



URBAN STRATEGIES COUNCIL 2012-2013 IMPACT REPORT



FOREWORD

Over the past 26 years,

Urban Strategies Council has distinguished itself as a regional and national resource for *data and strategies for action*. Our aim is to alleviate persistent poverty through research, policy, collaboration, innovation, and advocacy to achieve equity and social justice. Despite many successes over the years and significant progress in our work, we are sadly aware that persistent poverty remains one of the most critical social issues in America. Income and wealth disparities are at an all time high and growing numbers of families and children remain entrapped in the web of social conditions that cause and perpetuate poverty. Data-driven and evidence-based strategies and policies must continue to be established if we are to reverse the path we are on as a country.



Junious Williams, Chief Executive Officer

During recent months, we have been assessing the impact of our work as we seek to hone our focus. In the report that follows, we highlight some of the major efforts we have engaged in during the past two years and the impact of this work towards achieving our mission. In addition, we lay out the major strategic directions of our work going forward. It is our hope that this impact report helps our partners and investors understand our work and identify ways in which we can more effectively partner with them in the future.

The economic recession of the past several years has provided additional evidence of the fragility of families who exist on the margins of economic stability; it has also awakened many to the fact that the economic vulnerability associated with the “poor” now impacts those who traditionally occupied the stable middle class. The loss of a job, a health crisis, a ballooning sub-prime loan—all could easily plunge a once economically stable family into a downward spiral of debt and poverty. These circumstances make it even more important that we all pay attention to inter-related causes of poverty and continue aggressive efforts to grow the new economy in ways that provide opportunity and stability to poor and low-income families.

In the coming months and years, we plan to expand our efforts to provide the information and tools needed by the community to engage in data-driven decision making. We will also continue to work collaboratively in more effective ways to achieve the collective impact necessary to move substantial numbers of families out of poverty and into economic stability and sustainability. We plan to pursue our focus on equitable economic development, educational excellence, and community safety and justice as indispensable levers of change to achieve our goal of eliminating persistent poverty.

We encourage you to consider how we can work more effectively with you or your organization to achieve this goal. Whether through new or revitalized partnerships or through investments in our work, we seek opportunities to elevate the effectiveness and impact of our work.

ABOUT URBAN STRATEGIES COUNCIL

The mission of Urban Strategies Council is to eliminate persistent poverty in the Bay Area by working with partners to transform low-income neighborhoods into vibrant, healthy communities. We do this by leveraging research, policy, innovation, collaboration and advocacy to achieve equity and social justice.

We believe that the conditions required to eliminate persistent poverty include high-quality education, sustainable wage employment, public safety, and affordable housing. The Council works across these issue areas, bringing our expertise in research, policy, systems reform, and cross-sector collaboration. We believe that collective action, propelled by accurate, relevant, and timely data is critical to achieving the social change we envision through our mission.

OUR IMPACT

Over the past two years, we have published landmark research reports, successfully mobilized community collaborations, and achieved policy and legislative victories to further our social justice objectives. These include:

- The release of three major reports exploring the **disparities facing African American male students** in Oakland, which drew national attention and catalyzed local action. The reports explore suspensions, school attendance, and trajectories toward high school graduation.
- Revealing the extent of **investor acquisition of foreclosed properties in Oakland's low-income communities of color**. Resident activists used this data to secure a policy victory requiring investors to register their properties with the City and ensure that those properties are up to code. Read our report, *Who Owns Your Neighborhood? The Role of Investors in Post-Foreclosure Oakland*.
- Advocacy for **open data policy** which contributed to the Oakland City Council's adoption of an open data resolution and the **launch of open data portals** by Alameda County and the City of Oakland.
- The creation of the Savvy Consumer Toolkit, **an award-winning and innovative financial education curriculum** designed to reduce vulnerability to predatory financial products, which was launched by the Alameda County Community Asset Network.
- Organizing a **successful regional hearing of the Assembly Select Committee on the Status of Boys and Men of Color in California** and helping to create a **statewide policy agenda** to improve conditions for boys and men of color in education, health, employment and criminal justice.
- Re-engaging the Oak-to-Ninth (Brooklyn Basin) Community Benefits Coalition to ensure that the benefits won by the Coalition, which the Council staffed, are realized now that the Brooklyn Basin project is underway. Those benefits include: **\$1.6 million to four community partners for pre-apprenticeship training; 300,000 hours of work for new and first-period apprentices; and 465 affordable housing units in the 3,100-unit development.**
- Securing the highest percentage of **criminal justice realignment funds devoted to community-based services** of any county in the state by founding and staffing the Alameda County Coalition on Criminal Justice Reform (AC3JR).
- Achieving Oakland's most **democratic redistricting process** to date by leading a coalition of community organizations, providing technical and strategy support to the coalition, and building the **oaklandvotes.org** website which raised awareness of residents' rights to participate in the redistricting process.



The work of Urban Strategies Council is conducted under two interconnected initiatives: *Producing Data & Information for Action* and *Mobilizing Cross-Sector Collaboration*.

DATA & INFORMATION FOR ACTION

AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE ACHIEVEMENT INITIATIVE IN THE OAKLAND UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

The release of three major reports exploring the disparities facing African American male students in Oakland drew national attention and catalyzed local action. The reports explore suspensions, school attendance, and trajectories toward high school graduation.

In late 2010, the Superintendent of the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) asked the Council to partner with OUSD and the East Bay Community Foundation in developing the African American Male Achievement Initiative (AAMAI). The initiative aims to improve education outcomes for young Black males in Oakland by addressing literacy, suspension, and graduation rates, in which significant differences exist between African American male students and their peers. In addition to developing and tracking key indicators to help OUSD gauge progress, **the Council released three major reports in 2012 exploring disparities** in suspensions, chronic absence, and factors that impact students' trajectory toward high school graduation. Calling attention to areas where outcomes for African American male students are particularly poor, the reports contain data and policy analysis along with recommendations.

After consulting with the Council and reviewing its research findings, **OUSD approved a Voluntary Resolution Plan**, which ended the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights investigation and outlined steps **to reduce disproportionate discipline of African American students by the end of the 2016-17 school year**.

Urban Strategies' groundbreaking reports on the achievement, attendance, and disproportionate suspensions of African-American male students were catalytic in focusing Oakland leaders and educators on one of our community's most underserved populations. These reports alone impacted a shift in millions of dollars across the district system to better address and support student needs.

- Jonathan Klein, Executive Director, Great Oakland Public Schools Leadership Center

Urban Strategies played an integral part in creating the environment to pass and implement this ordinance by providing maps and data analysis for neighborhood tours that exposed elected officials and the media to the impacts that vacant and blighted foreclosures were having on the health and well-being of the community. As a result of this partnership, the city fully implemented the ordinance and has collected close to \$2 million in fines from the banks. A portion of these fines have been dedicated to foreclosure prevention programs in the city that have helped to keep families in their homes.

- Anthony Panarese, Organizing Director, Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment

OAKLAND FORECLOSURES & HOUSING QUALITY

We produced an innovative body of research revealing the extent of investor acquisition of foreclosed properties in Oakland's low-income communities of color. Our analysis was used by resident activists to secure a policy victory requiring investors to register their properties with the City and ensure that those properties are up to code. Read our report, *Who Owns Your Neighborhood? The Role of Investors in Post-Foreclosure Oakland*.

Our analytical data mining revealed that an increasing number of foreclosed properties in Oakland were being acquired by speculators. **The Council's June 2012 report was one of the first in-depth studies published nationwide, calling attention to post-foreclosure investor activity and its potential long-term impacts.** Our research indicated that 42% of all completed foreclosures in Oakland since 2007 were acquired by investors, and 93% of those acquisitions were located in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color. Moreover, our field work revealed that it was unlikely that speculators were completing the rehabilitation work that these properties need to be safe and healthy for occupancy. Concerned that this investor activity may cause further instability in Oakland's most vulnerable communities, the Council supported the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment, which sought to hold speculators accountable. **This resident-driven advocacy, equipped with the Council's data, resulted in the passage of an Oakland City Council ordinance in November 2012, which requires investors to register their properties with the City and have them inspected to ensure they are up to code.** This achievement underscores our efficacy in calling attention to previously unknown phenomena and in helping local organizations use data to inform advocacy and support a legislative agenda.



OPEN DATA

Our open data policy advocacy contributed to the Oakland City Council's adoption of an open data resolution and the launch of open data portals by Alameda County and the City of Oakland.

Building on our rich history of using data and research to inform communities and influence policy, the Council successfully pressed local governments to adopt open data policies and release public data sets. **The Council has created online data warehouses, mapping services, and data visualization tools to make data available to the public**, free of charge, to aid planning, decision-making, outreach, fundraising, advocacy, and evaluation.

In 2001, we launched our first data portal, **InfoOakland**. In 2005, we followed with an expanded and improved successor platform, **InfoAlamedaCounty**. In 2012, we launched a powerful new mapping and data visualization system—**InfoAlamedaCounty 2.0**. To date, hundreds of data sets and maps have been made available online via these portals, providing valuable information for data-driven decision making in dozens of local organizations. **Our information platform has provided actionable research, data, and analytics to almost 20,000 individuals since January 2012**. We continue to add data sets and functionality to these tools to enhance the public's access to relevant information and increase engagement in civic affairs.

In April 2012, the Oakland City Council adopted a resolution indicating their intent to make data available to the public in raw, accessible formats. In the winter of 2012-13, both Alameda County and the City of Oakland launched open data portals, making their data easily available to the public. In October 2013, the City of Oakland adopted an open data resolution which required the City to fully implement an open data policy for the first time. Our approach to developing this new policy was lauded by the Sunlight Foundation as a national best practice.

[Urban Strategies Council] developed the platform to permit us to analyze and map public health and other data to better inform our place-based strategies, and to more efficiently respond to public inquiries for data.

- Alex Briscoe, Director, Alameda County Health Care Services Agency

OAKLAND'S 100 BLOCK SAFETY PLAN

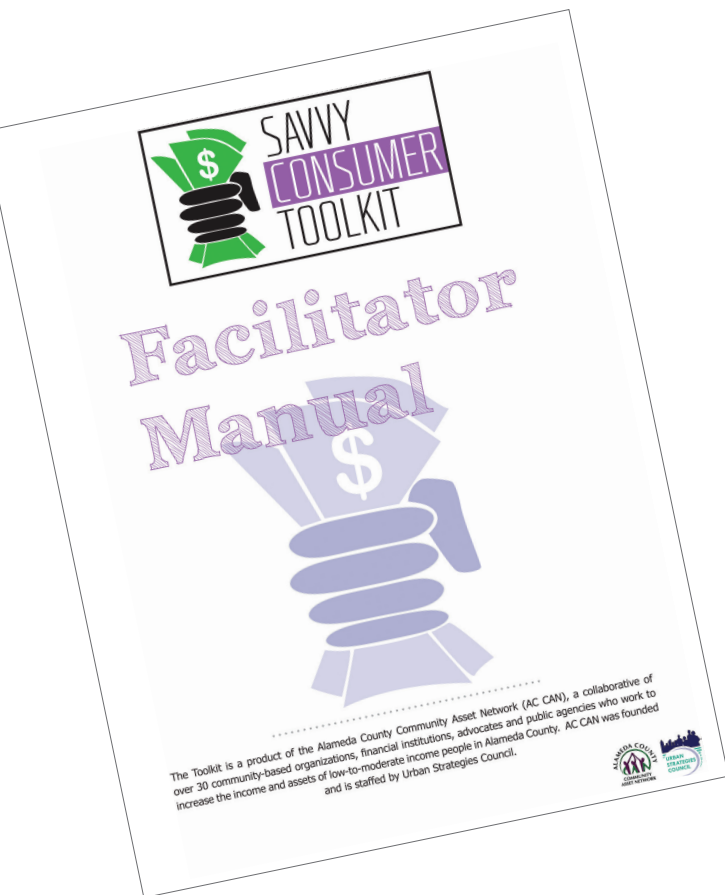
Responding to widespread community interest, we analyzed Oakland Police Department data and found that shootings and homicides were more widespread than reported by the Mayor, resulting in a change of strategy for addressing violent crime in the city.

In October 2011, Oakland Mayor Jean Quan announced a plan to focus police and other public resources on the 100 blocks of Oakland where “90% of the homicides and shootings occur.” In response to the City’s refusal to release information about which 100 blocks were included in the plan, the Council undertook its own study. Our analysis of the data from the previous two years indicated that a geographic area of 1,303 blocks was required to encompass 90% of Oakland’s homicides and shootings. After the May 2012 release of the Council’s analysis, the Mayor and her staff admitted that they were unable to validate their original assertion and were concentrating police and other services in more areas than initially reported. After backing away from the 100 block plan, **the Mayor’s office launched a data-driven program which research has shown to be effective elsewhere.** The Council, responding to requests from residents and community leaders, leveraged its analytical strengths to impact policy outcomes and hold government officials accountable for their questionable use of scarce public safety resources.



SAVVY CONSUMER TOOLKIT

The Savvy Consumer Toolkit—an award-winning and innovative financial education curriculum designed to reduce vulnerability to predatory financial products—was launched by the Alameda County Community Asset Network.



In response to increasing community interest in establishing a coordinated body with the purpose of advancing income and asset development programs and policies, **the Council founded the Alameda County Community Asset Network (AC CAN)**. In 2013, AC CAN released the Savvy Consumer Toolkit after two years of development. The Toolkit is **an innovative financial education curriculum** that uses popular education techniques to teach people about the consequences of predatory financial products and practices on their families and community, informs them about the importance of credit, and connects them to low cost, local credit-building products. The curriculum has been completed by 200 people, and 50 people have completed the train-the-trainer workshop. The Toolkit received the 2013 Innovation Award from the California Asset Building Coalition, which named it the most promising anti-poverty strategy to scale up at the local and state levels. AC CAN staff will be leveraging this award to provide technical assistance to its members and partner organizations, to explore how the Toolkit can be integrated into their programs.

AC CAN has come to be recognized as an innovator in the asset building movement through a collaborative model that engages many different agencies and organizations along the continuum of asset creation and preservation.

- Lena Robinson, Regional Manager, Community Development,
Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco

MOBILIZING CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION: ALLIANCE FOR BOYS AND MEN OF COLOR

We organized a successful regional hearing of the Assembly Select Committee on the Status of Boys and Men of Color in California and helped create a statewide policy agenda to improve conditions for boys and men of color in education, health, employment, and criminal justice.

As the regional convener of the Oakland-Alameda County Alliance for Boys and Men of Color, the Council drives the development of a common agenda and steers cooperative action among a group of thirty-five government agencies and local nonprofit organizations that seek to improve education, employment, and health outcomes for boys and men of color. A fast-growing population projected to comprise nearly three-quarters of the male population in Alameda County by 2030, men and boys of color are confronting significant barriers to success. For example, the graduation rate in 2012 in Oakland Unified School District was 51% for African American males and 43% for Latino males. In addition, as few as 30% of African American and Latino male students scored proficient or better on standardized tests in English Language Arts. Changing this reality is critical to ensuring Alameda County's future prosperity.

Over the course of the past two years, the Alliance has informed and championed a number of legislative efforts, including:

- Regional & State hearings – **In January 2012, the Council organized a regional hearing of the Assembly Select Committee on the Status of Boys and Men of Color in California** to explore leveraging public policy to bolster the economic opportunity and success for boys and men of color. The local hearing complemented hearings in the state legislature which took place in August 2011, 2012, and 2013; the result was a report outlining how the State of California can improve outcomes for this growing, under-served constituency.
- **“Ban the Box”** – As a founding member of the statewide Boys and Men of Color Alliance, the Council advocated for legislation to enable state and local government job applicants to demonstrate their qualifications prior to disclosing criminal history, granting previous offenders a fairer chance to secure employment and reduce the likelihood of recidivism. The Governor signed the bill (AB 218) into law in October 2013.
- African American Male Achievement Initiative in OUSD – **The Council advocated for the passage of eight bills, considered by the state legislature, to address school discipline; five were signed into law**, including a bill that strengthens alternatives to suspension and one that promotes positive interventions for truant students.

For the past two years we have had the opportunity to work with Urban Strategies Council on the Boys and Men of Color work in Oakland and statewide...USC has flexibility to move quickly to opportunities and support community and public agency processes to identify and implement change to improve outcomes for people of color.

- Jorge Ruiz de Velasco, Director of Education Initiatives, Earl Warren Institute on Law and Social Policy

OAK TO NINTH (BROOKLYN BASIN) COMMUNITY BENEFITS COALITION

We re-engaged the Oak to Ninth (Brooklyn Basin) Community Benefits Coalition to ensure that the benefits won by the Coalition, which the Council staffed, are realized now that the Brooklyn Basin project is underway. Those benefits include: \$1.6 million to four community partners for pre-apprenticeship training; 300,000 hours of work for new and first-period apprentices; and 465 affordable housing units in the 3,100-unit development.

In 2009, the Oak to Ninth Community Benefits Coalition, staffed by the Council, successfully negotiated the first independent community benefits agreement on a major Oakland development project, now known as the Brooklyn Basin Project. Our agreement calls for the developer, Signature Properties, to provide \$1.6 million to four community partners for pre-apprenticeship training; 300,000 hours of work for new and first-period apprentices; and 465 affordable housing units in the 3,100-unit development. After several years of delay, the project has secured financing and is set to break ground in early 2014. The Coalition is now re-engaging with the developer to ensure delivery of the tangible benefits that resident leaders fought for several years to secure.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

We helped secure the highest percentage of criminal justice realignment funds devoted to community-based services of any county in the state by founding and staffing the Alameda County Coalition on Criminal Justice Reform (AC3JR).

The passage of AB109 (the California criminal justice realignment bill that delegates authority to the county probation departments for supervision of non-serious offenders) ushered in new opportunities for reforming criminal justice at the county level. Driven by opportunities presented in the new law, the Council formed and is staffing the Alameda County Coalition for Criminal Justice Reform (AC3JR), a coalition of organizations committed to reducing the reliance on incarceration and improving outcomes for those returning from incarceration. AC3JR has been instrumental in their advocacy for: a comprehensive county reentry strategic plan; a community advisory board to advise county officials on their annual AB109 Realignment Plan; and the allocation of at least 40% of state funds to community-based providers. Through the efforts of the Coalition, Alameda County achieved the highest percentage of realignment funds devoted to community based services of any county in the State. The Coalition continues to work on pre-trial release and diversion, community-based reentry services, and transparency in the use of funds by county officials.

REDISTRICTING

We helped Oakland achieve its most democratic redistricting process to date by leading a coalition of community organizations, providing technical and strategy support to the coalition, and building the **oaklandvotes.org** website, which raises awareness of residents' rights to participate in the redistricting process.

The Council led a coalition of community organizers to create awareness of the redistricting process that the City of Oakland was required to undertake in response to the 2010 Census data. **The Oakland Votes Coalition informed communities across the City about their right to contribute to the redistricting process**, which has the potential to significantly impact local government. The Council conducted training and provided technical and strategic support to the coalition, including building the **oaklandvotes.org** website. The Coalition's advocacy work succeeded in compelling the City of Oakland to address all City Council districts during the process, instead of only two as originally planned. Additionally, while districts have previously been drawn with a waterfront-to-hills configuration, the Oakland Votes Coalition secured agreement among all City Council members to eliminate this requirement; this enabled districts to be organized around "communities of interest." At the close of the public process, our Coalition succeeded in more than tripling the number of resident-submitted maps and conducted community meetings with far richer engagement and capacity building than those conducted by the City. The final process was the most democratic redistricting to date in Oakland despite having significant flaws, some of which will be attended to through our new effort to create a Citizens Redistricting Commission in 2014.



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ATTRACTING INVESTMENT

Our success with galvanizing collaboration among public and community-based partner organizations has attracted attention and recognition from national grant makers and policy organizations.

In June 2013, **the Council was awarded a one-year planning grant to serve as the backbone organization and local partner for the Aspen Institute's Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund**. The Fund seeks to support cross-sector collective impact that will benefit youth who are neither enrolled in school nor participating in the labor market. The Council is convening local partners to develop a proposal for building onramps to career pathways for 18 to 24 year-olds who have been involved in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. At the end of the year, the Council will apply for a 3-5 year implementation grant, aiming to bring additional resources into the community to improve services for this marginalized population.

LOOKING AHEAD

Known for our work addressing the root causes of persistent poverty using research, data, and collaboration, we are uniquely positioned to increase our impact with two new initiatives.

DATA-DRIVEN CITIES: BUILDING AN ECOSYSTEM

Rich data sets are more readily available than ever before and can be leveraged to inform insights, strategies, and decisions. The Council aims to help nonprofits, government agencies, and individuals seize this opportunity to adopt a more data-driven approach to community change. We are building an ecosystem where data-driven innovation is not only possible, but is eventually the standard.

We will accelerate our efforts to democratize data in the community development sector, advocating for local governments to join the open data movement and provide equal access to public information for all residents. We will continue to provide research and analysis that allows our partners to understand complex issues, highlighting relevant context and unique conditions. As no sector truly operates in isolation, we will continue to build the capacity of residents and organizations to engage in informed, data-driven decision-making. Our focus on creating an ecosystem to support data-driven cities is guided by these principles:

- Our communities must have access to reliable, trustworthy data and information.
- Data without meaning and context are worthless.
- Data-driven decisions must always consider equity and social impact.

The Council's skill sets—collaboration, research, policy, innovation and advocacy—position it to play a unique and important role. There is no other local organization with the same capability to guide systems leaders and cross-sector partners through a research-driven and collaborative process towards equity in our practices, services, and investments.

- Lori A. Cox, Agency Director, Alameda County Social Services Agency





The Council does not do research or mapping in a vacuum; instead, they produce actionable analyses that enable us to make informed and strategic data-driven decisions.

- Anthony Panarese, Organizing Director, Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment

FROM COLLABORATION TO COLLECTIVE IMPACT

For over 25 years, the Council has partnered with community and government organizations to work toward common outcomes. As needed, we have served as initiators, conveners, consultants, and participants. However, **the multi-dimensionality of poverty requires collaboration** that brings effective strategies and programs to a scale commensurate with the magnitude of the problems we seek to address. **We recognize that the necessary scale can only be achieved if we move our work and the community's efforts from collaboration to collective impact.**

The collective impact approach is a promising strategy for increasing the effectiveness of collaborative efforts that aim to address large-scale, complex social problems. Collective impact initiatives are defined as: "long-term commitments by a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem. Their actions are supported by a shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, and ongoing communication, and are staffed by an independent backbone organization."¹

As evidenced by our invitation from the Aspen Institute to anchor the successful Oakland-Alameda County application to the Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund, and our invitation from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to participate in their grant process, the Council has the capacity to function as a backbone organization (an essential element of collective impact initiatives). Where the preconditions for collective impact (an influential champion, adequate financial resources, and urgency for change) do not exist, the Council can help create those conditions. The Council's work moving forward will focus on making existing collaborations more effective, determining which efforts might form the basis for a collective impact initiative, and which current challenges and new opportunities lend themselves to a collective impact approach.

1. John Kania and Mark Kramer, "Collective Impact," *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (Winter 2011).

I am very pleased to have Urban Strategies Council as a trusted voice in our city, one that does not compromise on principle and that works tirelessly across silos and institutions to connect efforts that would otherwise be isolated, disconnected initiatives with less impact.

- Libby Schaaf, Councilmember, District 4, City of Oakland

[The Council's] online data visualization tool **InfoAlamedaCounty.org** is a sleeping giant and, with more intentional support from the philanthropic community, can be activated to build a much stronger and more informed civic engagement.

- Angela Glover Blackwell, PolicyLink Founder and CEO

SUPPORT US

Your support is vital to realizing our vision of a community that is equitable, safe, and brimming with opportunity for all to live and work prosperously. Please visit our website www.urbanstrategies.org to donate or contact us to learn more about how you can take action and help accelerate our work.



THANK YOU

We are grateful for our donors, partners, and volunteers, without whose support we would be unable to continue our work.

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MAJOR CLIENTS

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Alameda County Public Health Department
Community Catalyst
R.A.D. Schwartz Foundation
City of Oakland
Enterprise Community Partners
New Schools Venture Fund
First 5 Alameda County
Oakland Unified School District

USC has been an invaluable asset to the District and to the community, bringing rigorous analysis of data, outstanding facilitation skills, and credibility within the community for independent and thoughtful participation in and support of community processes. These examples of our work together demonstrate the importance, for the District and the Oakland community, of having access to an organization with the skill sets, capacities, and flexibility to support a community-based approach to transformative school reform.

- Tony Smith, Superintendent, Oakland Unified School District

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The Urban Strategies Council Staff

Very few (if any) Oakland community-based organizations and leaders bring the credibility, urgency, creativity, and integrity that Junious Williams and Urban Strategies lend to each and every project they tackle...Because the team is involved in a number of the key educational initiatives, projects, and programs taking place in Oakland and Oakland Unified School District, their staff is positioned to break down silos and help clients and partners understand how their work connects with and/or supports other related efforts.

- Jonathan Klein, Executive Director, Great Oakland Public Schools Leadership Center

