

Listening to Californians

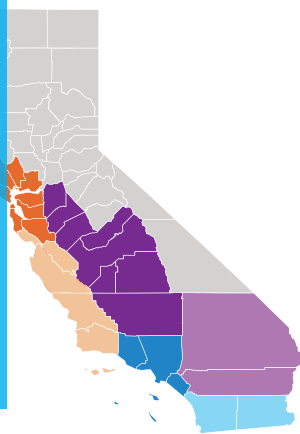
The James Irvine Foundation recently announced a new focus on expanding opportunity for people who are working but struggling with poverty. To better understand the challenges and dreams of these working Californians, we partnered with local nonprofits to speak directly with residents who could share their experiences, as well as the solutions that could make a difference in their lives. We also asked people about the role of creativity in their day-to-day lives.

WHAT WE DID

In Community Listening Sessions held across the state, we heard firsthand from Californians.

We visited six regions in California:

Bay Area
(Oakland, San Francisco)
Central Coast
(Salinas)
San Bernardino and
Riverside
(Coachella, Ontario)
Los Angeles
(Downtown LA, South LA)
Imperial & San Diego
(El Centro, San Diego)
San Joaquin Valley
(Fresno)



To gain a deeper understanding of life experiences, we visited the homes of 12 Californians who each spent 60-90 minutes with us, sharing stories about their lives.

We also used a smartphone app called dscout to hear from young Californians (18-36 years old) who are struggling economically.

Through the app, 58 people across the state used their phones to respond to our questions about their lives through texts, photos, and videos.

14 listening sessions

400+ people

10 languages

Amharic	Mandarin
Armenian	Somali
Cantonese	Spanish
English	Tagalog
Korean	Vietnamese

WHAT WE LEARNED

Participants told us about their frustrations and fears. But, they spoke most passionately about their goals for the future.

After hearing their stories, we identified **five common themes** related to these goals and the challenges that stand in their way, as well as insights on creative expression.



What's next? The themes we heard will guide our strategy and help to shape our grantmaking. We are also sharing what we heard with the people who participated and with other organizations. We will continue to listen and learn from Californians who are working but struggling with poverty.

To learn more about the Community Listening Sessions and the people we heard from, visit www.irvine.org/CAvoices.



What we heard

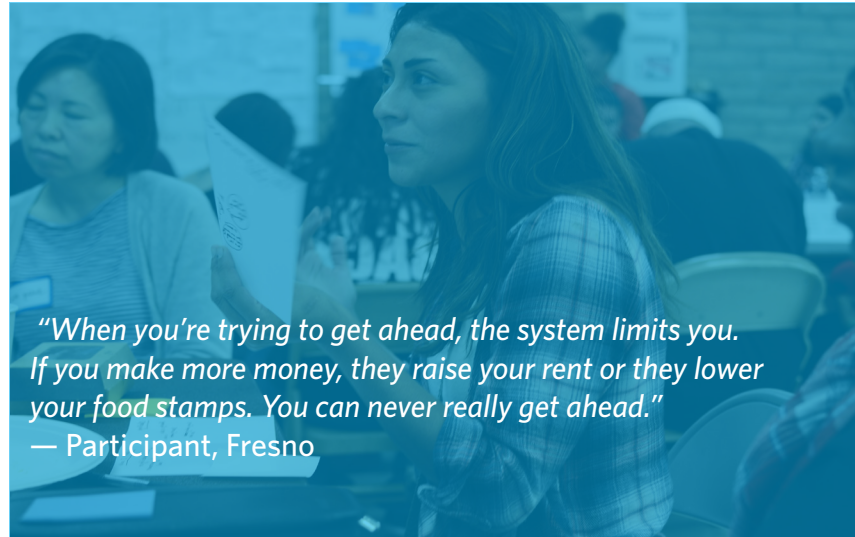
FIVE COMMON THEMES

1. I WANT TO LIVE WITHOUT MAKING EXTREME TRADEOFFS.

Despite working hard, too many Californians still have to make difficult decisions about what they can afford in order to survive.

We heard:

- I take one step forward and two steps back
- I don't have time to focus on having my voice heard
- College feels more like my ball and chain than my wings
- I need quality childcare to get ahead
- I can't afford to get sick



"When you're trying to get ahead, the system limits you. If you make more money, they raise your rent or they lower your food stamps. You can never really get ahead."
— Participant, Fresno

2. I WANT TO LIVE WITHOUT FEAR AND ANXIETY.

Busy schedules, unfriendly work environments, and unsafe situations make day-to-day life feel unstable.

We heard:

- I'm so stressed
- I'm one crisis away from losing everything
- I don't feel safe
- There will be consequences if I speak up



"I want San Bernardino [in five years] to be the most beautiful city in California. We're going to stop the violence. I see houses full of people, job offers, more public things for people to do."
— Warehouse Worker and High School Student, San Bernardino

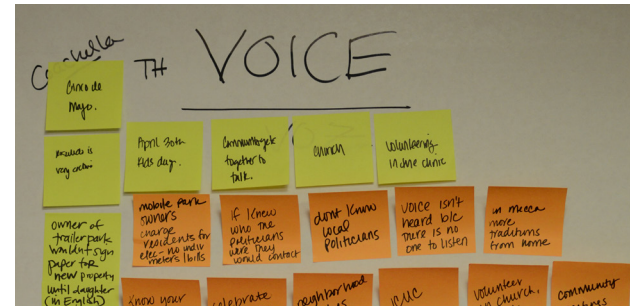
What we heard

3. I WANT TO BE TREATED WITH DIGNITY.

Working Californians who are struggling with poverty want respect for their contributions at work and in their communities.

We heard:

- Those in power don't see me as a person
- I feel expendable on the job
- My past sometimes prevents me from making progress
- The system pits us against each other



"The supervisors are supposed to give us water and breaks by law, but they only do those things when they know someone is watching. My supervisor tells us to say that we get those things all the time."

— Participant, Coachella Valley

4. I WANT TO BE CONNECTED TO A STRONG COMMUNITY NETWORK.

People who are physically or socially isolated from strong personal or professional networks miss out on information and support.

"It really does take a village. My whole family helps. If I had to raise my three kids and help with my nephews by myself, I would be overwhelmed."

— Home Healthcare Worker, Lancaster

We heard:

- Finding a job depends on who I know
- It really does take a village
- Together, our voices are amplified
- I want ways to make my community stronger



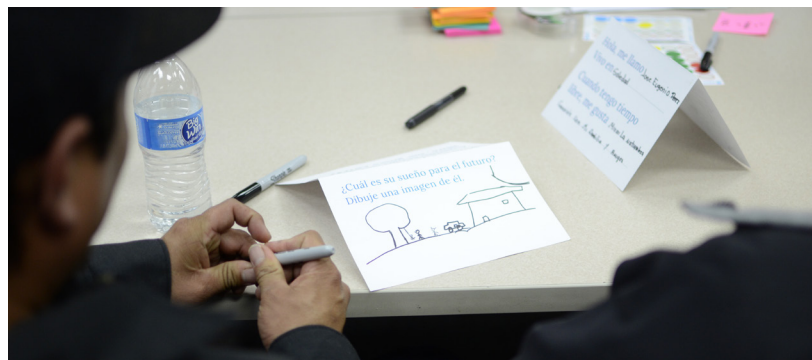
What we heard

5. I WANT THE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE MY SITUATION BETTER.

Some Californians feel trapped in their current situation and that they can't make progress toward their goals.

We heard:

- I'm doing all the right things, but I can't get ahead
- I want a stable place to live
- I can't get to better opportunities
- The system is often difficult to navigate



"The biggest challenge I face building the best [life for] me and my fiancé is finding a job and a place to stay. We have all the qualifications for them. Yet no one will hire us or accept our application for an apartment."

— Mobile Research Participant, McKinleyville

INSIGHTS ON CREATIVE EXPRESSION

With limited time and energy, working Californians still find time for creative activities.

We heard creativity has many benefits, such as:

- Relaxation and stress relief
- Building confidence and self-esteem
- Connecting with other people
- Connecting with something bigger than oneself
- Building a career



"I enjoy bringing customers' [nail art] ideas to life. We all feel good when we look good, but I feel great when I make someone else look good! I am proud to be able to use my creativity, something I love, as work."

— Mobile Research Participant, Tehachapi

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