

# EQUITABLE YOUTH COMPENSATION IN CALIFORNIA YOUTH ORGANIZING



## Acknowledgments

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# Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth organizing centers young people who are closest to the pain caused by systemic oppression and thus must be the drivers of social transformation. Yet they also face the most systemic challenges dedicating their time to youth organizing. This report shows how compensation makes it possible for youth to engage and persist in organizing. In contrast with other part-time work, often grueling and highly exploitative service jobs, compensation supports the holistic development nurtured by youth organizing spaces. Ultimately, compensation is a key, but not sole, component of how organizations can realize their visions for a world of abundance and care where all can thrive.

However, there is a critical need for more resources and best practices so that organizations can sustainably compensate young people and fully nurture their growth through meaningful paid roles. For example, structural barriers to appropriately compensating undocumented young people, consistent challenges finding sufficient ongoing funding for youth compensation, and limited capacity/ infrastructure for organizations to supervise young people in paid roles fosters challenges felt acutely by young people.

There is a critical need for more resources and best practices.



# Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Best Practices and Recommendations from the Field

We briefly summarize best practices and recommendations from the field and for funders below:

#### 1) Meet essential needs for youth to engage in organizing

These foundations must be met to facilitate and sustaining young people's engagement, including transportation, food, childcare, mental health resources, and health insurance and benefits. Other examples include paid travel opportunities, trainings, and professional development workshops.



#### 2) Strengthen pay, systems, and communications

- **Pay youth the maximum amount, in a timely manner:** Youth should be paid the maximum amount that the organization can afford (rather than expecting negotiation from the lowest salary). Organizational processes and infrastructures help ensure that youth are paid on time.
- Communicate clearly, consistently, and honestly about compensation: Verbal and written documentation should clearly communicate details such as pay rate, payment timelines, hours, specific roles, and expectations.

#### 3) Invest in young people beyond the check

- Invest in the time and support needed for training & onboarding: Youth need support and caring supervision to nurture their growth in paid roles. Best practices include relationship building, developing workplans to identify youth leader's strengths and goals, processes for accountability, thorough training, and tailored 1-1 sessions.
- Build up financial literacy: Paid roles can be bolstered by cultivating young people's skills and feeling of confidence around daunting financial systems. Examples include ROTH IRA and tax workshops and partnering with community banks.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

#### 4) Compensate multiple forms of labor, in addition to core organizing work

- Youth leaders should also be compensated for labor such as outreach, speaking at events, sharing their stories, participating in research, & attending trainings and meetings where young people are engaging in skill building and contributing to campaign planning.

#### 5) Center young people's voices around policies and practices around compensation

- Young people's voices should be centered in shaping equitable policies and weighing in on the form of compensation that makes the most sense for their needs. Especially since compensation can be a sensitive topic, young people need to feel safe to bring up questions and concerns. Organizations can proactively create space for young people to do so (e.g. through 1-1's and anonymous surveys).

#### 6) Systematize resourcing young people within our organizing models

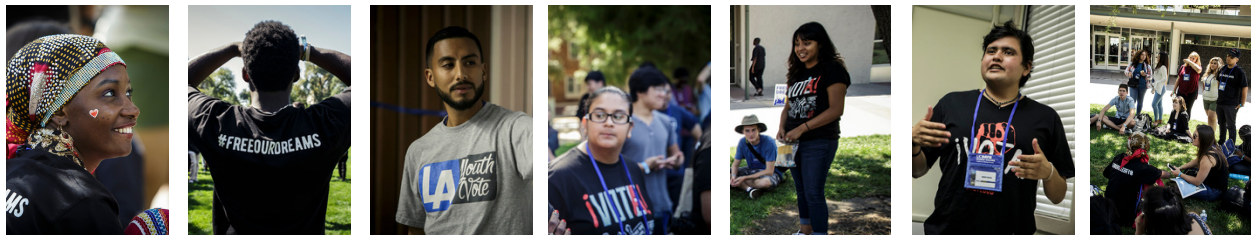
- Strategies include partnerships and collaboration to fund fellowships or share other resources. Organizations have also prioritized youth compensation as a resourcing/ redistribution principle.



# Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Recommendations for Funders



- **Center Youth Voice:** Provide opportunities for shared decision-making with young people over grantmaking and youth compensation practices in your program work
- **Prioritize meaningfully resourcing and developing young people within program work:** Provide the maximum compensation and take into account young people’s preparation and emotional labor for work such as preparing and speaking as panelists, spokespeople, facilitators, or trainers and participating in interviews, listening sessions, and/or focus groups.
- **Commit to resourcing young people within grantmaking:** Commit to providing grants that can support meaningful, paid youth roles and organizational capacity to invest in the supervision of young people- especially at the rate necessary to sufficiently compensate them for their labor.
- **Lift up and support organizational practices around meaningfully compensating and supporting young people:** Ask organizations about their best practices in meaningfully compensating young people. Identify and lift up these examples to celebrate and inspire other organizations and foundations, and to adopt in your own practices.
- **Identify other forms of philanthropic resources that can be shared or redirected to young people:** Actively look for ways to leverage non-cash compensation and opportunities for young people.

Investing in compensation for youth leaders is, as one focus group participant put it, “investing in change” on multiple levels. Compensation not only gets young BIPOC through the door- it also further fuels their commitment and enthusiasm, with implications for long-term engagement in movements. When multiplied, these efforts can support the growth and strength of movements for social justice.

# Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

## INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes findings from 6 focus groups with 32 youth leaders from 23 organizations, along with 44 surveys from organizational staff (representing a total of 35 distinct organizations). Additional insights come from a feedback session with YO Cali! Field Leaders and youth perspectives during a presentation of preliminary findings to funders. Youth and staff discussed the importance of compensation for youth leaders, challenges and lessons learned based on existing compensation practices, and recommendations on best practices moving forward. The report contextualizes these findings within existing literature on the importance of stipends for youth development.

## Surveyed Organizations

AYPAL: Building API Community Power	California Environmental Voters	Community Coalition	ICUC	Khmer Girls in Action	LGBTQ Center OC	LOUD For Tomorrow	Majdal: Arab Community Center of San Diego
Asian Pacific Environmental Network	California Native Vote Project	EYCEJ- East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice	Mid-City CAN	Save California Salmon	South Bay Youth	Young Womens Freedom Center	Young Womens Freedom Center (San Jose)
BAY Peace: Better Alternatives for Youth	California Youth Connection	Filipino Advocates for Justice					
Brotherhood Crusade	Californians For Justice San Jose	Future Leaders of America	PODER	Youth Alliance		Youth Liberation Movement	Youth United for Community Action (YUCA)
CARECEN-LA	Californians for Justice Fresno	GSA Network	RYSE Center	Youth Leadership Institute (Merced)			
CURYJ	Chinese Progressive Association	Hmong Innovating Politics	San Francisco Rising	Youth Leadership Institute (San Mateo)		Youth Will	

**Figure 1. Organizations**

<sup>1</sup>There were 44 survey responses, but 38 surveys were analyzed for data visualization purposes. Some organizations had multiple responses from staff members, which were combined for both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Different regional chapters of organizations (e.g. Californians for Justice, Youth Leadership Institute, and Young Women’s Freedom Center) were counted separately due to the potential for different practices. Several survey questions also allowed for multiple answers, which is why many analyses show total responses that amount to more than 100%.

# Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

## SURVEY FINDINGS

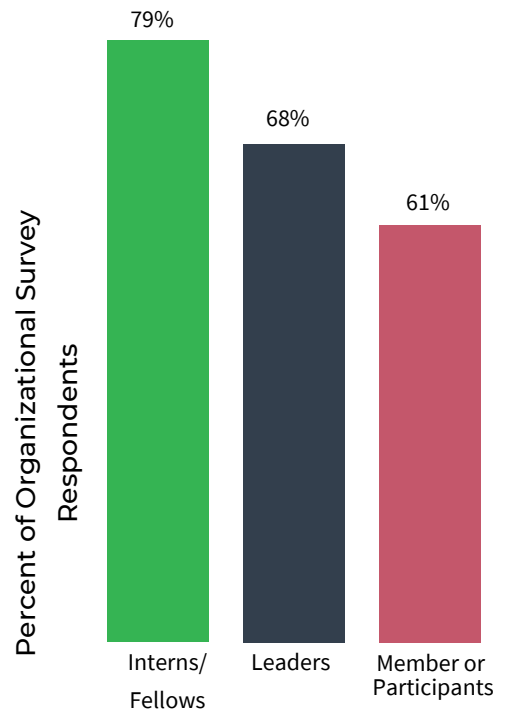
**Figure 2 - Regional Representation**

Percent of Organizations that Compensate Young People in the following Positions (n=38)

16 (42%)	Bay Area
12 (42%)	Southern CA
7 (18%)	Central Valley
7 (18%)	South Bay
5 (13%)	Inland Empire
5 (13%)	Sacramento Area
2 (5%)	Central Coast
2 (5%)	True North

**Figure 3 - Types of roles that are compensated**

Percent of Organizations that Compensate Young People in the following Positions (n=38)



# Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

## SURVEY FINDINGS

Hours Worked Per Week (n=25)  
Number & Percent of Total Responding Organizations  
by Category of Hours Worked

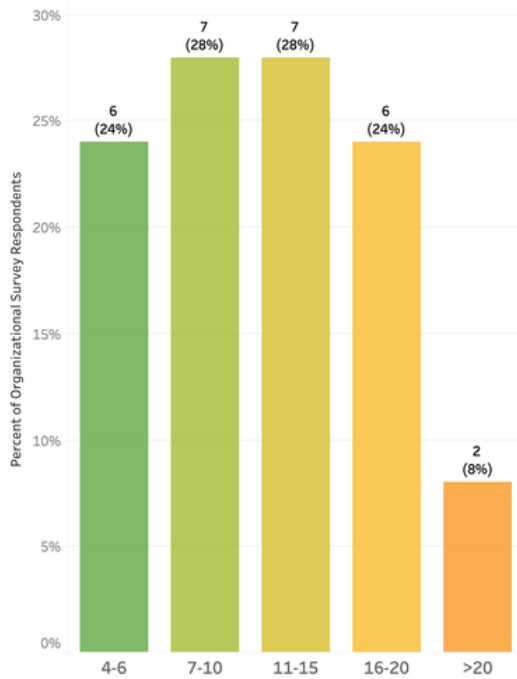


Figure 4 - Hours Worked Per Week

Figure 4 indicates hours worked per week by youth in paid roles. Quite roughly, organizations that provided information have paid roles that range from 4-20 hours a week, with a few that have roles for youth over 20 hours a week.

Please note that about 25 organizations provided this information, and some organizations are counted multiple times because they may have different tiers for youth roles (e.g. some youth work more hours than others), or stated a minimum number of hours worked.





# Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

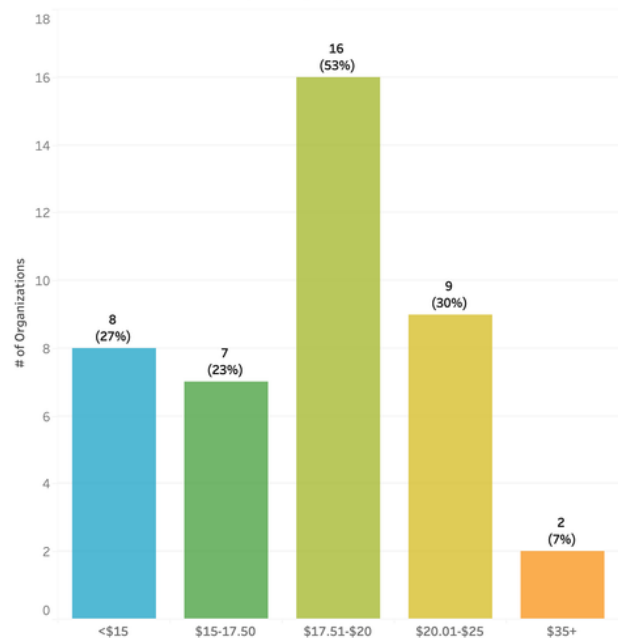
## SURVEY FINDINGS

Figure 5 shows the breakdown of hourly wages, or equivalent hourly wages calculated based on total stipend amount and number of hours, that organizations pay youth in compensated roles. Approximately 30 organizations provided this information. Some organizations were counted multiple times because they offer different tiers of pay or because they have large pay ranges that span multiple categories (e.g. \$18-25).

This visualization shows that over half of organizations that responded are able to pay youth \$17.50-\$20 an hour. Although eight organizations here pay the equivalent of less than \$15 an hour, almost all of them are stipended positions (which should not be viewed as the same as an hourly pay calculation). A total of 11 organizations are able to pay youth more than \$20 an hour, and in at least one case, much more than that at \$35 or more an hour.

**Figure 5 - Hourly Pay Range**

Distribution of Hourly Pay Ranges (n=30)  
Number & Percent of Total Responding Organizations



# Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

## WHY YOUTH COMPENSATION IS CRITICAL

### *Recruitment: Incentivizing Young People to Participate & Overcoming Barriers*

Compensation is key to recruiting young BIPOC into organizing spaces. Being paid makes it possible for youth to devote their time to organizing, rather than other jobs to meet pressing financial needs. Compensation is especially critical for young BIPOC most impacted by poverty: as one staff member pointed out for transitional age youth, “Especially in the Bay area, people are living on their own, and without getting paid they wouldn’t be able to do this work.

They’d have to get another job.” Similarly, another participant stated that “if orgs don’t pay young people, it will funnel young people to prioritize work.” Several young people shared that they had to reluctantly quit other organizing spaces to understandably focus their time on making ends meet.

These findings are supported by prior research that points to how low-income young BIPOC are understandably compelled to prioritize opportunities that enable them to provide a supportive income for their families (Cardona-Maguigad, 2020; Clark, et. al 2021; Murray et. al 2021). As such, stipends support recruitment to youth development programs by reducing financial barriers to participation, such as transportation costs or lost income from jobs (Russell et. al 2008; Scott et. al, 2015).

Similarly, several young people explained that compensation incentivized them to explore their organizations. As one youth leader stated: “especially when you start at an organization for the first time, knowing that you will be compensated will affect your effort, and it builds curiosity and more desire.”



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# Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

## WHY YOUTH COMPENSATION IS CRITICAL

Others echoed this sentiment that stipends initially got them through the door- which is corroborated by prior research that links stipends to increased youth program interest and demand (Deschenes et al., 2010).

However, as articulated again in the “Best Practices and Recommendations” section, many focus group participants also identified transportation, accessibility, and food as key resources needed to continue organizing- highlighting that, even if organizations are unable to pay youth, there are still crucial resources that are required to establish a foundation for young people to organize.

### ***Supporting Youth and Families’ Basic Needs as a Tool For Equity***

Compensation supports young people and their families to meet their basic needs.

As one youth leader clearly stated: “We live in a capitalist society. We need the money.” Another echoed the sentiments of many other young people when stating that “a lot of us have had to support our families financially.”

As such, their experiences align with previous research arguing that “stipends in youth development programming are a critical, high-value, equity-based tool that support participating youth, their families and communities, and program providers.” (Murray et. al 2021)



## Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

# WHY YOUTH COMPENSATION IS CRITICAL

In focus groups, youth explained that they use stipends and hourly pay to cover school expenses, college application fees, fulfill household financial responsibilities, and to save for future college expenses. Similarly, previous research finds that young people use stipends to support their families by paying for utility and other bills, food, clothing, toiletries, or covering their own disposable income to reduce burdens for their caregivers (Murray et. al 2021; Woodland 2016).

Compensation, then, matters for racial and socioeconomic equity. Higher percentages of teens of color have used their stipends for living and family expenses; one study found that almost 2/3rds of Black/ African American teens and almost half of Hispanic/ Latinx teens used their stipends for necessary personal expenses and supporting their families, respectively (Murray et. al 2021). In addition to meeting material needs, compensation helps alleviate the stress caused by a lack of financial resources (Woodland 2016). Similarly, one focus group participant pointed out that “being paid would remove a source of stress in my life.” In summary: compensation matters on multiple levels, and for far more people than the individual young people who receive compensation.

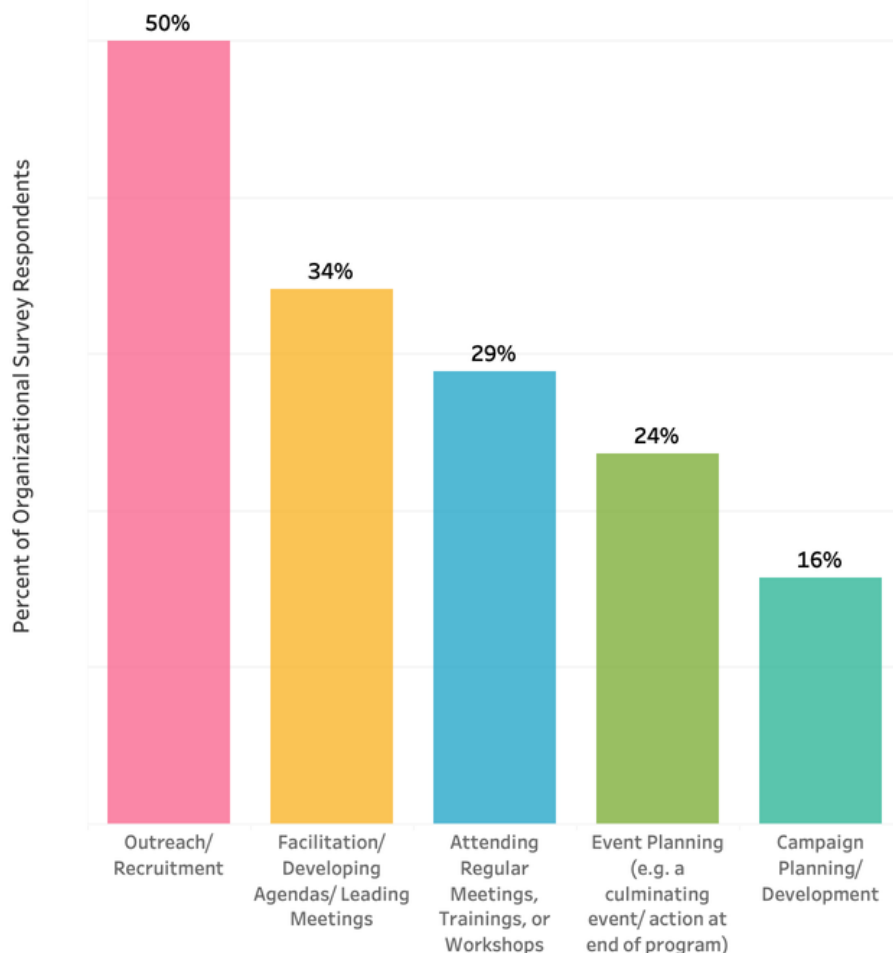


# Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

## WHY YOUTH COMPENSATION IS CRITICAL

### *Sustaining Young People’s Commitment to Organizing*

Compensation can also help sustain young people’s long-term engagement in organizing and/or movement ecosystems. Young people are pulled in myriad directions (e.g. school, caregiving, family responsibilities, other extracurriculars). Additionally, oftentimes organizing can take a “toll on physical and emotional well-being,” as articulated by one participant. Amidst these challenges, youth leaders stated that “being compensated does affect your commitment to continue organizing” and that “if we get money, we are more likely to do it longer than quit.” Similarly, another stated that “you would prioritize this over something that wouldn’t pay you.” Youth leaders affirmed that compensation can bolster more investment and excitement in organizing: as one youth leader reflected, “when getting paid, I want to give my 100% and show them I am committed.”



**Figure 6 - Types of Responsibilities that Young People are Compensated For**

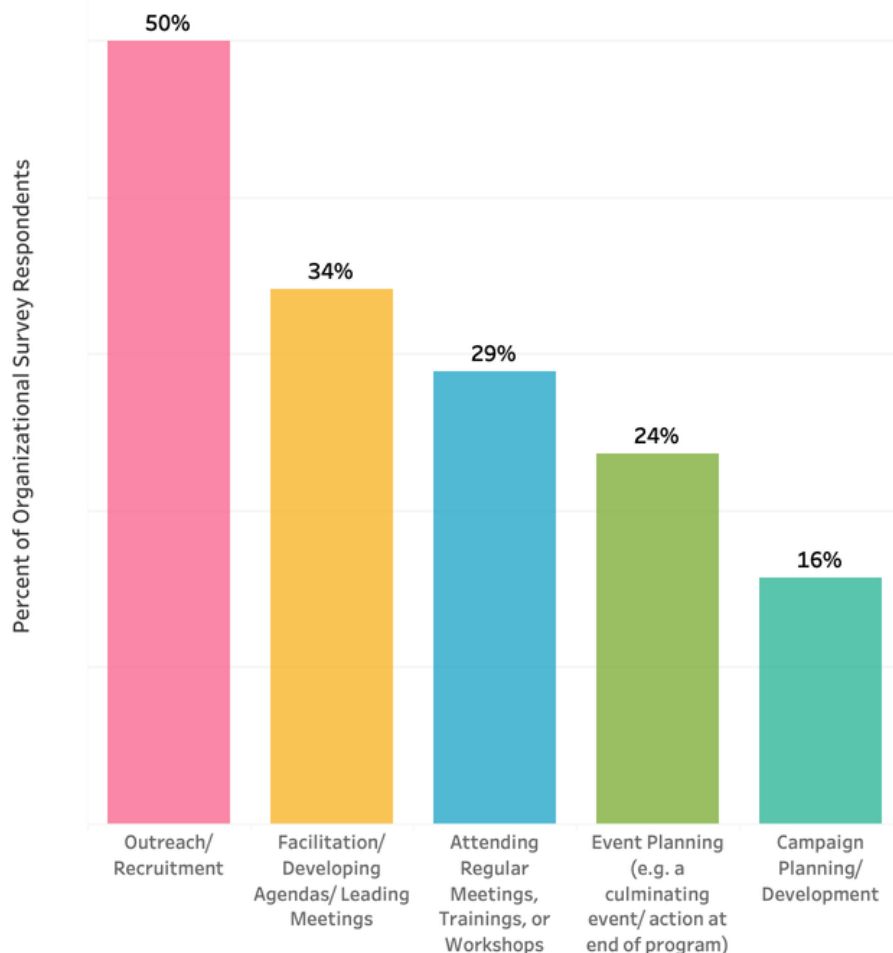
Top Responsibilities/Roles that Youth Are compensated For (n=38)

# Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

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**Figure 6 - Types of Responsibilities that Young People are Compensated For**

Top Responsibilities/Roles that Youth Are compensated For (n=38)

## Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

# WHY YOUTH COMPENSATION IS CRITICAL

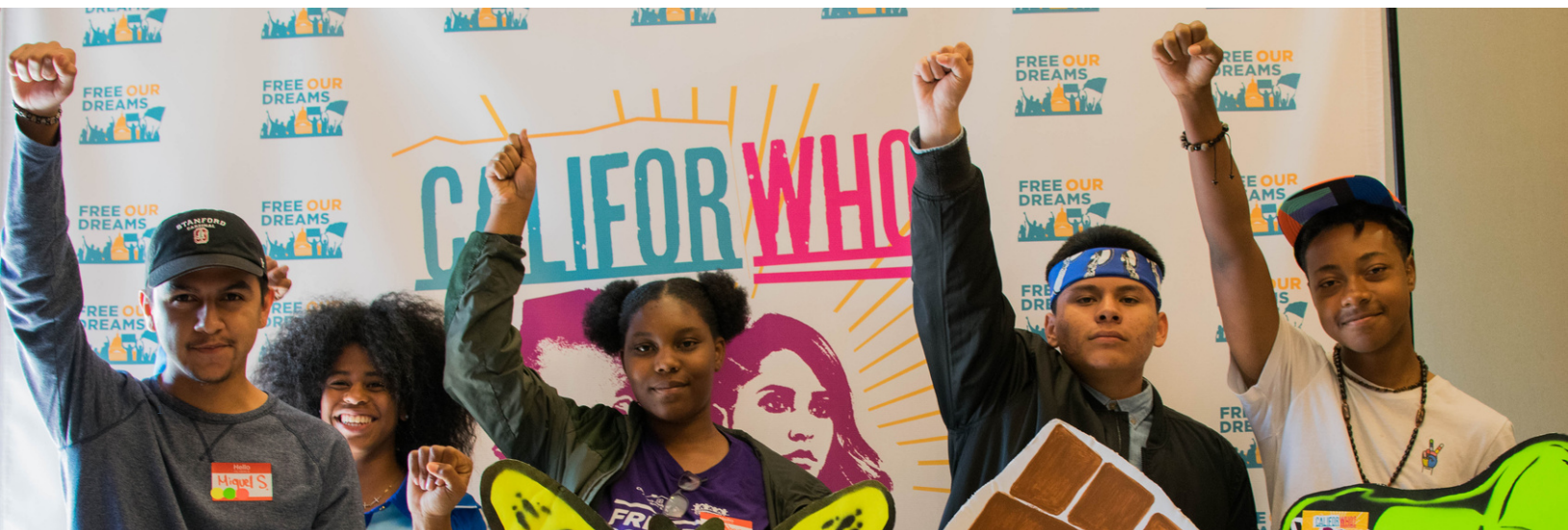
After all, organizing- such as base building, leading campaigns, and planning events- is a marathon and not a sprint. As one respondent pointed out, compensation made it possible for them to commit to the persistent follow up embedded in organizing:

“[Without getting paid], I wouldn’t be able to do as much follow through as I do now, [like] emailing the same person that didn’t respond to me 3 weeks ago. [There were] situations where I was frustrated and had other things that I wanted to do, but because I was getting paid -I [thought, I] will endure this, will move my school hours around, get rest.”

Similarly, another participant reflected on the sometimes exhausting nature of work such as phone banking, especially as high schoolers:

“We would share with each other... “it’s 8pm, we have to go work on an essay.” Phone banking was super draining; if we weren’t getting compensated for this, there would not be a lot of people doing this work longer term.”

Both leaders captured a broader sentiment that compensation was key to sustaining their participation in the long run, supplying a necessary spark of motivation for them to persevere through the ups and downs of organizing.



# Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

## WHY YOUTH COMPENSATION IS CRITICAL

### *Supporting Meaningful Development and Career Pathways*

Compensation goes hand-in-hand with young people’s meaningful development as part of potential career pathways towards organizing. As a staff member pointed out: “Oftentimes young people have to choose between meaningless jobs, or meaningful internships that provide them with experience.” Prior research suggests that “stipends provide a crucial alternative to a wage-based job that allows students to earn money in an environment tailored to their educational, developmental, and social-emotional needs.” (Murray et. al 2021)

For example, Figure 6 captures the types of responsibilities that young people are compensated for in the surveyed organizations. Half of the organizations surveyed stated that young people are compensated for outreach and recruitment (including base-building and GOTV efforts); a little over a third (34%) compensated for planning, facilitating, and leading meetings, workshops or trainings; followed by compensation for regularly attending meetings, workshops, or trainings (29%); planning events or actions (24%), and planning/ developing campaigns (16%).

These findings underscore a mutual relationship between compensation and leadership development. For example, prior research suggests that stipends, when attached to specific milestones, can be linked with more consistent attendance and meeting of goals (Soleimanpour et al., 2008).





## Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

# WHY YOUTH COMPENSATION IS CRITICAL

One staff member reflected that “the skills a person is able to learn is encouraged by the compensation portion. Being paid pushe[s] them to go outside of their comfort zone and use that skill to apply to different parts of their life.” Another pointed out that there is a “mutual impact” when youth are able to “do something that they love” while also getting paid. One youth leader illustrated how compensation can be a crucial component of transformative dimensions of organizing. Given that young people are shouldering so many responsibilities, compensation helps them prioritize this work :

“Over time as I started getting paid - [I realized...] This is really helping me and I’m helping the community. It’s a win win. It helps me to prioritize doing it [and to come] on time, [to] come and show up every opportunity because each time you’re getting paid you make more and more - the more you want to go.”

Findings also suggest that compensation can open up portals of possibility for organizing as a career. As another staff member explained, young people “become more motivated to continue this work because they see they can make an income from it. For young people who are open to this kind of work - they thrive later on, become staff.” As one youth panelist stated in the preliminary presentation of findings to funders, getting paid to organize in high school “provide[d] a pipeline and access to the idea that community organizing [is] a career that young people can take on.” They added that these paid experiences helped her see what kind of pathway she could take in life. Getting paid helps open up young people’s imaginations around a future livelihood where they can merge a good life and financial stability with working towards transformative social change benefiting their communities.

Compensation is a critical way that youth organizing groups live out their values of uplifting youth’s unique, creative perspectives and skills.

# Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

## WHY YOUTH COMPENSATION IS CRITICAL

### *Caring for and Valuing Young People’s Time, Labor, Energy, and Ideas*

Ultimately, compensation bolsters how youth organizing groups already care for, value, and radically love young people. As one respondent stated: “I do feel valued when I am being compensated. It shows that they care and creates a sense of community around the work we are putting in. [It] feels nice to know your work and time is being valued.” Another stated that compensation “altered my perception of how valuable my thoughts and ideas are”- another testament to how youth organizing builds young people up to realize and act on their power. Compensation is not the only way that organizations value young people’s labor; rather, it is part of a broader culture of care practiced in multiple ways by youth organizing groups. As one youth leader explained:

“I feel valued when I receive compensation, but it goes hand in hand with how I am being treated.”

These findings align with previous research suggesting that stipends are associated with more positive feelings about the youth program: for example; in a study of a program called After School Matters, 80% of respondents reported that “their stipend made them feel like their time and effort is valued.” (After School Matters, 2018)



## Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

# WHY YOUTH COMPENSATION IS CRITICAL

Compensation is a critical way that youth organizing groups live out their values of uplifting youth's unique, creative perspectives and skills. As one youth leader pointed out: "youth in this time have new perspective[s] in all that is happening; our ideas are new and should be compensated properly." After all, young people recognize that being asked to speak at events or share their stories for research without compensation is hypocritical: "If an event asks a youth to be a speaker, but isn't paying them - it can feel like it's just for show."

Especially since sharing their stories in focus groups require young people to be vulnerable, not

compensating young people can feel deeply exploitative and tokenistic. In contrast, when youth are paid for such roles, "It makes them feel recognized, empowered, confident in themselves." As another youth leader pointed out, compensation is another way that organizations can show that they are quite literally investing in young people's development and caring for them, rather than replicating the exploitative nature of the world that young people are often subjected to.

Compensation further shows that organizations authentically value young people's time, labor, energy, and ideas.

Many young people emphasized that it wasn't compensation alone that kept them coming back. For some, the stipend became less important as time went on and their community, connections, and passion for the work became their driving motivations. This illustrates how compensation is one, but not the only, key ingredient in a bigger picture of the beloved community fostered by youth organizing groups. Nevertheless, the findings above show how stipends are also critical to making participation possible for many young people and thus as a way to "promote education and economic equity." (Murray et. al 2021)



# Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

## PROMISES AND PITFALLS OF DIFFERENT FORMS OF COMPENSATION

This section highlights the promise and pitfalls associated with different types of compensation: namely hourly pay, stipends, and gift cards. Some key considerations that came up included: flexibility of uses, sustainability, taxes, and timeliness. Figure 7 shows the types of pay that organizations surveyed currently provide, with almost 3/4ths (74%) providing stipends, followed by paid internships and fellowships (63%), professional development opportunities (61%), part time hourly wages (55%), services (47%), and full-time hourly wages (21%).



**Figure 7 - The Types of Pay that Organizations Surveyed Currently Provide**

### Hourly Pay

Although a smaller percentage of organizations are currently able to provide part time hourly wages (55%) compared to the percentages that offer stipends and gift cards, many respondents identified hourly wages as their preferred form of compensation. Youth and staff reflect that hourly pay is more frequent and consistent, thus appropriately compensating young people for their ongoing work. A youth leader pointed out that getting paid hourly would make sense for attending meetings that occur regularly, at least three times a week.

## Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

# PROMISES AND PITFALLS OF DIFFERENT FORMS OF COMPENSATION

Hourly pay also constitutes a more sustainable form of payment for in-depth, long-term engagement. As one staff member stated: “Considering how much time, energy, and labor youth put into our program, in an ideal world we would be compensating them by hour.”

Unlike gift cards as one-off incentives, but similar to stipends, respondents pointed out that hourly pay offered necessary flexibility to pay for their specific needs, such as gas or food. For example, one youth member stated that

“hourly is best b/c you can use that money freely how you want to use it. I don’t really need an ipad as an incentive. I might need to put money towards food and bills. Everybody has different needs.”

However, there are also downsides: hourly pay is potentially less inclusive because it requires youth to have right to work documentation and bank accounts, which can be especially exclusive to undocumented youth and younger people. As discussed more in the “challenges” section, taxes also become an issue with hourly pay. Finally, a few participants suggested that hourly pay with direct deposit is ideal, especially since some reported that checks mailed home were taken first by parents.

### ***Stipends***

Many youth and staff also report that stipends are their preferred form of compensation. Stipends are also currently the most frequently offered form of compensation among surveyed organizations. As long as organizations are transparent about timelines and expectations required to receive stipends, this form of pay can encourage accountability to meet specific goals. For example, one respondent stated: “[Getting stipends] sets a goal; you put in all the work and at the end you get to see your work reflected in your stipend.” Similarly, previous research suggests that stipends that are tied to program milestones can support youth in recognizing how each milestone is relevant to an overall goal (Soleimanpour et al., 2008). While the relative infrequency of stipends compared to hourly pay is a significant potential disadvantage, one respondent stated that knowing when they would receive a stipend would help them budget accordingly.

## Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

# PROMISES AND PITFALLS OF DIFFERENT FORMS OF COMPENSATION

Some participants also stated that stipends are more inclusive than hourly pay, enabling undocumented folks to get paid. Similar to hourly pay and unlike gift cards, respondents appreciated the flexibility of stipends for meeting a wide range of needs, such as college application fees.

However, one challenge specific to stipends is that they are not initially taxed. One respondent explained that this was especially stressful because young people might not be connected to the organization or necessary resources at tax filing time:

“Stipend jobs don’t work for college students. In 2019 I worked stipend jobs - where they don’t take taxes out, and then I had to pay \$800 out of pocket in 2020 to pay federal and state taxes! Stipends are a trap. They put young people in a vulnerable position around taxes the following year, and often the orgs that paid them aren’t there to help.”

As with hourly pay, there were also some significant challenges around timeliness of pay discussed in the next section.

### **Gift Cards**

Many respondents stated that gift cards, while appropriate for one-off instances, are not appropriate for sustaining long-term organizing. Gift cards tend to have limited uses that are not ideal for supporting young people to meet their basic needs. As one respondent pointed out: “you can only use [gift cards] on [places like] Amazon, Target, but [what if] you don’t have one close by & you really need the money for gas or food.” Others stated that gift cards can be confusing to activate. However, gift cards can be helpful for one-time meetings, focus groups, or events, and for those who lack bank accounts. They can also be beneficial because youth leaders generally receive them more quickly than other forms of payment and are not taxed.



## Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

# CHALLENGES IN EXISTING COMPENSATION

Despite the considerable benefits to compensation identified in the first section, young people also pointed to several challenges in current compensation practices. It should be noted that many of these practices are rooted in the broader structural inequities that youth leaders in organizing groups are working hard to dismantle. However, it is clear that more resources are needed not just to pay young people, but to fortify the infrastructure and capacity of organizations to leverage compensation as part of broader transformative change.

### *Inaccessibility for Undocumented Young People*

Several respondents spoke to systemic challenges in compensating undocumented youth, who also face additional delays and insufficient compensation. However, one respondent shared the experience of some undocumented colleagues who were supposed to receive a stipend, explaining that “it took months for them to get their money due to lack of an SSN.” Others stated that undocumented folks “got discouraged to see folks getting paid, but not them. Money is something necessary, and it was terrible seeing undocumented folks being excluded and not sharing that excitement.” The challenges involved in paying undocumented youth thus take emotional tolls in addition to negative material ramifications.

Such challenges are especially devastating when considering undocumented folks also grapple with heightened pressure to support family members who face daunting barriers in making a livelihood. As one youth leader stated: “I am the eldest and AB540 and would like more money because I do support my family with that money.” Understandably, this challenge could also create significant barriers for undocumented youth to engage in organizing. As one youth leader noted, the problem is rooted in broader structural issues- all the more reason why undocumented young people need to be properly resourced to lead efforts forging a more inclusive and equitable world.



# Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

## CHALLENGES IN EXISTING COMPENSATION

### *Insufficient Amount of Compensation*

Many respondents pointed out that compensation amounts are insufficient for the high cost of living in their regions. As one respondent pointed out: “I am a fellow and I get paid hourly. How much I make isn't livable [in San Jose, where the ‘liveable wage’ is \$27 an hour]- it helps pay most of my bills, but I still struggle.” As shown previously in Figure 5, very few organizations are able to pay this amount. As a result, several youth leaders must pursue other forms of employment.

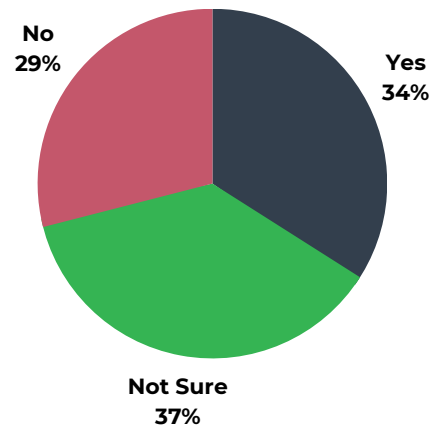
As one leader stated, “I would need to get a second job/work somewhere else. It would be so draining to work a second job.” In the survey, many organizational respondents stated that because of the insufficient compensation amounts relative to cost of living and multiple obligations held by young people, they are still competing with other job opportunities for young people’s time and energy.

This predicament can also spark skepticism about organizing as a viable long-term career. One participant reflected: “My current compensation is sustainable for doing the current job, but I see it as a stepping stool. I want to make more in the future.” Staff members also pointed out that the challenges involved in organizing, especially relative to compensation, also lead them to question the sustainability of this work, although they feel torn between their passions and other needs. As one paid staff member stated: their work also “takes a lot of mental, physical AND emotional labor. I have considered switching careers so I can live more comfortably but I still love the work that I do regardless.”

In surveys, many staff were on the same page about wanting to pay young people more. As shown in Figure 8, only about 1/3rd of organizational staff surveyed stated that they believed compensation for youth was adequate in light of their responsibilities.

**Figure 8**

Is Compensation Adequate, Given Responsibilities? (=38)

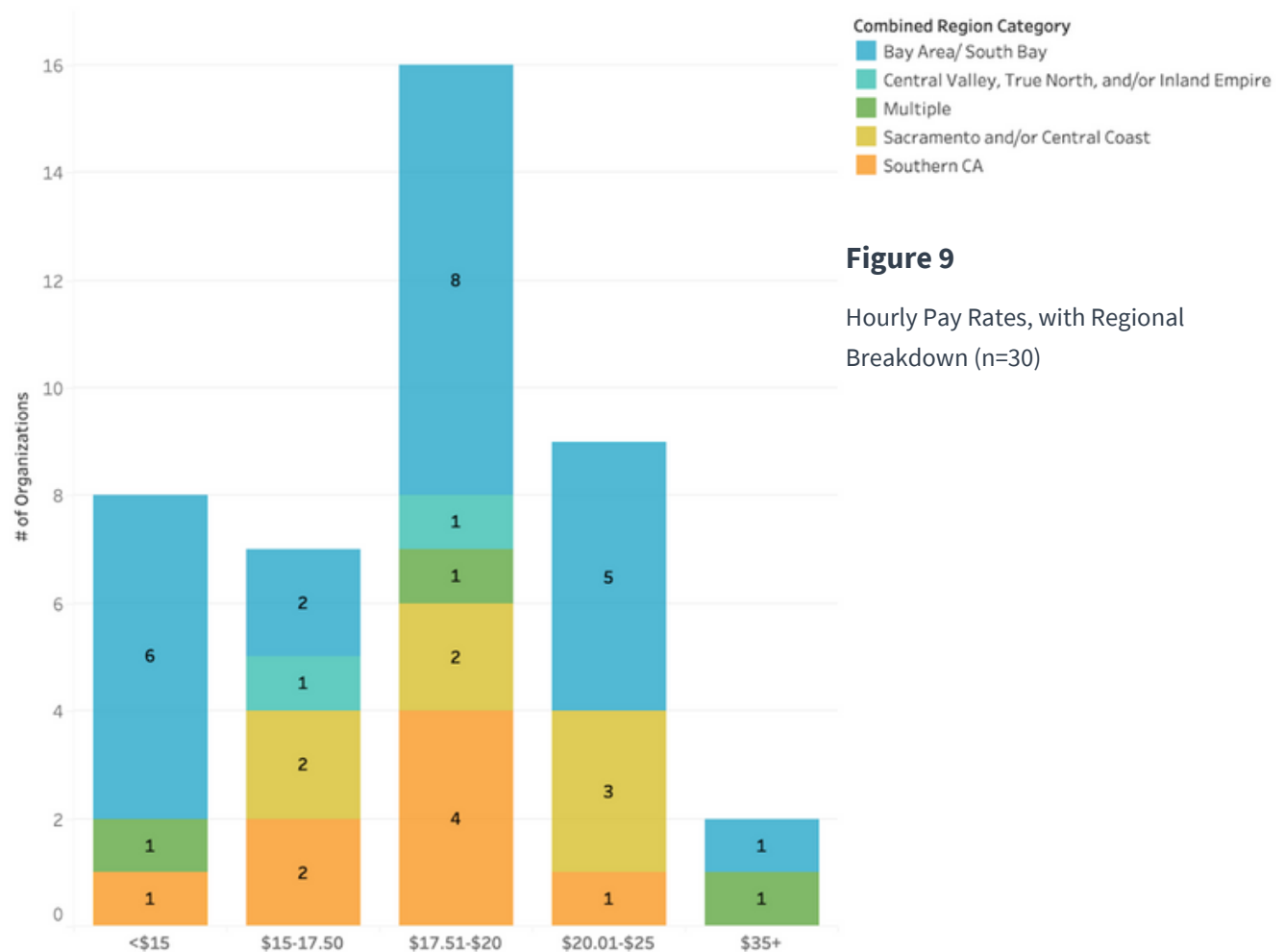




# Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

## CHALLENGES IN EXISTING COMPENSATION

However, it is likely that a higher number believe that compensation is insufficient. As one staff member who marked “unsure” stated: “I can't imagine living on \$15 an hour given that so many of our young people have to drive in our cities due to the poor public transportation system. Gas prices are so high, and a lot of our young people do not live close to our office or all program locations. Our member leaders still work full time or part time jobs. We also ask for a lot of our young people to share their creativity and design, and compensation should be higher to share and recognize how hard imagination work is and how valuable it is.” Even those that answered “not sure” indicated that the compensation might not be enough: one stated that while compensation was better than other opportunities, it was inadequate for the cost of living in the Bay Area, and another stated that they would like to offer more part-time hourly paid positions.



**Figure 9**  
Hourly Pay Rates, with Regional Breakdown (n=30)

# Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

## CHALLENGES IN EXISTING COMPENSATION

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### *Organizational Challenges in Securing Funding*

In surveys, staff stated that their organizations face considerable challenges finding sufficient funding to pay youth an adequate compensation. On top of that, funding they procure is often precarious and restricted to limited uses, creating further constraints on paying young people. As one staff member pointed out:

“Funding has not always been there for us to do this [pay youth]. We are currently able to run a larger paid youth program because of funding that we received from a state budget request, but before this we definitely did not have the funds to do so. As we approach the end of funding we have received from the state, I worry that we might have to scale back our program tremendously.”

These insights are corroborated by previous research about challenges that organizations confront in securing funding for a living wage compensation and meeting basic needs (Jimenez et. al 2019; Paul & Lefkowitz, 2006). Such challenges can limit the number of participants that organizations can take on (Grossman., et al, 2009). Similarly, a few staff members pointed out in surveys that as their programs grew, it became more challenging to fairly and equitably compensate members.

### *Delays in Pay*

Many staff and youth identified issues around delays in compensation. One participant shared stories of monthly payments being pushed back with no updates:

“They [youth leaders] only received a very late payment because they continued to push on the issue - they were never forthcoming about their compensation. That was a frustrating experience. They decided to leave after this experience, they were paid in full, but they had to bring external resources to support their advocacy.”

Some young people felt that organizations needed to be “more responsive” and prioritize paying young people on time. Meanwhile, staff of some organizations stated that they lacked capacity and infrastructure to process payment in a timely manner. Whereas one organization stated the importance of a supportive finance/ operations team, smaller organizations may not have the staff capacity needed to streamline payments. Furthermore, a few organizations are fiscally sponsored, which creates additional bureaucratic hoops.

## Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

# CHALLENGES IN EXISTING COMPENSATION

### ***Lack of Transparent and Open Communication about Compensation***

Some young people shared that there was a lack of transparency around pay and a broader culture where young people did not feel comfortable speaking up about their monetary needs. As such, they often felt intimidated to ask for more money or to inquire about issues such as delays as described above. Young people also explained that some spaces are not as mindful about burnout, and can expect unreasonable workloads from those in paid roles.

### ***Structural Barriers to Financial Systems***

Young people, their families, and communities, also face structural barriers to financial systems. Many staff pointed out that they wanted to shield young people from having to deal with the tax process, which can be daunting and bureaucratic. As one respondent explained: “our young folks have shared how the tax process was complicated and it made them hesitant to receive checks.” Others stated challenges associated with not having bank accounts. As such, systemic inequities in financial systems can also foster difficulties for young people to receive and can readily access compensation in an ideal form.

### ***Capacity for Supervision***

Staff also shared challenges linked to developing and supervising young people in paid roles, including ensuring that roles are meaningful and intentional. Supervision takes capacity on the part of staff- for example, work planning, time/task management, individual development plans, and being able to hold young people accountable for their work roles. This can be difficult considering that staff themselves are often over capacity and juggling myriad responsibilities. As one participant pointed out:

“For a while I was the only lead student organizer that was mentoring, supporting and supervising a team of 4 - 7 students which was overwhelming, where those practices around workplanning, accountability, individual leadership plans, trainings, etc can begin to ebb and flow depending on my capacity, energy, emotional, physical, mental exhaustion, etc., so i'd love to hire more full-time youth organizers! That way we have models of peer to peer support.”

## Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

# CHALLENGES IN EXISTING COMPENSATION

Some youth leaders shared how these conditions negatively impacted them or peers when they took on paid roles for the first time but needed more explicit communication and support around meeting new expectations or developing new skills. The lack of support fueled additional stress and could be demoralizing.

Altogether, then, these challenges point to a landscape in which resources are needed not just to fund young people's pay, but to ensure that organizations have the capacity to support youth in transformative development.



## Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

# BEST PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FIELD

### 1) Meet Essential Needs

Regardless of compensation, there are essential foundations that must be met to facilitate young people's engagement, including providing or reimbursing for transportation, food, and other resources such as childcare. Taking both public and private transportation to organizational spaces can become expensive and time consuming. As one focus group participant put it: "transportation is huge for young people: using their own car, sharing a ride, public transportation cost money." A few young people suggested that hybrid (online/ in person) options would make organizing more accessible given these challenges and the many different responsibilities that young people are juggling as students in high school and college. Others shared that being fed is literally and emotionally nourishing, and is critical to making young people feel welcome- especially if they are coming from a long day of school, work, and/or other obligations. Some youth also brought up the importance of childcare on site to make it possible for them to contribute to the work.

Several discussed the importance of mental health resources and health insurance and benefits, especially in light of pervasive burnout that can arise from the tolls involved in organizing. Participants highlighted the need for consistent check-ins and access to counseling: one organization has funded therapy sessions. Another participant explained: "When you have burnt out workers they aren't as productive or motivated. They need good insurance, mental health days. It would be amazing for organizations to give out insurance. We should prioritize paying youth adequate living wages and prioritize mental health [with] mental health days, retreats." As Vero pointed out in the funder briefing: these resources are critical needs for young people that their schools often may not provide.



## Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

# BEST PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FIELD

### Access to travel, networking, informal & formal mentorship

Other examples of key resources include paid travel opportunities, trainings, and workshops around topics such as personal development, networking, and connection building. For example, young people shared that compensated trips and travel to places were “eye opening” and expansive experiences that helped motivate them to continue and also helped them make connections and get inspired by new places, people, and ideas. Training and workshop topic suggestions included “participatory action,” “organization building,” and “human centered design,” as well as professional development to help young people develop skills and knowledge to pursue careers in different parts of movement ecosystems. As Sophia stated in the funder presentation, travel and conference opportunities helped “open my mind to different careers in this work and made me really confident and excited because I was already passionate in this. Seeing the different ways you can move up in this work is really motivating... getting benefits, preparation and mentorship through my organization has played a huge part in my self development.”

### ***2) Strengthen Pay, Systems & Communication***

#### Pay Youth the Maximum Amount, in a Timely Manner

Youth need to get paid in a timely manner, and they should also be paid the maximum amount that the organization can afford. Organizational processes and infrastructures are needed to ensure that youth are paid on time. One participant pointed out that their organization previously offered the lowest possible wage and expected folks to negotiate upwards from that point. They explained that their organization shifted away from this exclusive and harmful practice: “A lot of time the people who go into these roles are from immigrant backgrounds, low-income backgrounds, and don't have the generational knowledge to know what it's like to negotiate.” Another way that organizations have maximized compensation was by increasing stipends to account for taxes.

## Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

# BEST PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FIELD

### Be Consistent, Clear, and Transparent

Organizations need to communicate consistently, clearly, honestly, and transparently about compensation, both verbally and through written documentation that outlines, for example, pay rate, payment timelines, hours, specific roles, and expectations, including whether or not remote or hybrid work is an option. One staff member uplifted the importance of

“not over-promising anything, especially around money or compensation. Our young people deserve honesty and transparency when it comes to conversations around their pay rate, their needs, how many hours they work, where their roles entail, expectations etcetera so they have a clear understanding!”

For example, one young person shared that their organization gave them clear expectations about how much they would make and when they would be paid, as long as they met key expectations such as hours worked. As a result, it was clear to them when they would receive a stipend, and if not, why. Such expectations are especially critical when young people might be transitioning from unpaid to paid roles, or between different types of paid roles.

### **3) Invest in Young People Beyond the Check**

#### Invest in Time and Support Needed for Training and Onboarding

Youth need support and caring supervision to nurture their growth in paid roles. Staff identified best practices that include relationship building, developing workplans to identify youth leader’s strengths and goals, processes for accountability, thorough training, and tailored 1-1 sessions where staff check in consistently with youth about their roles and their lives so that they can better provide support or shape the experience. Another organization shared their approach:

“Having a supervisor for our interns and letting her lead the youth development practices by creating a youth leadership training that revolves around the work we do has been great. This training consists of webinars, presentations, and 1on1 sessions with our youth coordinator. The 1on1 sessions are tailored to each youth intern or fellow and often focus on the work they are currently or will be doing within our organization. “

## Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

# BEST PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FIELD

Investing in intentional training and onboarding is especially critical to right the wrongs of systemic underinvestments in, tokenization and false narratives of BIYOC. Young people also stated that this is especially important because they are often entering new roles with little to no prior experience, and mentorship is needed to set them up for success. For example, a staff member pointed out the importance of investing enough time into this training:

“Especially since this will be most people’s first job and kind of field. [Because of] not enough staff and moving in urgency, there are times when we jump youth in before training them. We need to be reminded to slow down and put training at the forefront.”

As such, a best practice might involve transitional programs that focus on developing skills of young people in specific areas where they may need more guidance (e.g. leading an internship, event planning).

### Build up Financial Literacy

Several emphasized financial literacy to empower youth in navigating financial systems. While best practices might involve getting young people on the payroll so that they can become familiar with financial practices such as receiving a W-2, it is also important to build young people’s skills and feeling of confidence around daunting financial systems. For example, one participant pointed out the value of “ROTH IRA and financial literacy workshops and opportunities to uplift our community and ourselves from poverty and into generational wealth.” Others shared that they partner with other community-based entities to facilitate safe banking options, as well as to provide workshops on financial literacy and taxes- all the more important when considering the challenges identified around navigating taxes previously described.

### **4) *Compensate Multiple Forms of Labor***

In addition to core organizing work (e.g. basebuilding, leadership development, and campaigns), participants identified several examples of labor that youth leaders must be compensated for. These included: outreach (e.g. phonebanking, canvassing), speaking at events, sharing their stories, participating in research, & attending trainings and meetings where young people are engaging in political education, leadership development, and contributing to campaign and event planning.



## Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

# BEST PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FIELD

As one participant pointed out: young people should be compensated for “events where you are asked to speak, present - some people have anxiety and don’t feel comfortable, and they step out of their comfort zone for whatever the event may be.” Another example is storytelling or participating in focus groups or interviews for research purposes. Young people have also shared that sometimes sharing these stories can be re-traumatizing or re-triggering, leading to longer term effects. These are just a few examples of the ways that young people are sharing their considerable expertise, time, and energy, but have not previously always been recognized as labor.

### ***5) Center Young People’s Voices***

Prioritizing young people’s voices about policies and practices around compensation is crucial. Since compensation can be especially sensitive, young people need to feel safe to bring up questions and concerns around issues such as workload expectations and compensation rates. A lack of transparency can foster a sense of fear where young people are too intimidated to discuss pay.

Furthermore, young people need to be centered in assessing whether compensation policies are equitable and expectations clear. Organizations can proactively create space for young people to bring up questions and concerns (e.g. through evaluations, anonymous surveys, and/or 1 on 1’s). For example, one organization shared that they provide “Check ins and post-opportunity meetings to evaluate and edit the role as described by a young person.”

Several participants also pointed out that young people should be able to determine which form of compensation they receive. For example, one young person stated:

“We get the option of whether we want a check - that is taxed, or an Amazon or Target gift card. It’s easier for me to get a gift card because it’s where I get everything.... Having options is super beneficial especially for younger youth who can’t cash a check. Maybe one day they need a gift card, or another day they need cash.”

## Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

# BEST PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FIELD

Young people also shared that different forms of payment can impact those receiving Section 8 Housing- yet another reason why being able to choose the format of payment is critical, given varying circumstances. Doing so would entail organizations developing the capacity to provide more options.

### **6) Systematize Resourcing Young People**

In surveys, organizational staff shared two main strategies for seeking resources to compensate youth leaders: 1) Partnering with other organizations who have the resources and structure to provide compensation for positions, and 2) Prioritizing compensating young people in organizational budgets and fundraising.

For example, less-resourced groups have partnered with other organizations and programs that place and train young people as paid fellows in their organizations, such as the Bay Rising Digital Organizing and Training Strategy Fellowship or YO! Cali's program that resources fellows to support organizing (e.g. basebuilding, leadership development, and campaigns). Others have worked with Power California in order to compensate youth for engaging in voter engagement, including voter registration, phone banking, and doorknocking. Collaboration can also involve shared community resources, such as access to eviction defense services.

Other organizations have prioritized youth compensation as a resourcing/ redistribution principle: one organization stated that they commit  $\frac{1}{3}$  of their budget to paying members. As another stated:

“We've prioritized compensating members for the expertise they contribute- because we have that as a starting point, it is included in our budgets and by extension when we're applying for or raising funds. There are ongoing discussions in the organization about creating meaningful opportunities for members to participate that are paid.”

# Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDERS

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### ***Center and respect youth voice***

Provide opportunities for shared decision-making with young people and provide them with substantive decision-making power over grantmaking and youth compensation practices in your program work (for example, on boards, advisory cohorts, youth grantmaking committees, and youth design committees). Provide options for young people to choose their form of compensation (e.g. stipends or gift cards) when possible. As a youth panelist stated in the funder briefing, this also means truly respecting young people's voices, expertise, and stories. For example, if young people are expected to be vulnerable and share personal experiences, facilitators should do so as well.

### ***Prioritize meaningfully resourcing & developing young people within program work***

Compensate young people who provide their labor for your program work- for example, for preparing and speaking as panelists, spokespeople, facilitators, or trainers; participating in interviews, listening sessions, and/or focus groups. Ensure that the compensation amount is the maximum that you can offer and takes into account not just the specific time involved in the event itself, but the preparation and emotional labor that young people are dedicating by sharing their time, expertise, and personal stories. Commit to providing meaningful paid roles through longer-term opportunities that provide training, wellness, and networking so that young people can develop capacities to connect to other opportunities, such as through internships and fellowships. Ensure that young people receive the payment in a timely manner.

### ***Commit to resourcing paid roles for young people within grantmaking***

Commit to providing grants that can support meaningful, paid youth roles and organizational capacity to invest in the supervision of young people- especially at the rate necessary to sufficiently compensate them for their labor. This is especially important, given the challenges shared by organizations around lack of funding to compensate youth, insufficient funding that means young people must leave organizing for other paid opportunities, and the need for increased organizational capacity to support young people's development.

## Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDERS

*Lift up and support organizational best practices around meaningfully compensating and supporting young people.*

Ask organizations about their best practices in meaningfully compensating young people. Identify and lift up these examples to celebrate and inspire other organizations and foundations, and to adopt in your own practices.

*Identify other forms of philanthropic resources that can be shared or redirected to young people*

Actively look for ways to leverage non-cash compensation and opportunities for young people (e.g. opening up travel or training opportunities for young people, providing transportation or food for young people in site visits or meetings, using your platforms to amplify young people's art, offerings, or businesses, providing access to use of space). Contract with youth-centered or youth-led services, trainers, vendors, or consultants.



## Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

### CONCLUSION

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Investing in compensation for youth leaders is, as one focus group participant put it, “investing in change” on multiple levels. Being compensated can make a world of difference in whether or not a young BIPOC folks can even be a part of a youth organizing group. But being paid not only gets young BIPOC through the door- it also further fuels their commitment and enthusiasm, with implications for long-term engagement in movements. When multiplied, these efforts can support the growth and strength of movements for social justice.

Importantly, compensation is mutually beneficial and bolsters what organizations already do. It supports groups in creating the relationships and practices that they want to enact more broadly in the world. However, there are also significant challenges rooted in broader social issues: such as securing pay for undocumented folks and ensuring that young people receive sufficient pay in a timely manner and the support they deserve in meaningful paid roles. Organizations face limited capacity even as they are fighting the root causes of these issues- such as conditions that make it very difficult for BIPOC, undocumented, and low-income folks to thrive.

Equitable and just compensation practices, as Sophia stated, are yet another way that organizations “tak[e] care of me as a person.” As such, supporting organizations to not only compensate, but to foster the infrastructures and conditions to fully support young people’s development through paid roles, is truly an investment in broader transformation.



# Equitable Youth Compensation in California Youth Organizing

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