



# WE RISE WERISE.LA

## THIS IS HOW WE RISE

Community Arts & Culture Projects 2021 Final Report

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# Credits



Community Arts & Culture Projects is part of WE RISE, the annual Mental Health Awareness Month initiative of the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health's ongoing WHY WE RISE campaign, funded by sponsorships and Prop 63. To learn more, visit [werise.la](https://werise.la)

Thank you to all the community partners, healers, artists, organizers, and others who worked with such commitment, expertise, and creativity to make WE RISE 2021 Community Arts and Culture Projects possible.

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Danzante Azteca at Culture Cures Community Altar, Community Coalition. Photo by Glauz Diego.

Celebrating Words Festival & Book Giveaway, Tía Chucha's Centro Cultural & Bookstore. Photo by Noe Montes.

Diaper drive, LA Baby Cooperative. Photo by Irene Montantes.

Musicians from Extra Ancestral, Levitt Pavilion Los Angeles. Photo by Chris Nelson.



# Introduction

Collective trauma requires collective healing. Now we are involved in collective liberation.

—**Rogelio Tabarez**  
Valle Vida & Alliance United

As the interlocking crises of our world today lay bare deeper systemic inequities, frontline communities are responding with bold leadership, creativity, and solutions to the problems they face. WE RISE 2021, an initiative of the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (LACDMH), amplified community-led arts and healing practices through Community Arts and Culture Projects (CACP) for Mental Health Awareness Month in May.

CACP supported a dynamic range of artwork, workshops, resources, and direct services driven by communities to address critical social issues. Their collective activity celebrated and represented an incredible diversity of creative expression across Los Angeles County. This report summarizes their work and proposes recommendations on how LACDMH and the County at large can further engage grassroots leadership, deliver services, and highlight solutions by impacted communities themselves.

## A Community-Centered Approach

In the face of a pandemic and intense social isolation, many community-based organizations acted as wellness centers entrusted by communities for healing, connection, and cultural expression. The CACP team designed a process of engaging such hubs of connection, overlapping with the community-centered focus of the LACDMH 2020–2030 Strategic Plan. The team’s approach included organizing a County-wide working group of artists, leaders, and grassroots organizers from diverse community access platforms—community gathering spaces, centers, and other networks of connection—to share resources and propose projects based on existing work and community-identified needs. The team facilitated meetings using arts, organizing, and popular education methods that centered the knowledge and experiences of partners as a basis for mutual learning and exchange for project development and program operations. They built a communications structure to support adjustments in real time to meet the priorities of impacted communities.

WE RISE 2021 produced robust programming that served over 17,000 residents across every district in Los Angeles County. The projects in this report demonstrate the importance of community leadership to heal and transform society. As Mr. Tabarez so wisely reminds us, this is the work of collective liberation.

This is how **WE RISE**.

144 Events

287 Artists

181 Organizations\*

391 Program Hours

17,054 People Engaged

Over 500,000 Reached by Community-Led Social Media‡

## CACP & the LACDMH 2020–2030 Strategic Plan

**Goal Prevention Services: Early Identification & Engagement (1A.2)**  
*Action* CACP working group engaged community access platforms.  
*Action* Partners developed projects to promote community healing based on existing work and needs.

**Goal Prevention Services: Navigation & Follow-Up (1A.3)**  
*Action* CACP developed critical navigation and follow-up methods with partners using a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) lens.

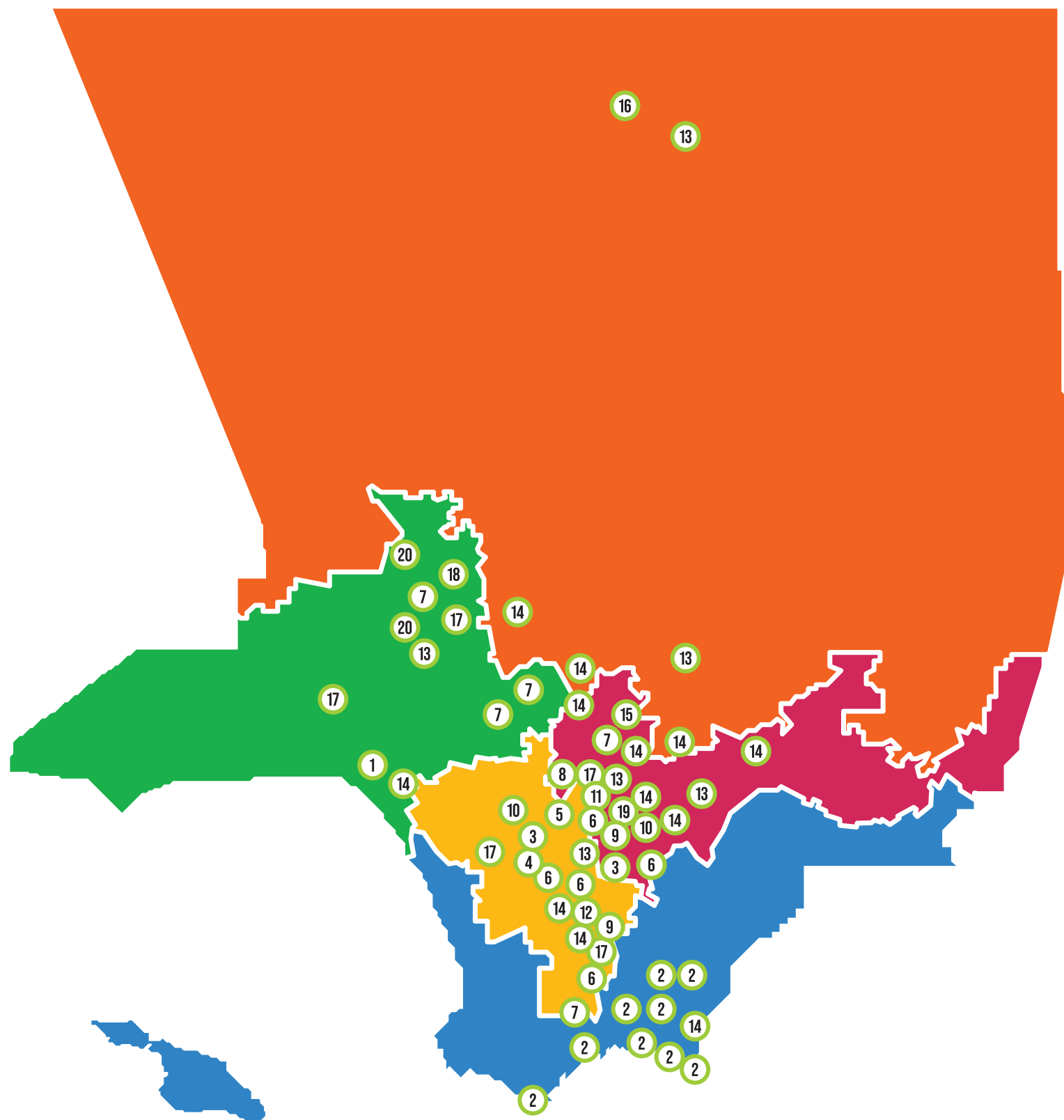
**Goal Social Support: People (1B.2)**  
*Action* Partners built meaningful connections, shared resources, and invited collaborators to deepen community impact through the projects.

**Goal Social Support: Purpose (1B.2)**  
*Action* CACP created opportunities for purposeful work, creative expression, civic participation, training, and education.

**Goal Organizational Support: Structure (4.1, 4.2)**  
*Action* CACP built an adaptive organizational structure meant to support partners’ long-term goals.

**Goal Organizational Support: Outcomes (4.3)**  
*Action* CACP engaged in a continuous process of listening, learning, and improving to help inform strategies and change.  
*Action* CACP instituted multidirectional communication with arts, organizing, and popular education methods.  
*Action* CACP integrated partner ideas to optimize communications and operations with the values of a Just Culture and continuous quality improvement.

# Projects / County Map



## WE RISE 2021 Community Arts and Culture Projects Partners

- 1 18th Street Arts Center**  
Mail art campaign on wellbeing, panel on systemic racism, and artist-led workshops on self-compassion
  - 2 Arts Council for Long Beach**  
District-wide collaboration on workshops, art installations, and performances addressing mental health, culture, basic needs, spirituality, racial justice, and housing
  - 3 CicLAvia**  
Self-guided bike ride, music playlist, and downloadable map of local landmarks
  - 4 Community Coalition**  
Healing workshops and participatory altar to lives lost to COVID-19 in South LA
  - 5 Frontline Wellness Network & Black Lives Matter LA**  
Healing services and programming for Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) communities, frontline organizers, and system-impacted families
  - 6 Garment Worker Center**  
Storytelling, speak-out, COVID vaccinations, and food bank for garment workers
  - 7 Instituto de Educación Popular del Sur de California (IDEPSCA)**  
Hygiene kit distribution, mobile altar and popular theater with day laborers and domestic workers
  - 8 LA Baby Cooperative**  
Diaper/wipes drive and talking circles with low-income/no-income immigrant mothers and families
  - 9 Levitt Pavilion Los Angeles**  
Mobile concerts at essential services sites
  - 10 LA Co-op Lab**  
Workshops on building worker cooperatives
  - 11 Los Angeles Community Action Network**  
Food drive, healing sessions, and music event for unhoused residents on Skid Row
  - 12 Mapache City Projects & LA Rooted**  
Self-guided walk and wellness activities
  - 13 Meztli Projects**  
Workshops and artwork with system-impacted youth, LGBTQ+ communities, monolingual Spanish speaking parents, and others
  - 14 Mujeres de Maíz**  
Interactive mobile murals and arts workshops on Ancestral healing, and digital storytelling
  - 15 Northeast Los Angeles Community Alternatives to 911 (NELA CAT-911) & Acción Comunitaria**  
Food distribution and workshops building mutual aid
  - 16 Paving the Way Foundation**  
Community resource fair, COVID-19 testing, live DJ, food drive, and arts workshops in Lancaster and Antelope Valley
  - 17 ProjectQ Salon & Community Center**  
Online workshops for parents and caregivers of Black trans/nonbinary youth and food drive/hygiene kits for housing insecure queer youth of color
  - 18 Tía Chucha's Centro Cultural & Bookstore**  
Online workshops, book drive, and mobile art installation to support literacy and wellness in East San Fernando Valley
  - 19 Unión de Vecinos**  
Community mural, food distribution, and documentary on tenant organizing in Boyle Heights
  - 20 Valle Vida & Alliance United**  
Workshops, video production, public art installation, and plant giveaways on Ancestral medicine and healing



# DISTRICT 1

## Sharing Joy & Essential Needs

21 Events  
35 Artists  
54 Organizations  
135 Program Hours  
2,965 People Engaged

### Partners

- CicLAvia
- Garment Worker Center
- Instituto de Educación Popular del Sur de California (IDEPSCA)
- LA Co-op Lab
- Levitt Pavilion Los Angeles
- Los Angeles Community Action Network
- Meztli Projects
- Mujeres de Maíz
- NELA CAT-911 & Acción Comunitaria
- ProjectQ Salon & Community Center
- Unión de Vecinos

I didn't realize how much we had accomplished and now that I am reminded of what we did, I know we can do more.

—Maria López  
Unión de Vecinos

It was transformative, not transactional... [We] were able to design something ourselves for our own communities. I think it's radical and I think we need to be doing more of that.

—Monique Noel  
Los Angeles Community Action Network

WE RISE CACP partners in the First District exponentially grew their long-standing work as community access platforms (Prevention Services, Goal 1A and Social Support, Goal 1B. LACDMH 2020–2030 Strategic Plan). Projects included pop-up mobile concerts at essential services sites, murals, a documentary, storytelling with garment workers, distribution of hygiene kits, and a combined 3.5 tons of food to low-income families and housing insecure queer youth of color. Inspired by the support, many partners plan to continue their programming, activity, and direct services.

### Impact

#### Vaccination Clinics & Pop-Up Concerts

Levitt Pavilion Los Angeles held mobile concerts at essential services sites with a resource fair and vaccination clinic for 500 people, supported by Supervisor Hilda Solis.

#### Food Distribution & Art

Unión de Vecinos distributed 2.5 tons of food in two days, produced a community mural and short documentary in honor of their 25 years of organizing, and plan to build a community garden, more murals, and videos.

#### Continued Services

NELA CAT-911 and Acción Comunitaria organized volunteer food distribution with 34 volunteers and 335 people, with plans to continue beyond May.



"We Make Your Masks!" Garment Worker Speak-Out and Health Fair, May 21, 2021. Photo by Mina Alvarado Goldberg, Las Fotos Project.



Acción Comunitaria's Food Distribution Launch in Glassell Park, May 29, 2021. Photo by Bijan Ghaemi.



DISTRICT 2

Economic & Racial Justice as Healing

20 Events

32 Artists

53 Organizations

65.5 Program Hours

2,082 People Engaged

Partners

- CicLAvia
- Community Coalition
- Frontline Wellness Network & Black Lives Matter LA
- Garment Worker Center
- LA Baby Cooperative
- LA Co-op Lab
- Levitt Pavilion Los Angeles
- Mapache City Projects & LA Rooted
- Meztli Projects
- Mujeres de Maíz
- ProjectQ Salon & Community Center

Economic justice and economic democracy is an essential part of mental health.

—Gilda Haas  
LA Coop Lab

It’s important to invest in communities who were impacted by the pandemic and what better way to do that than in art and in organizations doing the work on the ground.

—Glauz Diego  
Community Coalition

WE RISE CACP partners in the Second District expanded their capacity and acted as access points for healing and wellness in their community and programming (Prevention Services, Goal 1A and Social Support, Goal 1B. LACDMH 2020–2030 Strategic Plan). Culturally relevant strategies to support wellness included workshops on building worker cooperatives, storytelling, diaper drives, a wellness walk with community-led workshops, and a self-guided bike ride to cultural land-marks. Partners plan to continue integrating wellness, arts, and cultural work into their everyday operations.

Impact

Community Clinics

Frontline Wellness Network and Black Lives Matter LA organized free healing services such as reiki, therapy, acupuncture, and arts workshops for 150 frontline organizers and people impacted by state violence.

Healing Justice & Organizing

Community Coalition invited South LA residents to contribute to a participatory altar and visioning wall for community recovery, organizing, and advocacy that drew more than 200 people over the eight-day activation.

Essential Needs & Storytelling

During WE RISE, LA Baby Cooperative gave away 8,000 diapers with increased media coverage, donations, volunteers, and programming in Koreatown for 240 low/no-income immigrant mothers as well as 480 children and youth.



LA Baby Cooperative’s Diaper and Wipe Drive. Photo by Irene Montantes.



The visioning wall at “Culture Cures,” an eight-day altar installation produced by Community Coalition, May 17, 2021. Photo by Glauz Diego.



# District 3

## Creativity & Ancestral Medicine

- 42 Events
- 51 Artists
- 37 Organizations
- 73 Program Hours
- 2,117 People Engaged

### Partners

18th Street Arts Center  
Instituto de Educación Popular del Sur de California (IDEPSCA)  
Meztli Projects  
Mujeres de Maíz  
ProjectQ Salon & Community Center  
Tía Chucha’s Centro Cultural & Bookstore  
Valle Vida & Alliance United

WE RISE helped us make our vision come to life and really lead with that creativity and love of our community, knowing our communities are deserving of this.

—Melissa Sanvicente  
Tía Chucha’s Centro Cultural & Bookstore

...[WE RISE] provided a space for collective healing amongst some of the most vulnerable and forgotten workers in Los Angeles.

—Nancy Zuniga  
IDEPSCA

WE RISE CACP partners in the Third District acted as community wellness hubs, initiated new projects, and strengthened their existing programming (Prevention Services, Goal 1A and Social Support, Goal 1B. LACDMH 2020–2030 Strategic Plan). Projects included an all-women’s public art installation, Ancestral medicine workshops, and a mail art campaign to healthcare workers. Collaborating artists remarked they had never received this kind of support before and were inspired to continue their work.

### Impact

**Going Viral**  
Tía Chucha’s Centro Cultural & Bookstore’s first TikTok post, “10 Indigenous Books You Should Know,” went viral with over 160.3K views. One bookdrive attendee said, “Other than Disneyland, this is the only thing I will wait for!”

**Healing through Theater**  
IDEPSCA created a community altar and led theater workshops with day laborers and domestic workers in collaboration with the Mayor’s Office. They hosted a vaccination clinic and distributed hygiene kits, food, and clothing to over 100 people.

**Honoring Indigenous Traditions**  
Valle Vida and Alliance United’s events on revitalizing public space reached nearly 400 people and opened with a ceremonial blessing by Rudy Ortega, Jr., Tribal President of the Fernandeño Tataviam Band of Mission Indians.



The 16th Annual Celebrating Words Festival and Book Giveaway produced by Tía Chucha’s Centro Cultural & Bookstore, May 30 2021. Photo by Chris Nelson.



“Altar de Bienestar” installation produced by IDEPSCA, May 26, 2021. Photo by Chris Nelson.



# District 4

## Bridging Wellness

30 Events  
130 Artists  
14 Organizations  
63.5 Program Hours  
2,405 People Engaged

### Partners

Arts Council for Long Beach  
Instituto de Educación Popular  
del Sur de California (IDEPSCA)  
Mujeres de Maíz

### Additional Partners

Angel’s Gate Cultural Center  
Bebot Community Kitchen  
Compound LB  
Exceptional Children’s  
Foundation  
HEALING  
HomeFront Rising  
LB Fresh  
The Maye Center  
Pacific Island Ethnic Art Museum

We hope to continue the momentum and to continue to bring in community partners and uplift the voices and work that these partners have been doing for many years.

—Lisa DeSmidt  
Arts Council for Long Beach

I’m really grateful to WE RISE to have this intersection of social justice, wellness, and arts because we have to be creative in our seeking of liberation.

—Shelley Bruce  
HEALING

WE RISE CACP partners in the Fourth District strengthened long-term relationships and collaborations across a constellation of community, arts, and cultural networks (Prevention Services, Goal 1A and Social Support, Goal 1B. LACDMH 2020–2030 Strategic Plan). Projects included live painting, healthy cooking classes for BIPOC communities, exhibitions on wellness and spirituality, panels on wellness and racial justice, and mutual aid events to support healthy communities.

### Impact

#### Locally-Driven Partnerships

Arts Council for Long Beach’s Bridging Wellness project was the first collaboration of its kind in the district to explore mental health, wellness, and creativity, bringing together over 11 organizations and 124 artists.

#### Audience Reach

The combined social media reach was 93,916.

#### Cultural & Social Relevance

Pacific Island Ethnic Art Museum in Long Beach held their first outdoor exhibition with over 100 visitors, engaging local residents, both housed and unhoused, and Pacific Islander communities. It is the only museum in the continental United States, outside of Hawaii, focused on Pacific Island art and cultures.



“Heart Expansion,” live painting and multimedia installation by artist Shelley Bruce, in partnership with Arts Council for Long Beach, May 28, 2021. Photo by Chris Nelson.



“Mrs. B” by artist Jason Pereira, dedicated to a local unhoused resident and part of the “Ala Mai: Awakening of Mental Health Awareness” outdoor exhibition at Pacific Island Ethnic Art Museum, May 28, 2021. Photo by Chris Nelson.



# District 5

## Community Care

31 Events  
39 Artists  
38 Organizations  
54 Program Hours  
7,485 People Engaged

Partners  
Paving the Way Foundation  
Meztli Projects  
Mujeres de Maíz

Sometimes I wonder why I do this work and then someone will come and their life has changed and it just lets you know why you do this.

—Janie Hodge  
Paving the Way Foundation

Now seeds have been planted.

—Felicia Montes  
Mujeres de Maíz

WE RISE CACP in the Fifth District supported community-led projects that met essential needs and offered culturally relevant spaces for residents to create, heal, and engage in meaningful civic work (Prevention Services: Goal 1A and Social Support: Goal 1B. LACDMH 2020–2030 Strategic Plan). Projects included mobile mural pop-ups, a food drive, zine-making in collaboration with families impacted by violence, and a book of portraits and interviews with communities affected by the pandemic. Groups and participants expressed how meaningful it was to have projects in their community designed by their community.

### Impact

#### Arts & Essential Services

Paving the Way Foundation held a resource fair for system-impacted families with art activities, a live DJ, COVID vaccination clinic, and food drive that fed over 300 families.

#### Local Roots

Women’s cultural collective Mujeres de Maíz built on their 24 years of community work by producing bilingual mobile murals with Ancestral healing art and education. Online events drew over 30,000 people with international engagement.

#### Community Arts

Meztli Projects worked with artists to create work, facilitate workshops, and distribute art, engaging 2,259 people from Native and Indigenous communities, monolingual Spanish-Speaking parents, system-impacted youth, and other communities.



“Celestial Light: Finding Our Way Home,” an outdoor installation by Tanya Melendez, produced in partnership with Meztli Projects, May 19, 2021. Photo by Jenny Garcia.



“4 Direcciones, Unidos Para La Salud (Four Directions, United for Health)” at Mercado Monarca, produced by Mujeres de Maíz, May 24, 2021. Photo by Chris Nelson.



# Recommendations

## Evaluate community impact of WE RISE CACP

Identify best practices, key lessons, and areas for improvement including longer-term engagement, more planning, and more diverse geographic representation.

## Expand WE RISE CACP to a multi-year program

Invest in existing community access platforms year-round for longer-term impact with an annual celebration of work.

## Identify and engage community stakeholders

Continue to build on CACP partnerships with planning and engagement at least ten months before programming begins.

## Fund grassroots artistic and cultural production

Support community-led artistic and cultural production as a core strategy to strengthen local leadership, address social justice issues, and build democracy from the bottom up.

## Develop an adaptive infrastructure plan

Build all areas of program structure and organization in alignment with the strengths, capacities, and goals of directly-impacted community stakeholders.

Work in equitable partnership with grassroots groups, cultural workers, artists, and organizers as key leaders in larger systemic change.

## Move at the speed of trust

Organize the timeline of deliverables and outcomes based on community-identified needs and longer-term goals.

Use a Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) lens to build long-term relationships with BIPOC communities as well as poor and working class communities to inform and guide all stages of operations and outcomes.

# Conclusion

When we are able to cultivate connection and belonging and heal together it allows us to bring our full selves to the impact we want to create in the world.

—Jenny Garcia  
Frontline Wellness Network

WE RISE 2021 Community Arts and Culture Projects offers a model to build generative pipelines between municipal agencies and communities. Partners used arts and culture strategies to engage communities in meaningful creative expression, offer space for healing and civic work, meet essential needs, and galvanize action. They strengthened existing networks of mental health support, increased cultural equity and inclusion, and built community-led solutions to the most urgent issues of our times. Partners advanced key aspects of the LACDMH Strategic Plan because it aligned closely with their own community-driven goals and needs. Inspired by WE RISE, many communities are already continuing their work beyond May. Long-term investment in community-led cultural work will only strengthen a larger movement of healing and wellness, radically transforming Los Angeles County from the grassroots.

This was only the beginning.

—Yolie Anguiano  
Valle Vida & Alliance United

