthma, and [mental health diagnoses](#).

Community organizing is the connection to providing information and educating community members about their unique shocks and stresses in their own neighborhoods so they can prepare for and address them. To support individual and community empowerment, community organizers provide tools and resources to community members to make their own decisions on how to ready themselves to be more climate resilient.

By using tools like [CalEnviroScreen](#) and evaluating existing [research](#), it is important to note that those most impacted by climate threats, shocks, and stresses are often the most vulnerable communities. In Los Angeles County, Black, Latinx, Indigenous and People of Color have the lowest tree canopy coverage, carry the heaviest burden of pollution, endure increased heat-related illness and death due to urban heat, and suffer the worst environmental impacts as a result of systemic racism and historical disinvestment. Below are some of the major shocks and stresses that most Angelenos face.



A neighborhood surrounded by scorched hills after the 2017 Skirball Fire in Bel Air, Los Angeles. Photography by @ispy on Twenty20

SELECTED SHOCKS

Defined by the Mayor's Office of Resilience, major shocks are the sudden and acute events that threaten and impact one's immediate wellbeing. These can include natural disasters such as earthquakes, fires and floods.



EARTHQUAKES

Much of Southern California is [still unprepared](#) for a major earthquake. We know it is a matter of when, not if it is going to happen, making it essential to be prepared for when it occurs.

Historically, Los Angeles has been hit with two major earthquakes: the [1933 Long Beach Earthquake](#), a Magnitude 6.4 that killed 120 people and destroyed hundreds of buildings throughout the region and the [1994 Northridge Earthquake](#), a Magnitude 6.7 that killed at least 57 people, injured thousands, and caused up to \$20 billion in damages and over \$40 billion in economic loss - making it the most costly earthquake in United States history. Ideally, many of the deaths and property damage could have been prevented if the communities impacted were made to be more resilient through designing buildings to protect and preserve communities through earthquakes. [Resilience by Design](#) has more information on Los Angeles' greatest vulnerabilities regarding earthquakes.

Earthquakes are a serious threat to Los Angeles County, with the potential to lead to power outages, fires, damages to infrastructure, vehicular accidents, and more. To know if the community you live and/or are working in (California) are at risk for where earthquakes cause the most shaking and destruction, the California Department of Conservation has created a [Fault Activity Map of California](#) to show where activity is most common. The L.A. Times also wrote [this article](#) mapping where massive California earthquakes cause the most shaking and destruction. In the article, Miller and Lin II write about the damage a magnitude 7.8 earthquake on the San Andreas fault could look like:

More than 900 people could die from fire; more than 400 from the collapse of vulnerable steel-frame buildings; more than 250 from other building damage; and more than 150 from transportation accidents, such as car crashes due to stop lights being out or broken bridges.

It is important to prepare communities for earthquakes of all sizes in order to increase resilience. By having an [emergency kit](#) prepared and ready with a [survival guide](#) by their side, community members will have their basic needs met, being able to adapt quicker to the changing environment.



WILDFIRES

Wildfires are becoming increasingly destructive to our local mountains, forests, homes and neighborhoods, with California's dry, windy and hot climate stimulating fire growth.

Fires are nothing new to Los Angeles, with more recent events such as the Woolsey Fire in November 2018, which burned almost 100,000 acres of land in Los Angeles and Ventura Counties, destroyed 1,643 structures, killed three people and prompted the evacuation of more than a quarter million people.

TreePeople has ample resources on how to build resilient homes and communities in preparing for wildfires found at our [2019 Symposium](#). Here are some additional resources:

Building Community Resilience:

[The Topanga Disaster Survival Guide \(2017\)](#)

[North Topanga Canyon Fire Safe Council](#)

Building Infrastructure Resilience:

[Ready for Wildfire - Hardening Your Home](#)

[Creating a Fire Adapted Home - What Does it Take to Protect Your Home from Wildfire?](#)

[How to Have a Firewise Home](#)

[Wildfire Research Fact Sheet Series](#)



FLOODS

Los Angeles is prone to flooding, with three massive floods happening in the last century: the [1928 St. Francis Dam Collapse](#) that killed 431 people, the [1938 Los Angeles Flood](#) that killed nearly 144 people, and the [1992 Sepulveda Basin Flooding](#), which had no fatalities but left almost 100 people stranded and severe damages to infrastructure.

California is a flood-prone state, with one in five Californians and more than \$580 billion worth of structures vulnerable to flooding ([PPIC](#)). The County of Los Angeles is part of the Mediterranean climate zone of California, subject to short, wet winters with long, dry summers. The heavy rains over short periods of time can often lead to moderate flooding with severe damage. As cities across Los Angeles County continue to grow, more land is paved over, creating miles of impervious surfaces, buildings and houses. Because rainwater cannot percolate into the ground, there is more runoff at the surface level, which increases the risk of flooding.

TreePeople has ample resources on [Smart Water Solutions](#) for how individuals and communities can integrate rainwater systems into their own homes to optimize benefits of water supply, water quality and flood prevention.

SELECTED CLIMATE STRESSES

Angelenos also face ongoing environmental stresses (daily or chronic challenges that weaken resources - natural, built or human) such as extreme heat and air pollution.



EXTREME HEAT

Extreme heat causes more death in the United States than all other weather-related causes combined. In a warming climate, health impacts are on the rise, especially in cities, which are warming at a faster rate than non-urban areas. Reducing urban heat exposure is an equity issue, as low-income communities and communities of color are more likely to live in neighborhoods with older buildings, lower tree cover, more heat-retaining surfaces and limited access to coping strategies such as air conditioning. In Los Angeles, older adults, Black Americans and Latinx Americans are expected to see the largest increases in mortality as Los Angeles' climate heats up.

Check out [TreePeople's Prescription for Hot Cities](#) for more Los Angeles-based information.



AIR POLLUTION

People that live in polluted urban areas are more at risk for developing diseases such as [asthma](#), [high blood pressure](#), [cholesterol](#), [obesity](#), and [cancer](#). [Neurological disorders](#) have also been found in older adults and infants, as well as neurobehavioral problems in youth. Just short-term exposure to poor air quality and pollution has been found to worsen [psychiatric disorders](#) in children, leading to a potential increase in anxiety and suicidal thoughts. Researchers have found that children and young adults are the most at-risk for developing complications due to air pollution.

Just having contact with nature and natural spaces in one's community makes them less susceptible to developing these diagnoses, and more likely to [enhance cognitive functioning](#). [Research](#) has also shown that people who live in polluted urban areas are much less likely to be admitted to the hospital for asthma when there are a lot of trees in their neighborhood, with [one study](#) showing that the presence of an extra 300 trees per square kilometer (777 trees per square mile) was associated with about 50 fewer emergency asthma cases per 100,000 residents over the study period.

Learn more about why planting trees is essential to more than just decreasing air pollution with [TreePeople 22 Benefits of Trees](#).