



EVALUATION
REPORT

Building Capacity, Transforming Systems

A Summative Evaluation of The California
Endowment's Sons & Brothers Grantmaking

Executive Summary

Prepared for The California Endowment | Revised September 2021

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We acknowledge and express gratitude to the many people who contributed to this report and the evaluation of Sons & Brothers.

First, we thank those who took the time to participate in interviews or focus groups (listed in Appendix B) to share the history, evolution, and successes and challenges of Sons & Brothers. We especially thank the young people in Fresno, Los Angeles, and Oakland who shared their experiences being part of Sons & Brothers' organizing, leadership, and healing activities.

We want to thank our partners at Bright Research Group for their true collaboration on this evaluation, especially Kristina Bedrossian, Holly Joshi, and Brightstar Ohlson.

We thank The California Endowment for supporting this work. Early conversations with Dr. Robert Ross, CEO of The Endowment, and Ray Colmenar and Castle Redmond, co-leads of Sons & Brothers, helped formulate our guiding questions and design the evaluation, and they continued to give their time and insights over the last two years.

We also thank Sandra Davis, Sarah Reyes, and Jennifer Ybarra, Senior Program Managers at The Endowment, for their tremendous assistance in planning our "virtual site visits" in Fresno, Los Angeles, and Oakland which yielded valuable information from leaders of grassroots organizations and young people deeply involved in Sons & Brothers.

We acknowledge and thank Tia Martinez, lead consultant on the Sons & Brothers work, for her deep and expansive knowledge of the evolution of Sons & Brothers and ongoing support of the evaluation over the last two years.

Lastly, we want to thank the Learning & Evaluation group at The Endowment – Lori Nascimento, Elizabeth Rocha, and Glenda Monterroza – for their guidance and critical questions throughout the evaluation.

ABOUT EQUAL MEASURE

[Equal Measure](#) is a Philadelphia-based nonprofit consultancy working with national and regional foundations, nonprofits, and public entities to advance social change. Equal Measure offers program design, evaluation through a wide range of methodologies, capacity building, technical assistance, and communications services to help those who do good, *do even better*. For more than 30 years, we've partnered with clients across a broad spectrum of content areas, sharing fresh insights and translating good ideas into meaningful change—strengthening our clients' efforts to make our communities healthier, more equitable, and more inclusive.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

In 2010, The California Endowment (“The Endowment” or “TCE”) began an ambitious 10-year initiative called Building Healthy Communities (BHC) – a \$1 billion effort to “advance statewide policy, change the narrative, and transform 14 of California’s communities most devastated by health inequities into places where all people have an opportunity to thrive.”ⁱ



During the early stages of the Building Healthy Communities initiative, The Endowment identified ten key outcomes for community health, one of which was “health gaps for boys and men of color are narrowed.” The health outcome was considered critical because “addressing the social, educational, and economic disadvantages faced by boys and young men of color is essential to community health. Success here means equity in schools, more job opportunities, more alternatives to incarceration, and new youth development approaches tailored to them.”ⁱⁱ

The outcome to reduce health inequities evolved into a cross-cutting, population-focused effort to advance racial and gender justice. What began as small, limited investments in “Boys and Men of Color,” was elevated by Dr. Robert Ross, CEO of The Endowment, into a larger investment and an embedded component of the BHC work; it became known as “Sons & Brothers.” Sons & Brothers was launched in 2013 as a seven-year, \$50 million investment to “help all young people of color reach their full potential, because when our sons and daughters succeed, we all succeed.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The Sons & Brothers Evaluation

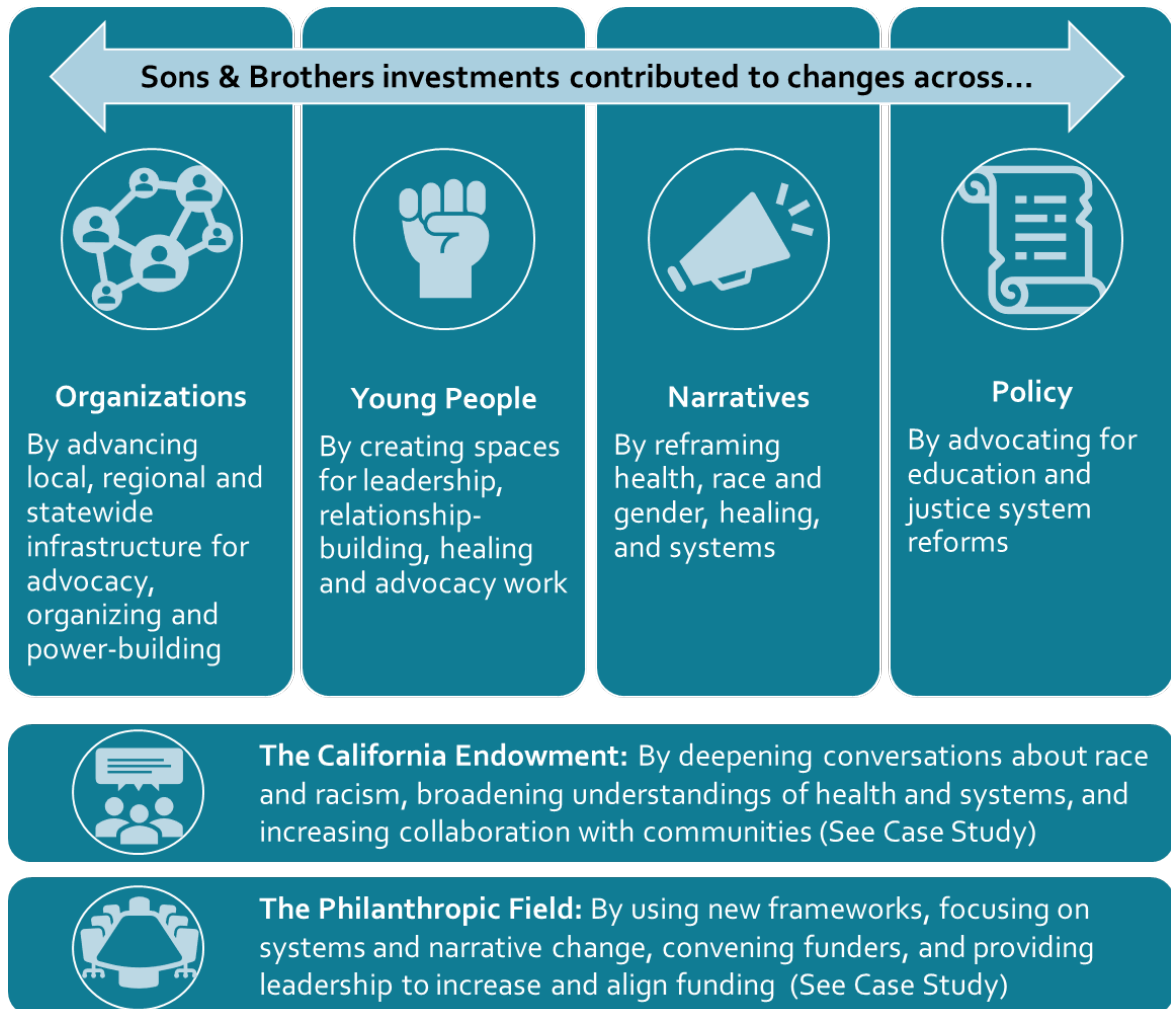
In late 2018, Equal Measure and Bright Research Group began a two-year evaluation^{iv} of Sons & Brothers to share learnings from this grantmaking. This summative evaluation report was guided by the following evaluation questions:

- How, if at all, did Sons & Brothers build the capacity of youth-serving organizations to improve outcomes for boys and men of color?
- To what extent has Sons & Brothers promoted systems change using a racial justice lens?
- How, if at all, has Sons & Brothers contributed to local and/or statewide policy changes?
- How, if at all, has Sons & Brothers contributed to changes in the narrative about boys and men of color?
- How, if at all, has Sons & Brothers created, expanded, and/or developed opportunities for young boys and men of color to build leadership skills, and organize and advocate for racial equity?
- What have been young boys and men of color’s experiences in Sons & Brothers leadership development activities?



This report is a look back at what Sons & Brothers was, what it accomplished, and the challenges faced along the way. But it is also a look ahead to how The Endowment can use the Sons & Brothers learnings to chart a new course forward in these challenging times.^v

SUMMARY OF EVALUATION FINDINGS



Contributions of Sons & Brothers to Organizations

One of Sons & Brothers most direct contributions is on the organizations funded to do systems change work. We highlight the ways in which Sons & Brothers grantmaking influenced community-based organizations.

Bolstering Local and State Capacity

The Sons & Brothers investment contributed to a stronger infrastructure for systems change at the local, regional, and statewide levels in California in three ways: strengthening organizational capacity, building coalition capacity, and helping establish a statewide policy infrastructure. Sons & Brothers investments improved the ability of grassroots organizations and coalitions of organizations to do the work of systems change – advocacy, organizing, and power building – to lead to more equitable health outcomes for boys and men of color. In addition to providing support for organizing by grassroots



organizations and their coalitions, Sons & Brothers played an important role in developing a statewide infrastructure to advocate for policy change through the Alliance for Boys & Men of Color.

Sons & Brothers grantmaking contributed to:

- Strengthening **organizational capacity** through the development, improvement, and scaling of work by grassroots organizations around youth organizing and power building for and with boys and men of color.
- Building **coalition capacity** through bringing organizations and people together, further building capacity to drive systems change for and with boys and men of color. Coalitions also strengthened cross-organizational learning opportunities, further building the capacities of grassroots organizations.
- Helping establish a **statewide policy infrastructure** through building the capacity of the Alliance for Boys & Men of Color to do policy work at multiple levels, including at the state level, through working with grassroots organizations and young boys and men of color.

The Endowment's, as well as the Alliance's, relationships with grassroots organizations evolved over time from a more top-down, bureaucratic approach to one that recognized the expertise of the local groups and communities; however, some stakeholders saw this as an area for continued growth for TCE and the Alliance.

Supportive Frames

The Endowment's framing for Sons & Brothers – the population-specific focus, as well as broader understandings of health and systems change – provided organizations support and space to focus on root causes of inequity. The Endowment's life course perspective and broad definition of health that included social determinants allowed for organizations and young people to organize and advocate across a broad range of issues, like education and the justice system. These frames influenced organizations in several ways:

- The Sons & Brothers investment, as one of the only large investments in a race and gender specific group, provided **legitimacy** to the efforts of local organizations. Organizations could leverage TCE's investment with other funders.
- Over time, the broader framing of health incorporated **healing** from contemporary and historical trauma and systemic racism as critical to advancing health outcomes. Some stakeholders felt there was need for an even greater investment in healing and culturally competent mental health supports.

While the population-specific approach and framing was powerful and affirming for many, for others it was exclusionary – leaving out girls and women of color, LGBTQ youth, and marginalizing Asian and Native youth. While changes were made to be more inclusive in local coalitions, and with the addition of Sisterhood Rising – an effort focused on girls and women of color – the population-specific approach was a continuing challenge throughout Sons & Brothers.

Contributions of Sons & Brothers on Young Men of Color

Sons & Brothers work, implemented by local organizations, engaged the direct participation of boys and men of color – of those most affected by adverse policies and conditions in developing solutions. Young people and the adults who work with them noted ways Sons & Brothers was impactful for young boys and men of color:



- Young men of color reported they felt **empowered and inspired** and felt that their voices were being heard. At the same time, while many young people described the policy and advocacy experiences as empowering, several described “tokenizing” situations that demonstrated how a clear role and purpose is needed to feel fully part of the work.
- Sons & Brothers investments provided young people with opportunities to build and apply **leadership skills**, as well as spaces to bring their lived experiences and understandings to organizing work.
- Through the youth-centered work at Sons & Brothers-funded organizations and coalitions, a **pipeline of young leaders** of color emerged. More support, however, is needed to continue to cultivate leaders among boys and men of color.
- Young men of color appreciated opportunities for **healing** and for starting the healing process.
- Sons & Brothers grantmaking provided the space for young men of color to build **relationships with peers and adult role models** who shared similar life experiences, relationships that further contributed to movement building.

Systems Change Influence: Narrative Change

Although there are many dimensions to systems change, we focus here on the contributions of Sons & Brothers investments to two interrelated systems:

- **Narrative change**, focusing on the stories and mental models that change the way communities and decision-makers perceive boys and men of color, as well as how they perceive themselves; and
- **Policy change**, focusing on the local and state public policies that influence the life trajectory of boys and men of color.

Narratives Advanced by The Endowment

The Endowment helped reframe key narratives about health, race and gender, and the systems that needed to change. In addition to the effect these narratives had on youth-serving organizations and young people, the perspectives elevated by The Endowment’s platform influenced how various stakeholders, including policymakers, viewed the work. Key narratives advanced by The Endowment included:

- The Endowment’s reframing of health represented a shift away from a traditional medical model toward one that understood the impact of **social determinants of health** such as income, education, and race.
- The Endowment elevated and legitimized a **racial justice focus** that created space for critical conversations and enabled organizing and mobilizing strategies.
- By framing definitions of health toward an understanding of complex social factors that influence wellbeing and away from individual decisions, The Endowment – through Sons & Brothers – placed the narrative focus squarely on **institutions**, rather than individuals.

Narratives Advanced by Local and Statewide Grantees

Local and statewide grantees helped advance additional framing – on healing from trauma and the school-to-prison pipeline – which built on the initial Sons & Brothers approach. Healing from trauma became a core focus of the work of Sons & Brothers at partner organizations and in the camps. Grantee experience in healing circles and familiarity with restorative justice approaches elevated the importance of healing within the Sons & Brothers investments.

The Endowment and its partners – through Sons & Brothers – helped elevate the connections between the education and carceral systems – the school-to-prison pipeline – and their negative effects on health



and wellbeing. With the changing definitions of health, framing that connected the education and carceral systems helped emphasize the impact that institutions have on the health outcomes for boys and men of color.

Role of Young People in Advancing Narratives

Young people have been critical in influencing the narrative about boys and men of color. Sons & Brothers investments have frequently been associated with giving young men of color platforms from which to tell their own stories, and the elevation of youth voice has strongly contributed to the movement's successes. Over the years, youth helped advance and shape narratives:

- By being **included in spaces** where they have traditionally been excluded, young people of color are changing narratives.
- By using their **voices, stories, and lived experiences**, young men of color have begun to change mindsets and influence policymakers and policies.

The progress made through Sons & Brothers investments are important precursors, but narrative change, like systems change, has a long timeframe.

Systems Change Influence: Policy Change

A critical outcome of Sons & Brothers investments was contributing to changing policies that inequitably harm boys and men of color. With Sons & Brothers efforts focused on systems change and racial justice, advocacy for policy change centered on the education and justice systems, and in particular on inequitable policies related to school climate and the school-to-prison pipeline.

Policy Changes in the Education System

- **Sons & Brothers investments in local and statewide partners contributed to local and state “willful defiance” bans.** Local and statewide advocacy resulted in bans on the use of willful defiance in school suspensions and expulsions, which had been disproportionately applied to students of color, particularly young Black and Latinx men.
- **Policy changes contributed to reductions in school suspensions.** Across California, school suspension rates fell by over 40% from 2012 to 2019, with larger reductions of over 55% in some counties including Los Angeles. Despite decreases, significant disparities remain, highlighting the ongoing necessity of equity-focused efforts.
- **Redirecting school funding was also an important policy effort and outcome.** Investments shifted from punitive systems to trauma-informed, health-based community supports.

Policy Changes in the Criminal Justice System

- **Sons & Brothers’ local and statewide partners were influential in passing a suite of criminal justice-related bills, including Propositions 47 and 57.** As boys and men of color are disproportionately arrested and incarcerated, criminal justice policy improvements – such as those related to sentencing and parole – have the potential to have real influence on Sons & Brothers health equity-focused long-term goals.
- **Local advocacy contributed to progressive policing practices and the reallocation of funds from punitive systems to restorative solutions.**



Conclusions and Considerations

The Sons & Brothers investments in local and statewide partner organizations unquestionably contributed to positive changes that should lead to improving health outcomes and reducing inequities for boys and men of color in California. Along with positive changes to organizations, coalitions, young people, and systems, there were some challenges and critiques of Sons & Brothers, including the exclusion of some groups, in particular girls and women of color, from the focus of the grantmaking and activities, as well as questions about the distribution of power between TCE and its grantees.

As The Endowment begins to implement their new strategy for the next decade, lessons from Sons & Brothers point to some issues to consider:

- **Population-specific approach:** The population-specific approach was at the heart of Sons & Brothers, and for many, was a powerful and affirming framing for the work. For others, it was exclusionary – leaving out girls and women of color, LGBTQ youth, and Asian and Native youth. A learning from these ongoing tensions is that The Endowment should address these legitimate concerns directly and explicitly, provide clear explanations, and recognize other groups' needs and what might be done to address those needs either through The Endowment's investments or by engaging other funders. Many described the exclusion of girls and women of color as a real "miss" for The Endowment that can serve as a lesson learned for future population-specific investments. It is encouraging to see the new vision explicates a strong racial justice lens that is gender inclusive.
- **Rural areas:** Many of the Building Healthy Communities sites (though not all) were in urban areas, but there is an opportunity for perhaps even greater impact in more rural regions that lack the history and infrastructure for organizing. Our findings suggest that the Sons & Brothers investments in capacity building for grassroots organizations and the development of coalitions in areas where organizing work is more nascent were very effective. The new strategic vision that expands the place-based focus from 14 Building Healthy Communities sites to four broad regions may allow for more investments across diverse geographic areas.
- **Grassroots organizations and systems change work:** While the Sons & Brothers investment built the capacity of grassroots organizations to strengthen organizing work with boys and men of color, and to collectively advocate with other organizations for systems and policy change, the work of systems change is a long and challenging endeavor. Systems are deeply entrenched and slow to change, and grassroots organizations cannot be expected to do this work without significant and long-term resources. Systems change work takes time; time to build trust and relationships, and to begin to change narratives and make step-by-step policy changes that alter systems. The Endowment's new vision centers organizing and base building, as well as listening to grassroots leaders, which is critical to understanding what the organizations need to achieve systemic and structural change.
- **Working with young people:** Boys and men of color were integral to the work of local grassroots organizations and coalitions and statewide advocacy efforts. There were, however, challenges in implementing TCE's camps and other activities across many diverse groups, including, at times, feeling like their identity was not specifically highlighted, resulting in sentiments of tokenism. Sons & Brothers camps, trainings, and workshops have begun building a critical pipeline of leaders of color that should be strengthened to sustain systems change efforts. Promising models that lift up healing and mentoring were lauded and should be



explored, as well as engaging with individual communities directly, utilizing culturally rooted methods to develop relational trust, and sharing between elders and young people.

- **Intergenerational organizing and learning:** Sons & Brothers grantmaking provided young people of color with space and opportunities to learn, grow, use their voices, share their lived experiences, and gain valuable skills. Young people also appreciated the support of mentors and adult allies. Some stakeholders felt there should be a stronger emphasis on intergenerational approaches and learning, as adults and young people have much to share and learn from each other. Others expressed that Sons & Brothers neglected intergenerational components like families, and the role of mothers in particular. They argued that since trauma is intergenerational, the work of both healing from trauma and organizing for change must also span generations – including community elders and families. It is exciting that The Endowment’s new vision for the next decade calls for an “intergenerational ecosystem” that will account for these critical relationships and dynamics.
- **Policy implementation and reinvestment:** Sons & Brothers investments in local and statewide partners contributed to important policy changes within the school climate and criminal justice systems, including willful defiance bans that resulted in reductions in school suspensions and changes in sentencing laws – both of which impact boys and men of color. It will be imperative to keep pressure on those systems in *implementing* the policy changes to ensure equity. As boys and men of color and their advocates contribute to the removal of inequitable policies, it is equally important to consider how public funds can be reinvested for positive change and for repairing the damage done by these “culture of punishment” policies – in communities of color, in prevention efforts such as youth development, in healing and mental health resources, and in continued changes to systems. The new vision’s continued focus on institutional change, particularly in schools and the justice system, can ensure continued momentum and build on policy changes of the last decade.

ⁱ <https://www.calendow.org/building-healthy-communities-old/>

ⁱⁱ <http://ca-endow.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/Ten-Outcomes.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.calendow.org/report/sons-and-brothers/>

^{iv} Due to COVID-19 our timeline was adjusted, and the 24-month engagement was extended to 27 months to accommodate changes to data collection. See Appendix A for more details on the evaluation methodology.

^v For details on the history, evolution, and key strategies of Sons & Brothers, see the full report.