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WE RISE 2022: BY US FOR US Community Forward Final Report

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Credits

Originally incubated at the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health and now in its fifth year, WE RISE 2022: BY US FOR US is a grassroots, community-driven initiative that invests in local organizations, artists, and leaders to strengthen community wellbeing and healing across Los Angeles County. Throughout May, Mental Health Awareness Month, community partners provided access to resources and opportunities for connection through art installations, cultural experiences, and other community engagement projects. To learn more visit [werise.la](https://www.werise.la)

On behalf of the Community Forward Programming team, we want to thank the contributors - community partners, healers, artists, organizers, Cause Communications, Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, and others - whose leadership, creativity, and dedication made WE RISE 2022 a success.

Robin Garcia and Anu Yadav

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WE RISE 2022 Community Forward Programming

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Diaper Drive and Art Community Event produced by LA Baby Cooperative, May 22, 2022. Photo by Carla Coffing.

Create to Destress event produced by 18th Street Arts Center, May 6, 2022. Photo by Carla Coffing.

Abuelita's Remédios Festival produced by Meztlí Projects, May 7, 2022. Photo by Cyn Yen.

Bringing Community Together event by Paving the Way Foundation, May 28, 2022. Photo by Carla Coffing.

Resisting Through Sueños/Resisting Through Dreams event produced by Youth Justice Coalition, May 27, 2022. Photo by Cyn Yen.

Spring into Wellness event by Mapache City Projects & LA Rooted, May 14, 2022. Photo by Chris Nelson.

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Introduction

“We must move from a space of resilience to a space of joy.”

- Rogelio Tabárez, El Nido-Best Start and Alliance United

Two years into a global pandemic, along with acute social injustices, our collective future demands grassroots leadership. In response to these challenges, frontline communities have responded with brilliance and creativity in building culturally relevant recovery and wellness programming. WE RISE 2022: BY US FOR US Community Forward Programming (WE RISE 2022) supported a series of community-led events on health and healing across Los Angeles County during May, Mental Health Awareness Month.

This report summarizes the WE RISE 2022 programming goals, strategies, and outcomes. It includes partner feedback that identifies key successes, areas for improvement, and recommendations for future programming to better meet the stated goals of the WE RISE initiative.

A Community-Centered Approach

WE RISE 2022 invested in local organizations, artists, and leaders to strengthen community wellbeing. Throughout Mental Health Awareness Month, community partners provided access to resources and opportunities for connection through art installations, cultural experiences, and other community engagement projects. As the ripple effects of the pandemic, social injustices, and global pressures continue, WE RISE 2022 emphasized positive programming that connected youth and those who love them, while amplifying our collective strength.

WE RISE has evolved from a campaign focused primarily on directing people to

resources, to one that focuses on:

- strengthening communities
- engaging community leaders in embracing mental health and wellbeing
- supporting lead organizations in developing, messaging, and connecting with others.

In this process, mental health is de-stigmatized, and resources and support become part of the ongoing work of organizations in the community.

This year WE RISE integrated arts and community-based programming, recognizing that creativity and cultural expressions are effective, interwoven

strategies that foster community wellness. Many projects addressed wellbeing and its connection to systemic racism, COVID-19, housing, jobs, and other pressing social issues. Community-based organizations provided direct essential services, food, diapers, and other critical resources. They used arts-based strategies to educate, empower, and nurture a sense of purpose, belonging, and connection in their communities.

WE RISE 2022 was built upon the success of last year's community-centered framework, engaging organizations with a demonstrated track record of serving local residents, low-income communities, and youth. Priority was given to projects

rooted in community engagement and/or local leadership development that effectively use arts and cultural strategies to advance positive mental health outcomes. It also included process-oriented or event-based projects with some form of delivery in May 2022.

Within this framework, the Community Forward team managed two distinct realities. On one hand, community groups are often focused on work that takes place over decades, nurturing relationships of trust with a commitment to transformational change. On the other, publicly funded projects must adhere to policy and legislation, and deliver tangible results within set timelines and scopes of work. Balancing these two realities was one of the hardest challenges we faced implementing WE RISE 2022.

Keeping this in mind, the Community Forward team built upon relationships formed last year with partners and worked to bridge gaps between county processes and urgent community needs. Many groups are deeply rooted within their communities and are able to respond quickly in areas the County has a hard time reaching. In the face of the pandemic and the intense social isolation over the last few years, many community-based organizations acted

as grassroots hubs for connection, resources, and healing. The Community Forward team convened a county-wide working group for partners to network, share assets, and design projects. The program design continued to be refined in real-time, both as a result of the very short timeline as well as to adapt to partner and funding stakeholder needs.

In addition to serving as Co-Directors and curators, we worked to ensure that projects were in alignment with the larger WE RISE initiative and rooted in equity relating to representation, types of events, and geography. We created the program infrastructure, facilitated the working group, and managed partner projects. We also met with the five district Supervisor offices as well as other county departments and offices, many of which expressed unequivocal support and enthusiasm for this groundbreaking cross-sector initiative.

The projects included in this report demonstrate the ability of community leadership to heal and transform their communities and thus society at-large. During the last two years, community partners directly engaged over 40,945 people both online and in-person. Many partner organizations were able to build from their WE RISE 2021 projects, thus

engaging even more additional partners, artists, and community members for WE RISE 2022.

The Supervisorial District Snapshots offer a picture of how WE RISE 2022 leveraged the uniqueness of each District. Community Partners were invited to participate based on their demonstrated ability to provide services and understanding of community context in each District. Some also served as a keystone partner collaborating with a wider network of groups and artists which allowed the Community Forward team to expand the reach of WE RISE 2022. Additionally, two current and former Los Angeles County Creative Strategist Artists-in-Residence were engaged to produce projects.

WE RISE 2022

122 Events

92 youth-focused events

23,891 people engaged

22 main partner organizations

471 artists

1,031,235 social media impressions

WE RISE 2022 Community Forward Partners

With support from the Community Forward team, each partner managed and produced their own projects and often acted as a hub in collaboration with many other organizations and artists both within districts and across the County.

● 18th Street Arts Center

Community events addressing mental health, food justice, the environment, and youth participation

● Art Time Out

A series of drawing/creative coloring workshops promoting art as self-care, combined with voter education and outreach for LA County shelter residents

● Arts Council for Long Beach

District-wide collaboration on workshops, art installations, and performances addressing issues of mental health, culture, basic needs, spirituality, racial injustice, and housing

● Community Coalition

Month-long series with workshops, exhibits on the 30th Anniversary of civil unrest, bike tour, art walk, and festival in South LA

● Dignity and Power Now

Community events for systems-impacted community members on healing and wellness modalities in partnership with Frontline Wellness Network and Black Lives Matter LA

● El Nido-Best Start and Alliance United

Workshops, video production, public art installation, and plant giveaways on Ancestral medicine and healing

● Esperanza Community Housing

South Central Film Festival amplifying emerging voices of youth, Indigenous, Black, Brown, LGBTQIA2s+², immigrants, and people of all abilities in cinema

● Gente Organizada

Resource fair for queer youth of color and families in Pomona to elevate awareness of health, wellness, artistic, cultural, and direct services

● Instituto de Educación Popular del Sur de California (IDEPSCA)

Spanish language wellness workshops on health education, popular theater, art workshops, and PPE/carekit giveaways for low wage workers, domestic workers, and day laborers

● LA Baby Cooperative

A diaper, infant supplies, and clothing drive, outdoor festival, and workshops on job skills and wellness for migrant and Indigenous mothers in Koreatown and MacArthur Park.

² LGBTQIA2s+ refers to people who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Two-Spirit, and the other ways people may choose to self-identify.



- **LA Commons**

Pop-up community art activations and an outdoor installation

- **Levitt Pavilion Los Angeles**

Pop-up music concerts in MacArthur Park/Westlake and South Central at food distribution sites, health fairs, and an open mic

- **Los Angeles Community Action Network**

Wellness event for Black and Brown women in Skid Row impacted by the COVID-19 crisis

- **Mapache City Projects and LA Rooted**

Community walk with art and wellness activities

- **Meztli Projects**

Workshops with diverse populations including systems-impacted youth, LGBTQIA2s+ communities, and monolingual Spanish speaking parents and/or caretakers

- **Mujeres de Maiz**

Interactive mobile murals, a wellness festival, arts workshops, and digital storytelling

- **Paving the Way Foundation**

Community walk, resource fair, and youth art exhibit for re-entry families and the surrounding communities

- **SBCC Thrive**

Youth arts festival with participatory workshops and art galleries

- **Self Help Graphics & Art**

Meditative outdoor green space in Boyle Heights for individual and collective wellness

- **Tía Chucha's Centro Cultural & Bookstore**

Festival and book drive with readings, poetry, performances, and art installations

- **Unión de Vecinos**

Food distribution, community clean-ups, art giveaways, and neighborhood beautification in Boyle Heights

- **Youth Justice Coalition**

Arts workshops for systems-impacted youth

First District

Socializing Services through Art

22 Events

77 Artists

2,159 people engaged

72,601 social media impressions

“I felt safe here. We don’t have safe spaces for women in Skid Row so this was so important and much needed. My body and head feel so much lighter.”

- Participant from LACAN wellness event

“It was about people working together to transform power.”

- Elizabeth Blaney, Unión de Vecinos

Partners

Gente Organizada

Levitt Pavilion Los Angeles

Los Angeles Community Action
Network (LACAN)

Self Help Graphics & Art

Unión de Vecinos

WE RISE 2022 partners in the First Supervisorial District paired cultural work with essential services, providing pop-up mobile concerts, art and gardening workshops, ancestral healing workshops, community cleanups, food drives, and healing circles for Black and Brown women in Skid Row, and resource fairs. WE RISE 2022 allowed groups to bolster their ongoing programming in new ways, and many plan to continue their project work beyond May.

- **Pop-Up Concerts.** Levitt Pavilion Los Angeles provided live music at essential service sites and produced an open mic, engaging 1650 attendees. They built a stronger web of support across many organizations, people, and artists.
- **Large Scale Collaborations.** Gente Organizada brought over 13 organizations together for their resource fair for LGBTQIA2s+ youth. These groups aim to continue to collaborate in Pomona beyond May.
- **Art, Culture, and the Environment.** Self Help Graphics & Art distributed over 100 wellness kits, created a garden in their parking lot, and offered healing and artmaking workshops, performances, and environmental programs.

Key Issues: food security, mental health, essential services, LGBTQIA2s+ youth, housing, environmental justice, public health



Garden Block Party produced by Levitt Pavilion Los Angeles, May 7, 2022. Photo by Cyn Yen.



Concert in the Garden produced by Self Help Graphics & Art, May 26, 2022. Image courtesy of Eric Jaipal and Self Help Graphics & Art.

Second District

Healing and Social Justice

26 Events

95 Artists

11,941 people engaged

139,232 social media impressions

“I got a glimpse of the future I want to live in. Imagine every park in the County offering culturally relevant arts and wellness programs grounded in local ecology and led by local community healers and artists. WE RISE allowed us to prototype such a program.”

- Sandra de la Loza, Mapache City Projects and LA Rooted

“LA Baby Cooperative has been a space to go to for me to have time with the community and to take leadership in roles that I have never had the chance to do.”

- Sussy Luna, LA Baby Cooperative

Partners

Community Coalition

Dignity and Power Now

Esperanza Community Housing

LA Baby Cooperative

LA Commons

Mapache City Projects and LA

Rooted

Youth Justice Coalition

WE RISE 2022 partners in the Second Supervisorial District worked at the intersection of healing and immigration, women's issues, youth, and social justice. Projects included a children's festival for immigrant families in Koreatown, distribution of nearly 12,000 diapers, participatory art exhibitions, creative artmaking around visions of the next LA within historically marginalized communities, and art and healing workshops for systems-impacted youth. Each group used culturally relevant strategies to reach communities and engaged new partners. Groups will continue to integrate wellness, arts, and cultural work into their everyday operations.

- **Creating Our Next LA.** LA Commons produced an outdoor installation in Grand Park and pop-up art activations at partner WE RISE events, inviting community members to share their vision for a healthier, more livable Los Angeles.
- **Community Care Clinics.** Dignity and Power Now distributed 150 mutual aid bags and 200 healing kits, and provided free healing services to people impacted by state violence. Over two years of WE RISE they reached over 715 people.
- **Healing Justice and Organizing.** Community Coalition reached over 500 South LA residents through their month-long series, featuring a community-designed art exhibition on 30 years of civil unrest, bike tour, art festival, and arts workshops.
- **Youth Storytelling.** Esperanza Community Housing reached nearly 300 people through the South Central Film Festival showcasing youth filmmakers and offering filmmaking workshops, with plans to continue their festival and outreach.

Key Issues: mental health, policing, economic and racial justice, immigration, youth, storytelling



Community Care Fest produced by Dignity and Power Now, May 7, 2022. Photo by James Takamatsu.



Youth filmmaking workshop by Esperanza Community Housing, May 20, 2022. Photo by Sandy Navarro.

Third District

Creativity as Medicine

18 Events

147 Artists

4,724 people engaged

588,598 social media impressions

“The Healing Fair was a truly inspirational and amazing event... On that day you can feel the healing, feel the sense of pride knowing that we have a strong community that cares for one another.”

- Ramiro Rodriguez, El Nido-Best Start and Alliance United

“Intergenerational healing happened... It was definitely a celebration of life and creativity.”

- Rosalilia Mendoza, Tía Chucha's Centro Cultural & Bookstore

Partners

18th Street Arts Center

El Nido-Best Start and Alliance
United

Tía Chucha's Centro Cultural &
Bookstore

Partners in the Third Supervisorial District focused on ancestral healing, wellness, and healing justice as tools for recovery. Projects included locally-designed arts and healing workshops, community organizing, mural making, and a book drive. Partners additionally worked together to cross-promote, share resources, and coordinate outreach efforts. They aim to continue this cross-pollination beyond WE RISE 2022.

- **Literacy as Wellness.** Tía Chucha's Centro Cultural & Bookstore produced their 17th Annual Celebrating Words Festival, distributing over 1000 books in both Spanish and English, along with artwork, coloring books, 250 herb plants and trees, and over 150 PPE supplies. The festival hired over 75 cultural workers, 13 local artists, and reached over 1800 people.
- **Collective Healing through Murals.** El Nido-Best Start and Alliance United surveyed their community asking the question, “What does the community need to heal?” They engaged 300 people, including 200 youth who painted a large-scale mural that traveled to many of the WE RISE 2022 events and depicted a community vision of sovereignty, agency, and resilience.
- **Identity, Belonging, and Wellness.** 18th Street Arts Center worked with five artists and artist collectives, bringing in over 244 participants on topics of healing and recovery, listening, identity, and belonging. They employed 40 local artists and cultural workers and engaged 35 youth.

Key Issues: Indigenous culture, literacy, youth, ancestral healing, recovery, cultural production



The 17th Annual Celebrating Words Festival and Book Giveaway produced by Tía Chucha's Centro Cultural & Bookstore, May 21, 2022. Photo by Noe Montes.



El Nido-Best Start and Alliance United, May 14, 2022. Photo by Chris Nelson.

Fourth District

Community Care as Mental Health

31 Events

27 Artists

4,724 people engaged

67,673 social media impressions

Keystone Partners

Arts Council for Long Beach

Instituto de Educación Popular
del Sur de California (IDEPSCA)

Additional Partners

Angels Gate Cultural Center

Compound LB

Creative Journal Expressive Arts

DreamKreator Studio

Exceptional Children's Foundation

Flux Art Space

Healing Elements And Lifeways (HEAL)

Jazz Angels

Khmer Girls in Action

Lavender Services

LGBTQ Center of Long Beach

Long Beach Blues Society

Long Beach Polytechnic High School

Long Beach Unified School District

Pacific Island Ethnic Art Museum

Rock Club-Music is the Remedy

The NowHouse Education Group

United Cambodian Community - Living
Arts Program

"... I felt I had no one at that time, that is why we need this type of guidance and support...so we know our rights and know we have groups that support workers like us."

- Day Laborer and Program Participant, IDEPSCA

"I have struggled all my life with being brave enough to live my authenticity. It took me until I was 55 to finally come out and live my truth. And this practice of making art helps me keep stepping outside my box and not being afraid to express myself truthfully."

- Participant with DOSAYGAY! Queer Art Classes by Lucas Gordon & The LGBTQ Center of Long Beach

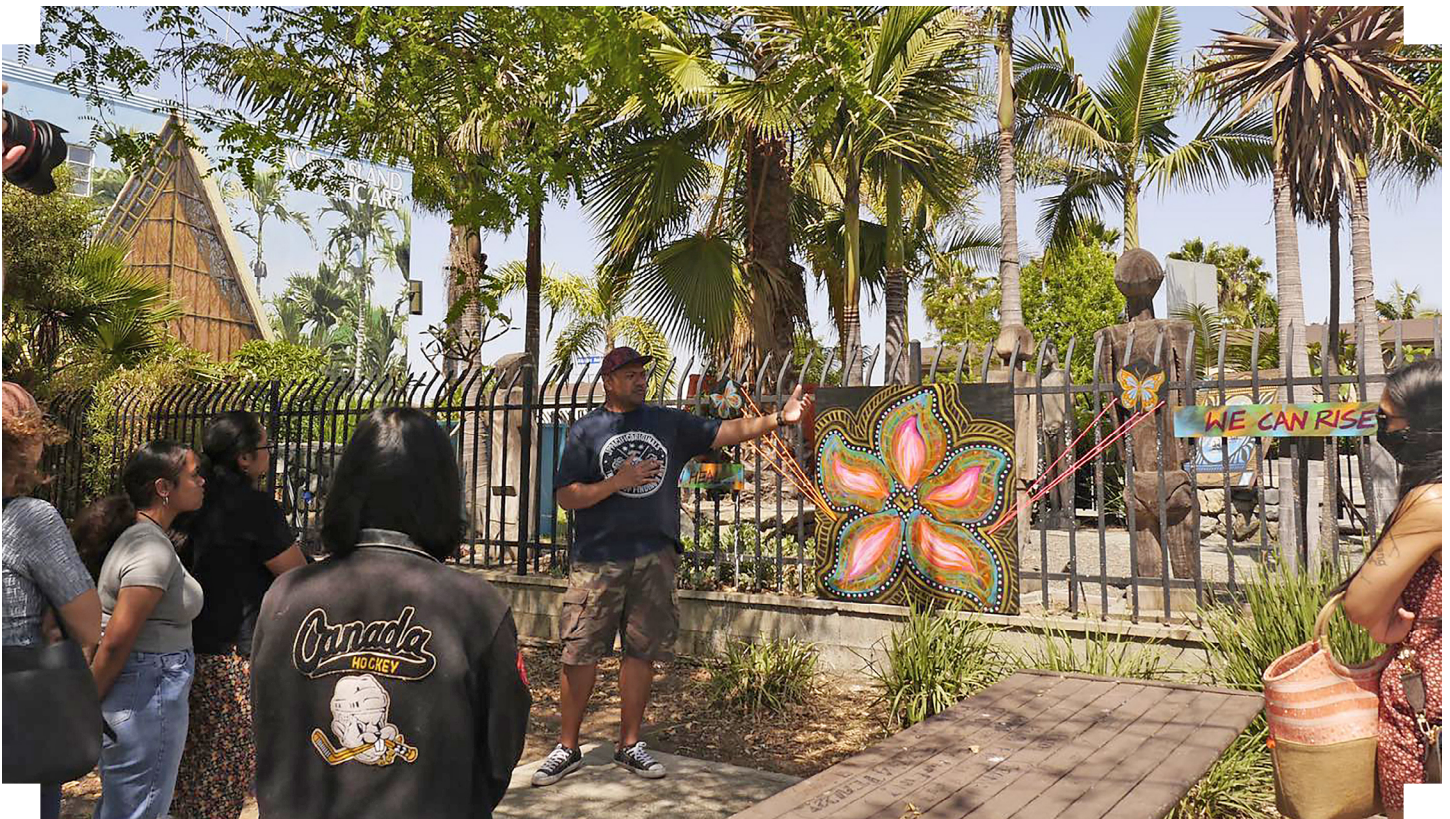
Projects in the Fourth Supervisorial District focused on the power of art to support recovery and community organizing. Projects ranged from popular theater workshops for day laborers to live painting and exhibitions on wellness and spirituality. Groups produced mixed media art installations, talking circles, panels on wellness and racial justice, and mutual aid events to support healthy communities. Groups built upon their WE RISE projects from last year, deepening and expanding community relationships, fine tuning approaches, and developing an infrastructure to continue to offer services beyond May.

- **Locally-Driven Partnerships.** Building upon their district-wide WE RISE 2021 partnership, Arts Council for Long Beach and Angels Gate Cultural Center formed a second collaboration supporting artists and performers on locally-driven projects to explore mental health, wellness, and creativity. They brought over 18 organizations together and reached over 4,481 people.
- **Theater as Healing.** IDEPSCA engaged over 243 day laborers and domestic workers through popular theater to raise awareness about labor rights and provided food and wellness kits at all four of their worker centers. Twelve Mental Health Promotoras (Promoters) from the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health also provided mental health resources directly to workers at events.

Key Issues: Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), heritage, disability access, food security, housing, LGBTQIA2s+, spirituality, women, veterans, day laborers, domestic workers, immigration



Participants at Teatro de Bienestar theater event, May 16, 2022. Courtesy of IDEPSCA.



TOE FO'I: The Return, The Ho'okahi exterior art installation created by Jason "JP" Pereira, produced by Pacific Island Ethnic Art Museum. Originally supported by Empowered Pacific Islander Communities. Photo by Bryson Nihipali.

Fifth District

Ancestral Healing and Community Care

28 Events

119 Artists

2,609 people engaged

163,131 social media impressions

“This is the first time I shared my art with a lot of people. It has helped me become more social and gain confidence.”

- Sergio Campos, SBCC Digital Arts youth participant

“Mujeres de Maiz has taught me about my culture and has empowered our youth positively to nurture their femininity with pride and empowerment.”

- Program Participant, Mujeres de Maiz

Partners

Art Time Out

Meztli Projects

Mujeres de Maiz

Paving the Way Foundation

SBCC Thrive

Projects in the Fifth Supervisorial District focused on cultural and ancestral healing. They included pop-up murals, music concerts, creative voter outreach, a youth art walk and festival, and holistic healing work for groups including LGBTQIA2s+ community members, Elders, and people experiencing homelessness. Groups and participants expressed how meaningful and powerful it was to participate in projects designed by their community.

- **Youth Art.** Paving the Way Foundation hosted an art walk and festival for reentry youth, reaching over 300 people.
- **Traditional Healing and Women.** Women's cultural collective, Mujeres de Maiz produced a series of wellbeing workshops, an intercultural art festival, women's circles, and a mural engaging over 1500 people.
- **Community Arts.** SBCC Thrive hosted a festival for youth and families with workshops in Wilmington, Lancaster, and Palmdale ranging from digital art to theater and drum circles. They also offered COVID-19 test kits as well as other health and financial resources.
- **Ancestral Healing.** Meztli Projects hosted Abuelitas Remédios, a festival offering free ancestral and cultural healing services, food demonstrations, art workshops, and other activities for children and Elders, with over 500 in attendance.

Key Issues: BIPOC, incarceration/reentry, Indigenous, LGBTQIA2s+, systems-impacted families and youth, women, elders, ancestral healing



WeRise Antelope Valley Art Festival hosted by SBCC Thrive, May 27, 2022. Photo by Carla Coffing.



Artist and co-director, Liliflor Ramirez at the MLK Mural produced by Mujeres de Maiz. Photo by Liliflor Ramirez.

Areas for Improvement and Key Recommendations

WE RISE is a bold and unique model at the intersection of arts, government, and community engagement. It has great potential for transformational impact, however, there are extenuating issues that if not addressed will impede its long-term success. Unanimously, community partners said they needed more time, clearer communications, and more input into the programmatic design, marketing, outreach, and evaluation processes in order for this collaborative impact model to reflect its stated goals and values.

The recommendations outlined below are shaped by comments from community members, feedback from partner organizations during routine check-ins and exit interviews, and our assessment of WE RISE's successes and challenges over the last two years.

Invest in multi-year engagement

- Invest in multi-year community-led programming for longer-term impact.
- Plan a year in advance, building relationships of trust with community partners.
- Provide opportunities for learning exchange and leadership development.

Center community leadership

- Start by listening, designing program structure in close consultation with communities throughout the entire process.
- Use a clear Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) lens to support generative relationships of mutuality.
- Account for the additional skilled labor and time required to fully integrate the needs of authorizers with partner goals and capacities.
- Conduct robust community outreach in each District to strengthen equitable representation.
- Design a participatory, community-based assessment tool and evaluation of WE RISE to gauge impact beyond the program timeline.

Conclusion

“Being part of WE RISE for a second year was a tremendous privilege and learning opportunity. It gave depth to new and existing partnerships.”

- Allegra Padilla, Levitt Pavilion Los Angeles

“Make sure you bring this back for the youth next year!”

- student participant, Youth Justice Coalition



WE RISE 2022 expanded and deepened its community partnerships across the County. Partners offered culturally relevant spaces for healing and civic engagement, and provided direct services to communities using cultural and traditional modalities. They engaged youth, families, and communities, and built important relationships with each other. In doing so, they strengthened existing networks, worked through an equity and inclusion lens, and continued to build community solutions to our most pressing social issues.

Many of the organizations shared their enthusiasm to continue this work year-round to deepen community impact. With multi-year support, WE RISE has the potential to become a robust cross-sector, interdisciplinary model that can strengthen community leadership and existing community-based infrastructure throughout the County.

The WE RISE 2022: BY US FOR US Community Forward Programming Co-Directors were honored to have curated WE RISE 2022. We are inspired every day by how communities are finding solutions and envisioning the world we so justly deserve. By fully supporting the extraordinary brilliance and creativity of community-driven leadership, we can transform communities throughout Los Angeles County as part of a larger national and global movement of healing, wellness, and equity.

