



Re-Imagining

a Bay Area Workforce

System Grounded

in Racial and

Gender Equity



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INTRODUCTION

Although the San Francisco Bay Area is often praised for its economic prosperity, **nearly 1 in 3 households are unable to afford basic needs** like childcare, transportation, and housing – despite many struggling households working multiple jobs, in sectors considered high-demand.¹ Due to historic and continuing discriminatory laws and policies limiting access to educational, professional, and economic opportunities by race, ethnicity, immigration status, and gender, households of color are much more likely to be struggling to make ends meet despite the fact that they are working. Bay Area Black and Latinx households are twice as likely as white households to live paycheck-to-paycheck, and residents of color are often the first to be displaced when living costs skyrocket.² Women, and especially women of color, are often saddled with a family member's criminal justice debt and caregiving across generations, on top of maintaining one or more jobs.³

Across the workforce, education, housing, and criminal justice systems, deep-rooted and persistent racism, sexism, and xenophobia created today's racial and gender inequities – including racial and gender wage inequities that continue to grow, despite recent surges in employment rates in the Bay Area. The median income discrepancy between white people and people of color has increased to nearly \$30,000,⁴ and women in some Bay Area counties are paid 60 to 70 cents for every dollar paid to a man.⁵ Especially in regions like the Bay where costs grossly outpace income, unemployment rates alone – even historically low ones – do little to show the true economic picture of our region. Until all people can access opportunities for high-quality jobs and wages, more and more working

1 Insight, 2019 Family Needs Calculator Data.

2 Veklerov, Kimberly. "Bay Area Housing Prices Push Low-Income Minorities Further Out, Study Finds." *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 7, 2019, available at <https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Bay-Area-housing-prices-push-low-income-13596075.php>

3 Who Pays? Report. Ella Baker Center. "In 63% of cases, family members on the outside were primarily responsible for court-related costs associated with conviction. Of the family members primarily responsible for these costs, 83% were women." <https://ellabakercenter.org/sites/default/files/downloads/who-pays.pdf>

4 Regionally, the income gap between white people and people of color increased by over \$2,500 between 2016 and 2017, resulting in a nearly \$30,000 median income differential. Metro Monitor 2019, Brookings. Updated October 2019. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/metro-monitor-2019-inclusion-remains-elusive-amid-widespread-metro-growth-and-rising-prosperity/>

5 ACS 2017 data, median wages for employed workers.

households, and especially women, people of color, and immigrants, will grapple with keeping the lights on and providing for themselves and loved ones.

California's Workforce Board, the Governor, and the Departments of Education, Employment, and Rehabilitation lead the coordination and implementation of the state's public workforce system.⁶ Established over two decades ago, today's public workforce system is largely localized – a trend that deepened during the Great Recession to encourage responsiveness, and at the same time, has increased disconnect, fragmentation, and a lack of collaboration among local and regional boards.

In the Bay Area, workforce stakeholders are united in the broad goal to connect people with jobs and job training; however, systemic barriers persist, particularly for people of color and women who are just as or more qualified than their white male peers, and yet, are foreclosed from opportunities to work and build wealth. Although regional and local workforce plans and programs attempt to reach these communities, at least to the extent required or recommended by state or federal policy, **servicing is not the same as centering**.

Eliminating racial and gender workforce inequity requires a bold, collaborative approach that centers working people of color, women, and immigrants – period. Truly centering those facing the greatest barriers to work and wealth requires deliberate, inclusive collaboration and planning grounded in a racial and gender equity lens. Only by first addressing and understanding the impact of past and present racism, sexism, and xenophobia can we build an agenda for real opportunities and accessible pathways to economic security for all, rather than piecemeal, short-term “wins.”

Racial equity “[applies] tools and practices needed to recognize people of color’s experiences with unequal power differentials and access to resources and opportunity, while considering historical and current lived realities, including structural racism.” (Andrews, Parekh, Peckoo, 2019).

The **Re-Imagining a Bay Area Workforce System Grounded in Racial and Gender Equity** is a project to ultimately help systems leaders and other workforce system stakeholders re-imagine a workforce development system embedded with a racial equity lens to ultimately better meet the needs of people of color, immigrants, and women. The purpose of this project was to **examine the ways in which workforce institutions in the Bay Area may be perpetuating racial and gender bias and inequities** by:

- Analyzing the impact of key federal, state and local policies and practices on working people of color and women in the Bay,
- Uncovering dominant narratives in the public workforce system in the Bay Area that drive investments, policies and practice, and examining the extent to which workforce organizations reinforce harmful narratives about people of color, women and work,
- Incorporating the voices of systems leaders, practitioners and working people to uncover both the true barriers to work and promising approaches to addressing racial inequities, and
- Conducting a robust policy review and landscape analysis of federal, state and local workforce policies focusing on those that have a disparate impact on people of color and women.

⁶ Established in 1998 through the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA), California's Workforce Development Board (CWDB) oversees statewide workforce training and education programs. In 2014, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) replaced WIA, creating the foundation of today's workforce system.



METHODOLOGY

Over the past year, the Insight Center for Community Economic Development (“Insight”) conducted a robust policy review and landscape analysis of federal, state, and local workforce policies, focusing on those that have a disparate impact on people of color and women in the Bay Area. Additionally, Insight conducted structured interviews and focus groups with workforce leaders, practitioners, and marginalized working people to inform our learnings and recommendations for this project. Insight also conducted quantitative labor market research to produce data revealing income and work disparities by race, ethnicity, and gender.

Insight met with workforce development board (WDB) leaders in the East Bay (Contra Costa, Oakland, Alameda, Richmond), South Bay (NovaWorks), and North Bay (Solano) for: 1) an initial call and 2) a longer, more in-depth conversation on stakeholders’ respective workforce systems.⁷

We also spoke with over a dozen community-based organizations and advocates about their insights and recommendations for building racial and gender workforce equity, including several with first-hand experience navigating the workforce system and programs in the face of incarceration, homelessness, and poverty. These conversations included meetings with stakeholders from Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO), Rise Together, Urban Strategies, Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, Safe Return, and Building Opportunities for Self Sufficiency (BOSS).

Insight also examined dominant narratives within the current workforce system that perpetuate occupational segregation along race and gender lines, informing notions of who deserves help from systems and who does not, and preventing workforce stakeholders from enacting transformative change.

Lastly, we conducted three focus groups with formerly incarcerated people looking to find work upon their release as a way to bring in impacted community voices into the project. We interviewed 46 people in these focus groups.

The one-page summary used to describe the project to potential interviewees and interview protocols for workforce board interviews and re-entry focus groups can be found in the Appendix.

⁷ Workforce stakeholder interviews included the following: Patience Ofodu, Maureen Nelson, Charles Brown III, Jeffrey Shoji, Donte Blue (Contra Costa); Heather Henry, Bryan Hooker, Sheryl Cutler (Solano); Patti Castro, Latoya Reed (Alameda); Kris Stadelman (Novaworks); Lazandra Dial, Stephen Baiter (Oakland); Sal Vaca (Richmond).

OVERARCHING THEMES FROM STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS, POLICY LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS, QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH, AND NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

- In the Bay Area and beyond, centuries of discriminatory policies and practices have led to entrenched racial and gender workforce inequity – from restrictive U.S. immigration laws that segregated Latinx and Asians by occupation and living area, to criminal justice policies that have kept Black and Brown people from finding work and economic stability.
- Occupational segregation among women, Black, and Latinx communities is a direct result of discriminatory policies from our past and present, as well as deeply embedded narratives around who deserves and is suited for what jobs.
- Although Workforce Development Boards (WDB) across the Bay serve the re-entry population, they are woefully ill-equipped to meet the needs of this population. The current workforce landscape encourages a “stay in your lane” structure that relies heavily on service partnerships but does not challenge WDB staff to tackle equity issues across systems like housing and criminal justice. Yet, as our interviewees acknowledged, taking a broader, intersectional approach would help a tremendous number of people who could benefit from WDB services.
- Overall, our work revealed a lack of holistic and innovative initiatives working to address pervasive racial and gender biases. Promising practices exist, but their impact is often lessened by limited funding, narrow scope, or the absence of deliberate focus on race and gender.

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Insight performed quantitative data analysis of the Bay Area labor market to help understand how current groups are situated in terms of workforce participation and income.

The table below shows **Median Household Income by Race in the Nine County Bay Area**. This data provides a look into racial income inequity across the nine counties.

County	Median Income	White Households	Asian Households	Black Households	Latinx Households
Alameda	\$79,831	\$95,331	\$101,544	\$42,642	\$60,819
Contra Costa	\$82,881	\$96,220	\$102,276	\$52,917	\$61,038
Marin	\$100,310	\$109,205	\$92,136	\$57,626	\$53,106
Napa	\$74,609	\$80,840	\$105,168	\$71,701	\$58,849
San Francisco	\$87,701	\$111,704	\$75,013	\$28,603	\$62,153
San Mateo	\$98,546	\$112,359	\$112,148	\$54,964	\$64,707
Santa Clara	\$101,173	\$111,307	\$121,383	\$66,429	\$64,434
Solano	\$69,227	\$75,478	\$85,712	\$53,465	\$58,273
Sonoma	\$73,929	\$71,542	\$72,651	\$58,364	\$52,781

Source: Insight Analysis of 2016 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau

MAIN TAKEAWAYS:

<p>In San Francisco County, white household income (\$111,000) is about \$24,000 more than the median – that difference is basically the median income for Black households in San Francisco (\$28,000). The difference between white and Black median income is approximately \$83,000.</p>	<p>In Alameda County, Black households make about \$59,000 less than the highest median income group (Asian households). That’s more than Black households’ actual median income (\$42,000).</p>	<p>Latinx households are really struggling in North Bay counties like Sonoma (roughly \$52,000 median income) and Marin (about \$53,000).</p>
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The table below shows the **Ten Most Common Jobs in the San Francisco Metro Area.***

Occupation	Number of Positions	Median Hourly Wage	Median Annual Wage
Personal Care Aides	69,430	\$11.68	\$27,120
Retail Salespersons	53,780	\$13.34	\$32,530
Cashiers	47,890	\$12.55	\$28,540
Combined Food Preparation and Serving Workers, Including Fast Food	47,650	\$12.63	\$27,440
Waiters and Waitresses	41,540	\$13.93	\$35,410
General and Operations Managers	41,010	\$63.94	\$157,510
Software Developers, Applications	40,910	\$64.13	\$141,630
Office Clerks, General	38,970	\$19.11	\$41,400
Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	37,730	\$14.94	\$35,000
Registered Nurses	35,480	\$62.15	\$124,970

*Source: Insight Analysis of 2017 Occupational Employment Statistics, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Bay Metro Area includes: Alameda County, Contra Costa County, San Francisco County, San Mateo County, Marin County.

MAIN TAKEAWAYS:

<p>The most common job in the San Francisco Metropolitan Area is a personal care aide, with a median wage of \$11.68.</p>	<p>The five most common jobs (personal care aides, retail salespersons, cashiers, food prep, waiters) pay at least \$90,000 a year less than the three highest paying jobs on the list. These jobs make up more than 54 percent of the ten most common jobs in the Bay Area.</p>	<p>Over 80 percent of the state’s personal care aides are women, and the majority are women of color. (Insight, 2019).</p>
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POLICY REVIEW AND LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

To complement and add context to the quantitative research above, Insight authored a supplemental policy review and landscape analysis of the Bay Area. Insight compiled and analyzed secondary local, state, and federal data to: 1) examine historic policies, laws, and narratives, from the Gold Rush to the present, that helped create and widen racial and gender workforce inequities; 2) summarize and analyze current rising jobs and sectors in the Bay Area workforce; 3) unpack barriers that people of color, women, and immigrants and refugees encounter in accessing workforce and work opportunities; and 4) identify promising practices, strategies, and change agents within and beyond the workforce system.

The accompanying policy landscape and analysis helped inform **Steps & Stops**, a timeline capturing, by race, over 200 years of “steps” (policies providing or facilitating economic opportunities) and “stops” (policies excluding groups from economic opportunities). Insight created these deliverables to help stakeholders forge a shared history, complete with hard truths such as structural racism and the discriminatory policies enabling it, in order to move forward with a racial equity framework and acknowledge the lasting impact of – and the constant need to challenge – structural racism and gender inequity.

Throughout history, a “step” for one group (most often white men or households) served as a “stop” for others – particularly, people of color and women. One such example is the GI Bill, the application of which allowed white male veterans to access credit, education, and housing after World War II, but systemically denied these same economic “steps” to Black people and veterans of color. The Policy Landscape and Steps & Stops can be reviewed together, with the Landscape adding greater richness and detail to the Steps & Stops covered briefly in the timeline. Moving forward, Insight aims to build out an online interactive home for Steps & Stops, making it an accessible resource for stakeholders, and allowing the user to explore the timeline in greater detail (e.g., with photos, related events, and infographics).

Please see the Appendix for the Steps & Stops Documents.



NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Narratives – our cultural understandings, frames of reference, or mental models – play a significant role in how policy makers create and implement policies, and how people on the ground react to them. More than just stories, narratives contribute to our sense of our environments and help us create order in a fairly chaotic world. Specific stories inform the narratives that we hold near and dear in our hearts and minds, and narratives in turn become an endless story that we build upon and continuously shape. We bounce new ideas and concepts up against our deep-seated narratives.

What is tremendously important to understand for those of us fighting for racial and economic justice is this: **In America, the narratives we hold are based on a hyper focus on the individual versus systems, and are rooted in racism, xenophobia, and sexism.** This lethal combination makes it extremely difficult to pass the policies we need to make comprehensive, transformative structural change toward economic, racial, and gender justice.

Insight’s narrative research and stakeholder interviews surfaced three quintessential harmful narrative buckets that we must name and address while pushing for policy change: **1) notions of personal responsibility; 2) personhood being tied to traditional ideas of work and having a paid job; and 3) pervasive anti-blackness/racial resentment.** All three of these buckets hold major ramifications on who we see as deserving and who we don’t, and we build our social and economic policies off of these ideas.

These narratives also showed up in the work we did for this project:

- **Personal Responsibility/Toxic Individualism:** In almost all of the conversations we had with workforce stakeholders, there were iterations of personal responsibility and toxic individualism (repeated citing of a “skills gap” or a lack of “soft skills” as core issues facing women, people of color, and immigrants and refugees; stakeholders sharing that if only “certain people” had better behavior, or with more “upskilling” of folks looking for work, all would be well). This is evident in the widely held “bootstraps narrative” – a centuries-old belief that anyone can work hard and “pick themselves up by their bootstraps” to make it in America. Among interviewees, there was a

lack of widespread understanding that there are larger systemic issues at play that prevent people from attaining the skills they need to match job market needs. This hyper focus on individual behavior prevents workforce stakeholders from taking a systemic, holistic approach to their work.

- **Personhood and Traditional Notions of Work:** Our country was founded on the Puritanical notion that hard work and sacrifice are necessities in life and, as a result, Americans deeply prioritize and value work. Often, we are so consumed with work and the concept of “being on the clock” that we have come to define full personhood and deservedness on the basis of having full-time, paid work. On the other hand, we see people who are not working as juvenile, undisciplined, less deserving, and morally inferior. Society and the law then reflect these biases. It is no wonder, for instance, that the workforce system is having such a hard time adequately supporting the formerly incarcerated, who face huge barriers to finding steady employment. An implicit bias can be triggered – often unintentionally – which challenges workforce stakeholders to see the formerly incarcerated as fully deserving, since they have not been working at a traditional job for some time. There is an “othering” that happens, where people distance themselves from those with a record, creating a barrier to supporting this population fully. During several workforce meetings, Insight observed workforce stakeholders referring to people with a criminal record as “those people” or “ex-felons.” Other stakeholders shared that during workforce trainings with members of the reentry community, workforce staff were advised to “watch their purses” and be wary of attendees. Frustratingly, these challenges are far from uncommon, and numerous studies confirm that employers and workforce stakeholders frequently grapple with deeply rooted biases and assumptions toward job applicants and workers with a criminal record.⁸ These biases can result in tangible harms and inequitable treatment in the form of job offer or interview denials, stagnant wages, and diminished opportunities for advancement.⁹
- **Anti-Blackness/Racial Resentment:** As a society, we have built an economy on the backs of Black labor. Beyond failing to acknowledge this, we have created systems, rules, and policies that actively harm Black people. This founding notion that Black people are less human than white people – that they are liars, cheats, and morally bankrupt – negatively impacts all people of color, and low-income white people, as well. It also leads to shockingly terrible economic outcomes for Black and Brown communities in the Bay Area. In the Bay Area’s most diverse counties, Alameda and San Francisco, white households make \$16,000 and \$24,000 more, respectively, than the median income (Insight, 2018). In 7 out of 9 Bay Area counties, Black households’ median income is anywhere from \$30,000 to \$45,000 below the county median. In every single Bay Area county, Latinx household income lags behind by double digit percentages. The workforce system often contributes to this phenomenon by unintentionally buying into the narrative that women and/or people of color are more suited for certain jobs than others. This is partially why we see that, nationally, women make up close to 70 percent of our lowest paid workers who make less than \$11/hour, with Black and Brown women making up a disproportionate percentage.¹⁰ It is hard to disengage from the conditioning we are subjected to by trends in the workforce.

8 Prison Policy Initiative. July 2018. “Out of Prison and Out of Work: Unemployment Among Formerly Incarcerated People.” <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html>

9 Pager, Devah. 2006. *The Mark of a Criminal Record*.

10 “Women in Low-Wage Jobs May Not Be Who You Expect.” National Women’s Law Center, August 2017. <https://nwlc.org/resources/women-in-low-wage-jobs-may-not-be-who-you-expect/>



KEY FINDINGS FROM STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS EXIST BUT ARE NOT FULLY EFFECTIVE IN PRACTICE

Much of today's Bay Area workforce system was shaped by the Great Recession, which increased regional collaboration. These collaborations are critical, particularly given limited resources. However, interviewees reported mixed feedback on the effectiveness of these partnerships. Interviewees noted difficulties in maintaining partnerships and effective collaboration, in addition to not having the capacity or time to ensure partnerships reach their full potential.

Local boards aim for a "person-centered approach," and staff, from front line to management, wear many hats. While this can be positive in individual interactions, it means that long-term success in partnerships and collaboration is heavily, and problematically, dependent on interpersonal relationships. This can be especially difficult when staff leave or change roles, because "keys" to these cross-department collaborations sometimes reside within one person or team. In Contra Costa, for example, the workforce board frequently relies on personal relationships with other departments to get needed employment and labor data that should be more accessible across departments.

BRIGHT SPOT

Despite the difficulty in maintaining partnerships and sustaining collaboration, Insight noted several promising practices undertaken by the boards we met with. Solano, a county often left out of Bay Area regional workforce discussions due to its larger rural population and geographic distance, has made strides to increase collaboration with Sonoma and Contra Costa stakeholders in the last few years. This is especially encouraging given the emergence of rising costs, housing shortages, the impact of fires plaguing the North Bay, and other exigencies that will likely keep occurring, or may worsen, in the future. In the past year, Solano workforce stakeholders have increasingly taken a

leading role in the System Impacted Solano Network (SISN), a “reentry plus” local coalition that aims to connect individuals and families impacted by the criminal justice system with educational, legal, professional, health, and housing resources.

A HOLISTIC PORTRAIT OF THE STRENGTHS, NEEDS, AND CHALLENGES OF THE COMMUNITIES BEING SERVED IS NEEDED

Federal law does, to some extent, call on local and regional boards to serve people who have barriers (including those with a disability, the formerly incarcerated, and Limited English Proficiency speakers) and/or low-income households (receiving public benefits qualifies one for WIOA). However, the Bay Area’s high cost of living, prevalence of low-wage jobs, and the inadequacy of accurate poverty calculators can mean that many who struggle with poverty still would not meet WIOA enrollment qualifications. Beyond these “flat” categories, a more holistic, complete picture of individual and community strengths and challenges by race, gender, and immigration status, as well as a deeper understanding of structural racism, are needed to establish a better understanding and measuring of economic need.

THE SOLE FOCUS ON UNEMPLOYMENT ALLOWS WORKFORCE PROGRAMS TO IGNORE ISSUES OF UNDEREMPLOYMENT AND DIGNITY AT WORK

Many working people are underemployed and not counted in WIOA unemployment data (e.g., those working two or three jobs to make ends meet but still struggling) – thus creating and furthering a hugely inaccurate depiction of workforce needs. WIOA funding is partly determined by unemployment data, so the Bay Area’s perceived prosperity hurts these underemployed workers and those facing barriers to good jobs. Underemployed workers are further invisibilized through harmful narratives, such as the “bootstraps” narrative discussed before, or the idea that any job is a good job, without looking at job quality and dignity at work.

BRIGHT SPOT

Insight’s Family Needs Calculator (FNC) could be utilized by local boards as an additional indicator of economic needs, particularly for families and individuals above the federal poverty line but below the FNC. Solano’s board has expressed interest in using the FNC to support their reporting requirements and deliverables. Heather Henry, chair of the Solano board, has also presented the FNC to her board.

PROGRAMS LACK A GENDER EQUITY FRAME

Although many of the WDBs shared that the majority of people who walk through the job center doors are women, there is a lack of specialized programs focusing on women or increasing gender equity specifically. For example, in the Bay Area, boards strive to connect workforce participants to jobs with a pathway to advancement and \$15 minimum wage. In Contra Costa County, these industries are advanced manufacturing, healthcare, energy, biomedical, and construction. **However, WDB data collection does not capture how women are accessing and progressing through these industries, or what gender-related equity issues may exist across sectors and industries.** Thus, it is unclear how women in traditionally male-dominated, in-demand industries (construction, tech) fare in jobs due to the limited nature of data collection. Per WIOA requirements, WDBs only track participants up to one year after program completion, and they generally do not disaggregate by gender or race.

BRIGHT SPOT

As described by interviewee Sal Vaca, Richmond WDB has sought to increase its capacity to serve female-identifying working people. The board is aware of the need to ensure that women have access to the same in-demand industries *and* high-paying jobs that men have. Results in these shifts appear promising: While local construction sectors can be as low as 1 percent female-identifying in many areas, Richmond's Clean Energy Center Construction Program averages 15 percent female grads.

OUTREACH, REPORTING REQUIREMENTS, AND COLLECTED DATA ARE OFTEN INEFFICIENT IN SERVING PEOPLE OF COLOR, IMMIGRANTS, AND WOMEN

Federal WIOA requirements can be rigid, insufficient, or otherwise problematic. Specifically, data collection is limited and can lack timeliness. WIOA reporting requirements do not mandate long-term monitoring of changes in pay, job title/position, and more comprehensive indicators of job mobility. Moreover, boards identified the difficulty in sharing and receiving uniform, timely data as a major barrier to progress in determining how well they are serving people of color, immigrants, and women.

Outreach to both employers and individual participants can be difficult and is often not specifically customized for people of color, women, or immigrants and refugees. One stakeholder shared that collaboration across city and county lines can lack depth and consistency, especially given “historic annual defunding of the public system over the last twenty years” and cuts to funding for outreach.

BRIGHT SPOT

The Contra Costa WDB drives the planning and execution of semi-annual county-wide resource fairs. In fall 2019, the board's most recent event, “Hidden Untapped Talent,” brought together about 200 workforce officials, employers, advocates, and potential applicants. In addition to providing a networking space and job fair, these events feature a substantial educational component, including a breakdown of fair chance hiring law changes, as well as a panel of workers sharing their experiences navigating the job market with a disability, criminal record, or other system involvement.

STIGMA AROUND SERVING THE FORMERLY INCARCERATED PREVENTS A “FAIR CHANCE”

Formerly incarcerated workers face added barriers both before exiting incarceration (insufficient access to core supports and meaningful training opportunities) and entering the job market (lack of awareness of employer incentives, employer stigma). Despite some recent progress, like the statewide Ban the Box initiative and greater workforce system emphasis on serving the reentry community, more is needed to improve job outcomes for justice-impacted working people.

The reentry population is hugely undercounted, which makes it difficult for boards to measure progress and success, or get adequate funding for reentry work. In Solano, the workforce board's service 2018 data only captured 17 reentering people served over the past two years in the entire county, when the actual number is likely far greater: There are over 20,000 individuals of working age with a felony record in Solano County alone (Insight, 2018).¹¹

11 “Opportunity for Every Worker: Toward a Fair Chance Workforce in the Bay Area.” Rise Together, May 2019. <https://insightcced.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/OpportunityForEveryWorker.pdf>

The difficulty of reaching out to and serving the reentry community is largely due to fear and stigma: People generally do not want to share if they have a criminal record when they become program participants due to concern for very real and prevalent discrimination and stigma in the workforce and hiring. As stated by Donte Blue, Deputy Director of Contra Costa's Office of Reentry and Justice, who collaborates with the Contra Costa WDB: "If you're doing training in our jail, you're not doing any training for employment. There's no pipeline programs. There's some computer training, you could get a certificate in MS Word. That's not really training. It's a pipeline that has to lead to another pipeline."

There is also a lack of mental health supports and systemic acknowledgment of the trauma incarceration brings on the individual, family, and community – even long after release and as the individual tries to enter the workforce. This shortage of supports especially harms people and families of color, who are disproportionately targeted and incarcerated by the criminal justice system in the Bay Area and beyond.

Although California passed its statewide Ban the Box law in 2018, challenges to the workforce development application process remain for justice-impacted individuals. For instance, the current application for workforce services, which is crafted at the federal level and used by local workforce programs, asks if an individual is an "offender." Given the pervasive discrimination against applicants and workers with a criminal record, such a term can be triggering and harmful, deterring potential workforce participants from applying for job services and supports. Bay Area counties, including Solano, are seeking to address this issue and ensure that more justice-impacted applicants access services without encountering harmful and unnecessary stigma. "A better term for gaining that information from clients at intake needs to be asked," shares Heather Henry. "We are looking at how we can change our paper applications so we can get a more accurate count of our justice-impacted folks."

THERE IS NARROW CAPACITY AND VISION TO EFFECTIVELY IDENTIFY AND SERVE IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE PARTICIPANTS

Federal law requires counties with 15 percent or more Limited English Proficient (LEP) speakers to "adequately describe, assess the needs of and plan for serving the LEP population in their jurisdictions."¹² Nonetheless, even if the LEP community is recognized as an important population in need of support, WDBs lack the ability and resources to fully identify and serve it.

WDB reporting does not robustly capture the challenges and successes of serving immigrant communities, including refugees and recent immigrants from Yemen, Iran, Afghanistan, and Iraq, largely due to lack of disaggregated data collection. Relatedly, reporting requirements do not mandate comparing or contrasting workforce services for immigrants with advanced degrees with the experiences and opportunities of immigrants with lower educational attainment. The latter group is less likely to be served by WDBs and, instead, must rely on their own communities (if any) for resources and support.

While outreach and service to immigrant and refugee communities remain a challenge, numerous workforce stakeholders discussed promising local partnerships with organizations like Upwardly Global, a California-based nonprofit helping immigrants and refugees find promising educational and professional opportunities. Many of the workforce clients served through Upwardly Global are immigrants and refugees with a college or advanced degree but, as NovaWorks' Kris Stadelman describes, "are underemployed and not where they should be based on their strong qualifications and skill set." At NovaWorks, a substantial portion of workforce clients who have a four-year

12 California Workforce State Plan, 15. This includes Alameda, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Napa, and likely in the future, Contra Costa (14.43% "less than very well" English). Additional 2018 requirements were created to support more immigrants to find and retain livable wage jobs and careers. Similar requirements exist for counties with substantial Migrant Seasonal Farmworker populations.

degree or higher (over 80 percent of NovaWorks' current customers) are immigrants or refugees. With an array of high-paying tech and engineering jobs in the Bay Area and Silicon Valley, collaboration with Upwardly Global can yield opportunities matching workers' educational backgrounds. Without these critical partnerships, many more new and recent immigrants would be forced into temporary and low-paying positions, in addition to grappling with the isolation of adapting to a new home.

Despite some successes in serving immigrants and refugees with advanced degrees, our conversations with stakeholders suggest that more should be done to identify and serve those with lower educational attainment, such as migrant workers and the justice-impacted, both of which are disproportionately Black or Latinx. NovaWorks does not specifically perform outreach to these communities. Instead, it relies on its partners (CBOs, rehabilitation centers, schools, etc.) to inform the public of its services.

Furthermore, WIOA eligibility documents still ask for citizenship status, which is a big disincentive and barrier to program participation for many immigrants. As noted by one staff member from the Contra Costa WDB: "It's hard to cut through fear of systems, particularly for the undocumented community. For federal WIOA forms, the 'citizenship box' increases reluctance to come through the doors and apply for and receive services."

As a result of the barriers summarized above, communities of color often do not have trust or confidence in WDB services. As noted by one WDB member, "White people tend to be more comfortable coming to [the] job center." The member recalled a big plant closure where Chinese workers (primarily Mandarin speakers) did not seek out rapid response services and did not engage with WDB, regardless of whether they had found job opportunities following the plant closure. "These communities are already so isolated, and they – perhaps rightfully so – may feel that we can't connect them to what they need."

There is also limited ability to serve rural immigrant communities. Solano, for example, has a substantial South Asian population employed in agriculture and farming, particularly within its Punjabi community. But without more specialized services, as well as cultural and language capacity, WDBs lack ability to help these workers transition into higher paying, non-seasonal work.



RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

In order to re-imagine a workforce system that truly embeds racial and gender equity, philanthropic investment in narrative change efforts must be made on a large scale. At the same time, commitment to de-siloing the workforce field can foster needed interactions with criminal justice reform advocates and organizations dedicated to building worker power. It will be virtually impossible to expect transformational change within the current workforce structures without making connections to larger efforts around worker power and progressive narrative shift.

Workforce stakeholders need to acknowledge and identify the harmful narratives they operate under that perpetuate deep racial and gender inequities. This process includes equipping stakeholders with the information and education to name, explore, and assess how narratives shape workforce policy and practice.

Workforce leaders and programs must explicitly center the needs of people of color, immigrants, and women. Doing so calls for increased, nuanced attention on the needs of different communities of color. Maintaining a “one tide will lift all boats” type of thinking in our current workforce structures will only prevent us from gaining greater racial and gender justice in these systems. In the few instances where we saw initiatives aimed at specific populations – Women Building the Bay, for example, which aims to increase the number of female-identifying workers in construction – there is marked improvement toward greater gender equity within an industry. These types of programs should serve as evidence that targeted programming works.

The workforce system must also be held accountable to communities of color and women by tracking and keeping disaggregated data by race, gender, immigration status, and incarceration. Right now, very few programs document their work along these lines, making it easy to not be held accountable for how they are improving workforce participation of these groups. Moreover, even if a county has the ability to pull data by specific demographics, boards report a lack of capacity to do so effectively, and federal guidelines often do not require local boards to disaggregate by race, gender, immigration status, or criminal record status.

Additionally, we need to be looking at job quality statistics – not just placement. How long did the person keep the job? What was the work environment like for the participant? What kind of benefits did they receive? What kind of wage did the worker receive, including raises or promotions? These are the types of data points the field needs to move toward in order to track their progress toward racial and gender equity.

Finally, in order to be proactive in creating a more equitable workforce system in the future, we need to ensure that emerging work trends do not negatively impact working people of color, immigrants, and women – all of whom are already at a great disadvantage within our economy. More research and advocacy needs to be done to understand how the different future of work trends – gig economy, algorithmic scheduling, increased workplace surveillance, and advanced technology, to name a few – will impact women, people of color, and immigrants. We can design a better future for these workers if we proactively prepare the workforce system to work with these populations, ensuring they can have thriving futures.

APPENDIX

RE-IMAGINING A BAY AREA WORKFORCE SYSTEM GROUNDED IN EQUITY PROJECT SUMMARY

Despite laws that prohibit intentional discrimination, the labor market is neither race nor gender neutral, nor color blind. Working people are concentrated by race, ethnicity, and gender among industries and occupations, work arrangements and positions, and pay levels. Research finds that education and skills play a role but do not fully explain differences between gender and race/ethnicity regarding earnings, labor force participation, training and promotion opportunities, and choice of occupation. Structural and institutional barriers based on race and gender need to be identified, examined, and addressed to get to the root cause of labor market stratification.

Typically, traditional employment and training programs fail to consider the structural and personal impacts of race and gender on jobs and job seekers to ensure fair outcomes for all working people. Hence, this project will help people re-imagine how to structure workforce programs with a gender and racial equity lens to meet the needs of women, people of color, and immigrants throughout the Bay Area.

The purpose of this project is to examine the ways in which workforce institutions in the Bay Area may be perpetuating racial and gender bias and inequities by:

- Analyzing the impact of key federal, state, and local policies and practices on working people of color and women in the Bay;
- Uncovering dominant narratives in the public workforce system in the Bay Area that drive investments policies and practice, and examining the extent to which workforce organizations reinforce harmful narratives about people of color, women, and work; and
- Incorporating the voices of systems leaders, practitioners, and working people to uncover both the true barriers to work and promising approaches to addressing racial inequities.

RE-IMAGINING A BAY AREA WORKFORCE SYSTEM GROUNDED IN EQUITY WORKFORCE STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

I. Introductions

- II. Overview of Workforce Equity Project: The overall goal of this project is to help systems leaders and other workforce system stakeholders re-imagine a workforce development system embedded with a racial equity lens to ultimately better meet the needs of people of color, immigrants, and women. We are talking to you to learn about how your programs serve women, people of color, and immigrants/refugees seeking employment in your county. We would like to find out what works and what does not work, your analysis on barriers they face to employment, and how employers, workforce development systems, and communities can leverage existing best practices and improve services for these populations.

III. Questions:

1. Let's start by you sharing with us the goals of your WDB. What are you trying to accomplish with your work?
2. What are you and relevant partners doing specifically to **reach** women, people of color, and/or immigrants/refugees? How were these outreach activities or strategies developed?
 - a. What major partners are involved in serving these particular populations (women, people of color, and immigrants/refugees)?
 - b. What is/are their role(s)?
3. What are some barriers that women, people of color, and immigrants/refugees face to finding steady employment?
4. What are your most **innovative** programs, and how are they funded? Do you have any that are specific to serving women, people of color, and/or immigrants/refugees seeking employment? What are your most successful programs for these populations? Why do they succeed?
 - a. Do you track race/gender or related data points (e.g., criminal record status, citizenship status) in general programming?
 - b. If yes, could you share these outcomes or data points with us?
5. What have the biggest **challenges** been in serving women, people of color, and/or immigrants/refugees?
 - a. Are there any that you feel are specific to this county?
 - b. To this region?
6. What **strategies** have worked best for you in getting employers to hire women, people of color, and/or immigrants/refugees in the public workforce system? **Why** have they been successful?
 - a. Which **industries** are you working most closely with to provide employment pathways?
 - b. How are these pathways accessible for and/or tailored to women, people of color, and/or immigrants/refugees?
7. We are interested in **outcomes** – e.g., number of individuals who find and sustain work (that pays a livable wage with pathway(s) to upward mobility) – not only outputs (number of individuals who completed a training or class).
 - a. How do you measure success (program completion, duration of employment after program, etc.)?
 - b. Are you tracking any outcomes besides those federally mandated by WIOA? If so, which ones and how are you tracking them?
 - c. What outcomes or data points do you wish that you knew or had access to? What is stopping you from being able to access this information?
 - d. Do you have any outcomes data on serving women, people of color, and/or immigrants/refugees that we have not discussed yet? If so, can you share them?

IV. Conclusion

1. Is there anything else you'd like to share? Do you have any questions for us?
2. Lay out next steps for the project.

RE-ENTRY FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Background on employment and income:

- a. Tell us about your first or early experience(s) working (paid or unpaid) – specifically, please tell us about your work experience(s) before incarceration. What was that like for you?
- b. Have you ever been out of work? If yes, for how long? Please talk about your experience(s). How did it make you feel?
- c. Let's talk about the present. How do you go about earning money?
- d. How many people do you need to support with your income? How do you support them, and what does it cost?

2. Experience with finding work with a criminal record

- a. What have some challenges to finding work been? What has helped or could help you overcome those challenges?
- b. How have you been treated at your current or recent job(s)? What were/are some positive aspects about your experience(s)? Any negative aspects?
- c. Did you recently, or do you currently, participate in any of the following: an apprenticeship; a one stop center; or any other skill building, licensing, or job training programs? If so, what has your experience been?
- d. What would your ideal work situation look like? (Probe for work hours, schedule, wages, environment.) What sort of supports or opportunities could help you achieve this?

Is there anything else you want to share that we haven't talked about yet?

ABOUT INSIGHT CENTER FOR COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Founded in 1969, the Insight Center is a national research and advocacy economic justice organization, working to ensure that all people become and remain economically secure. We examine hidden truths to unearth and address the root causes of economic exclusion and racial inequity. We are working to shift inequitable power structures, so that everyone can fully participate in the economy and has the freedom to bring their full selves to our diverse nation regardless of zip code, race, immigration status, or gender.

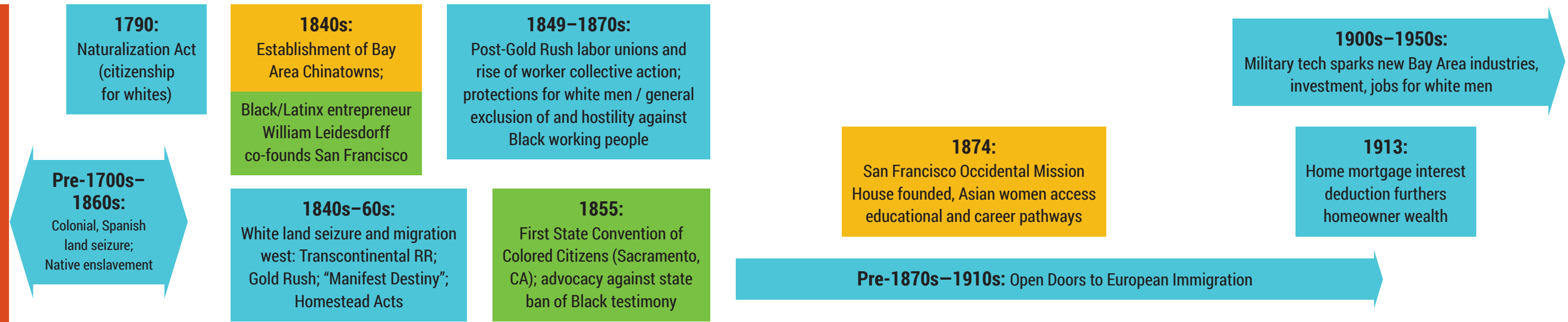
We address these issues at the root level through innovative, multidimensional initiatives and partnerships that leverage our core capacities in research, ideation, narrative change, and leadership to foster systemic, transformational change.

While we work across the nation, we are headquartered in Oakland, California, our lab for progressive policy innovation and thought leadership.

STEPS AND STOPS TO BUILDING WEALTH BY RACE IN THE BAY AREA, 1700–1918

KEY: **BLACK** **WHITE** **NATIVE** **ASIAN** **LATINX** **POC**

STEPS



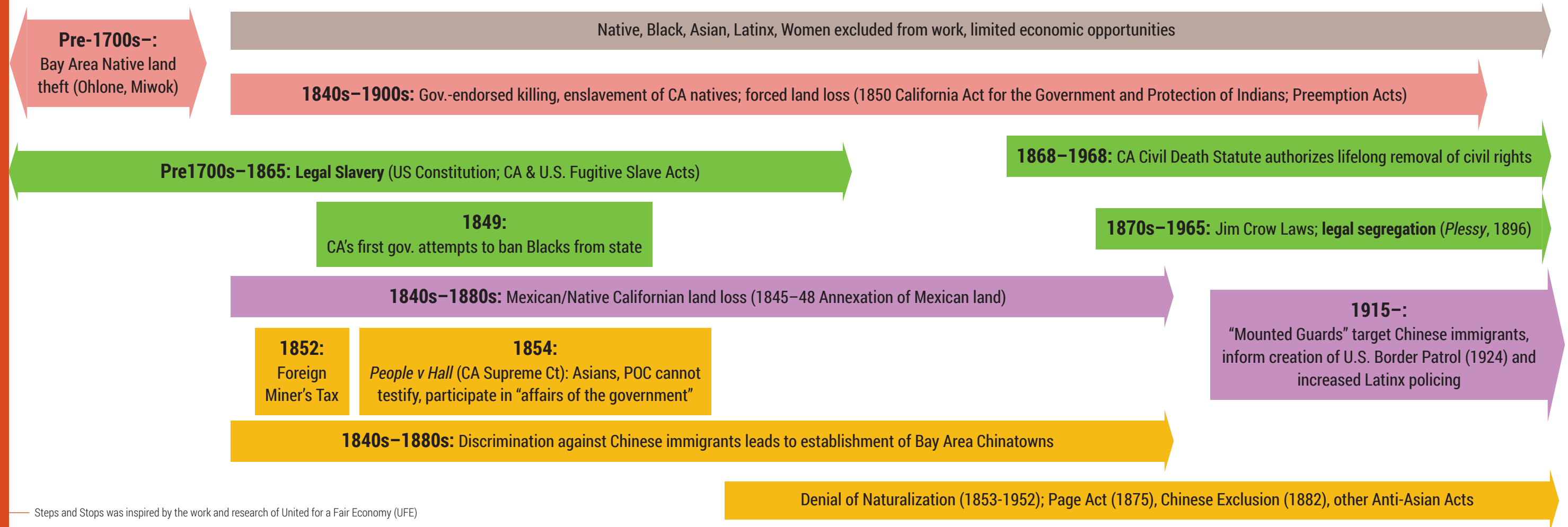
1776:
U.S. INDEPENDENCE

1848–1855:
GOLD RUSH

1861–1877:
CIVIL WAR & RECONSTRUCTION

1914–1918:
WORLD WAR I

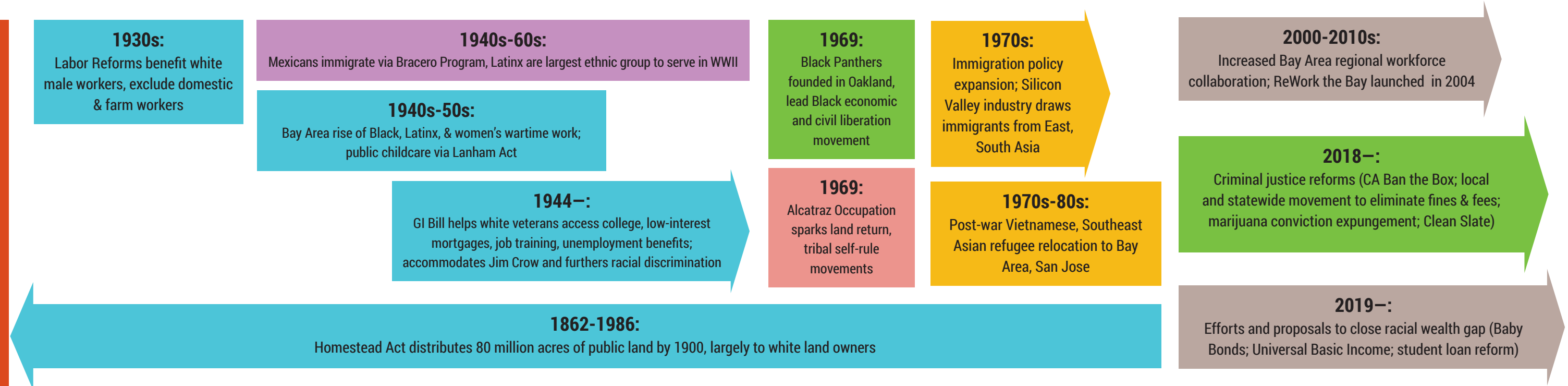
STOPS



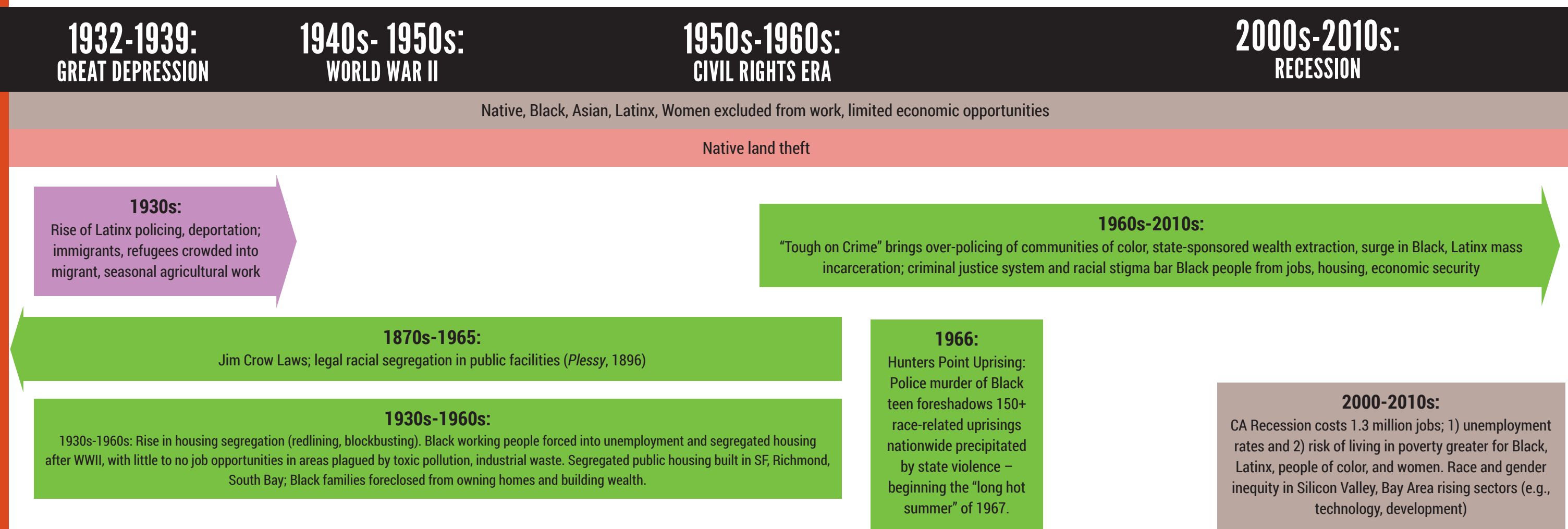
STEPS AND STOPS TO BUILDING WEALTH BY RACE IN THE BAY AREA, 1918 – PRESENT

KEY: **BLACK** **WHITE** **NATIVE** **ASIAN** **LATINX** **POC**

STEPS



STOPS



Steps and Stops was inspired by the work and research of United for a Fair Economy (UFE)

