

# Landscape Study of Community Based Organizations in Sacramento County

Summary of Study Findings | October 2024

The County of Sacramento (County) is exploring how to better work with local Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and deepen their impact in high-need communities. To do this, the County partnered with the Institute for Social Research (ISR) at Sacramento State University to conduct a landscape study of local CBOs. The goal of the study is to identify barriers to partnering with the County, and to learn how the County can actively support CBO capacity building. Data informing the study was gathered in 2023 through 2024, from CBOs, support organizations, and County staff, through focus groups (43 participants), interviews (4 individuals), and an online survey (158 respondents). Feedback was synthesized from the data collected and the key findings from the study are summarized below.

## FINDING 1 | CBOs are important and valued, especially in serving under-resourced communities in Sacramento County.

CBOs provide an essential link between public agencies and their communities. They can identify needs in real-time and serve diverse community members. CBOs are effective because they are flexible, creative, and responsive. Especially in communities historically overlooked, they are especially important to serving those who may be reluctant to trust government agencies.

### Insights from Survey & Focus Groups

- CBOs provide **innovation and flexibility** for community services.
- CBOs recognize and address their **local communities' needs in real time**.
- CBOs can access to **under-resourced and hard to reach communities**.
- **Trust and relationships** are integral to CBOs' effectiveness.
- The "ecosystem" of CBOs has **varying capacity** to access County funding.

"We're much quicker to respond to those [community] needs, and it's harder for County agencies to provide a quick response to the needs... We are very lucky that we can do it much quicker and provide it in a culturally appropriate, culturally sensitive way." - CBO

"What makes us unique in the community is that we build relationships. And in our culture, we have so many things to be distrustful of, and so many things have been thrown at us. So many programs, so many people, so many issues, all that." - CBO

## FINDING 2 | Numerous challenges were identified related to CBOs accessing funding from, and contracting with, the County.

Both the County and CBOs identified issues that sometimes hinder positive partnerships between CBOs and the County. Accessing available funding and following contract requirements have been reported as difficult and resource intensive by County department staff, CBO support organizations, and large and small CBOs.

“You don’t receive money up front, you have to float whatever it is that the County’s asking you to do before you get a dime. And that’s really, really hard for small organizations who have great ideas and implement great programs and have great results.... it undermines a lot of the possibility of growing those innovative ideas.” – Support Organization

“There are [CBO] vendors who have pulled out of contracts, they say it’s not worth it to us. The reporting aspect is not worth it to us. We’d rather not take the money.”  
– County staff

Some CBOs feel **invisible, undervalued, or used for political advantage** based on negative historical and contemporary experiences, and seek acknowledgment from the County.

“They [local government] want free help or they want a letter of support. And once they get it, then **you can’t find them** [for organizational funding or support]. So, I’ve been there.” – CBO



### Challenges Shared by CBOs

- Small CBOs often go **unacknowledged**, and their work is largely uncompensated.
- There are **few opportunities** to provide meaningful input into programs impacting their community.
- Small CBOs have difficulty **‘breaking into funding’** with most contracts going to the same organizations.
- There is a **lack of clarity and coordination** across the County for CBO engagement and contracting.
- County funding has **arbitrary and inconsistent policies**, and **restrictive** funding requirements.
- Less than half of CBOs (43%) surveyed can cite an example of an accessible/simple funding process.
- Accessible funding processes noted include **simplified proposals, clear communication, clear eligibility, and covered program costs**.
- **Almost half** of CBOs surveyed receive **most of their funding from public sources**. One-in-five do not have any public funding.

“We’re raising our hand and saying, **‘We got people that want to help. Do you see us? We feel invisible.’** – Small CBO

“We’re more than **just ‘contractors’** from who you’re purchasing a product. We have a **social responsibility that goes beyond** the delivery of - we’re not buying nuts and bolts or widgets or something.” – Support Organization

## FINDING 3 | Broad investment in CBO capacity building is necessary to deepen the impact of ongoing community work.

CBOs benefit directly from capacity building, networks, and coalitions. Small CBOs rely on informal networks and coalitions to support them. Broadening perspectives on what capacity building investment looks like to support ongoing CBO work and making existing supports more visible can go a long way towards deepening the impact of CBO services in Sacramento communities.

### Insights from Survey & Focus Groups

- Only a third of CBOs surveyed report **using Sacramento-based capacity building resources**.
- The most common types of capacity building used are **organizational strategy/planning**, leadership development, communication/outreach, and DEI.
- Capacity building is most often delivered through peer advisors, staff training, and consultants.
- About a third of CBOs surveyed report regularly using networks/coalitions to access capacity building, 41% sometimes do. **One in five CBOs do not know of any networks or coalitions**.
- One half of the CBOs surveyed say their operations would be very or extremely affected without networks/coalitions.
- Top capacity building priorities identified are **fund development**, organizational strategy/planning, board development, and data/evaluation.
- CBOs noted that their preferred methods to receive capacity building are **dedicated funding**, staff training, and technical assistance.

“We don't pay them to have the capacity, so they don't have the capacity. We don't let them become partners with us through contracts, because they don't have the capacity we never paid for them to have.... you're stuck on that cycle, **nothing ever changes.**” - Support Organization



“A space is a **game changer** for us. A physical space would be a game changer for us.”  
– CBO

“We need to be more equitable in how we think about **capacity in communities**, and where we know there's a lack of capacity proportionately, we need to disproportionately invest in building it.” – Support Organization

“I could potentially bring in a lot more capacity or funding to the organization. But then **I would lose the ability to function in the programs.**” – CBO

## FINDING 4 | Funding and support systems barriers should be addressed to fully realize the potential of CBOs in addressing local needs.

Study participants recommend strengthening CBO-County relationships and making County contracting more accessible, especially for small CBOs. County staff, support organizations, and CBOs all provided similar feedback that reworking the current contracting and reimbursement structure can open funding opportunities to CBOs that were previously excluded from such opportunities. Additionally, applying an equity-centered approach can redistribute resources and amplify community voices that are less heard. Lastly, consistent recognition, support, and relationship building can go a long way to build trust between CBOs and the County.

“What we're calling for the County to do is have a breakout movement to say: “we're going to do some things different”. This is not about tossing past blame, this is about building a better future.”

- Support Organization

“It would be helpful for Sacramento County to be willing to assist newer organizations with **capacity building, providing funding, and providing technical support** to ensure these organizations can get off the ground and have the necessary resources to sustain themselves.”- CBO

“And [CBOs] are innovative, they're responsive, they want to partner... **can go a really long way if we get out of their way.**” – County Staff

“Shared alignment in areas of service and relationship building to reduce aggressive competitiveness. There is enough need – **let's figure out how to best serve our communities through a collaborative, coordinated approach.**” – CBO

### Landscape Study Participants Recommendations

- Establish **centralized contracting** infrastructure.
- **Fix reimbursement** processes.
- Provide targeted **technical assistance**.
- **Simplify reporting** and oversight requirements.
- Encourage **fair compensation** for CBO services.
- **Extend funding cycles**.
- Provide **funding for program planning** and piloting.
- Require large contracts to **subcontract with smaller CBOs**.
- **Increase accessibility** and visibility of County resources.
- **Dedicate County staff** for CBO contractor technical assistance.
- Incorporate **funding for administrative** and operational services.

“CBOs still mostly work in silos because **funding is often discrete and single issue focused**. Finding ways to apply collective impact and to facilitate conversations about how multiple organizations can contribute to addressing an issue would be fruitful.” – CBO

**Acknowledgements** | The County and the research team are incredibly thankful to the study participants who generously contributed their time and experiences to this project. Special thanks to the organizations that shared valuable insights and recommendations through Key Informant Interviews, Focus Groups, and the CBO Survey. To protect participant privacy and encourage candid feedback, all participant feedback remains confidential, and identifiable information was not disclosed to the County.