Empower Students

A call for California's college access and success organizations to support student-led movements for educational equity

uCANRise

u·aspire · SoCal CAN Southern California College Access Network · Students Rising Above

The James Irvine Foundation

March 2019

Dear Reader,

In the spring of 2017, The James Irvine Foundation provided multi-year grants to three nonprofit organizations under our Postsecondary Success focus area. Southern California College Access Network (SoCal CAN), Students Rising Above (SRA), and uAspire were funded to scale their student supports to and through college, and to create a community of practice in which they could learn from each other's challenges and successes. The outcomes of the community of practice, which they named uCANRise (a brilliant combination of their organizations' names), were open-ended—we were eager to learn along with them without setting strict parameters and deliverables.

Two years later, we now have an opportunity to reflect on what they've accomplished. While each uCANRise organization has strengthened their individual programming to better support low-income, first-generation, students of color during college, whether via an online hub, texting, or peer mentoring, collectively they have generated ideas and momentum that are far greater than the sum of their parts. They have surpassed our expectations for both how and what they learned.

For one, they tackled the not insignificant challenge of collaborating with organizations on similar missions operating in a constrained funding environment. They demonstrated deep commitment to overcoming the norms of competition and instead created meaningful and sustainable partnerships with one another. They dedicated precious staff time and energy to figure out how to align their work to benefit all involved. What was most impressive was how effectively they cultivated a space of honesty, shared responsibility, and buy-in. They exemplified what a true community of practice looks like.

That wouldn't have been possible if not for education consultant Laurie Jones Neighbors who individually coached and convened the three nonprofits throughout 2018. What organically transpired from those meetings, that also included students and higher education issue experts to spur the group's thinking, was the most exciting outcome of this project and an entirely new concept for uCANRise: Underrepresented students have the most valuable perspectives needed to address systemic educational inequities. When given the chance to meaningfully engage, students not only develop thoughtful solutions, but they are also equipped with lifelong leadership and civic skills to thrive in the current climate and throughout their careers.

Ultimately, this central learning pushed each organization to radically reconsider how it understands the challenges students face and how it subsequently approaches supporting students. They also began to envision how their peer organizations and partners might join them in picking up this mantle. We all have to lean into our brave spaces, change our mindsets about what is possible, and speak truth to power if we are going to encourage students to do the same.

The next phase of uCANRise's work is just getting started, but already I'm eager to see how students can thrive when college success organizations give them the space and strategies to lead the way.

Sincerely,
April Yee
Program Officer
The James Irvine Foundation

Table of Contents

02
Introduction from April Yee

04
Acknowledgments

06
Summary

07
Purpose, Passion, and Collaborative Action: uCANRise and Educational Equity

09
The Opportunity for College Access and Success Organizations

10
Empowering Students for Systems Change

13
Implementation: Drawing the Map Together

15
20 Promising Practices

22
Resilience: Lessons from Student Advocates in California

27
Looking Ahead

Acknowledgements

The uCANRise member organizations acknowledge our appreciation for the support from The James Irvine Foundation, and our program officer, April Yee, for supporting the work that led to this report. We also want to express gratitude for Laurie Jones Neighbors, consultant and project manager for the uCANRise community of practice. Our process and final products are thanks in large part to Laurie's efforts. Additionally, we'd like to thank Vanessa Barbic, Katie Hern, Andrea Venezia, Jessica Scadron, Max Lubin, Lena Carew and the staff and students at Students Making a Change (SMAC), the staff at Campaign for College Opportunity, Caroline Hutchinson and Cindy Downing, and the following students who provided their expertise and thought partnership: Jonathan Alejandre, Brittany Contreras, Jason DeShou Shan, Darren Johnson, Dalice Stogden, and Ramiro Villafuerte.

For more information about uCANRise, visit uCANRise.org

uCANRise

uAspire, a national nonprofit whose mission is ensuring that all young people have the financial information and resources necessary to find an affordable path to and through college, was founded in Boston in 1985, and has evolved into a national leader on the issue of college affordability. We partner with local, regional, and national nonprofits, school districts, and charter management organizations in more than 27 states to train their student-serving staff, and provide guidance to thousands of young people through key college affordability milestones.

uCANRise participants from uAspire include:

- Monica Hayden: Senior Program Director, San Francisco Bay Area
- Jonathan Lewis: Senior Director of Succeed, National office, Boston
- Jaclyn Piñero: Executive Director, San Francisco Bay Area
- Emily Wolfson: Succeed Knowledge Manager, San Francisco Bay Area

Formed in 2005, **Southern California College Access Network (SoCal CAN)** is an alliance of over 70 organizations working together toward a singular goal: To increase the rate at which low-income students access and complete college. Each year, network members provide direct support to more than 150,000 students and families in the region. We play an important role in the field by creating opportunities for organizations to learn together, collaborate with one another, and jointly advocate for policies and practices that advance student success.

uCANRise participants from SoCal CAN include:

- Alison De Lucca: Executive Director
- Marcos Montes: Higher-Education Policy Consultant
- Saru Ramanan: Director of Learning and Collaboration
- Rudy Torres: Level Up Program Manager

The Students Rising Above (SRA) community is dedicated to changing the future through the cultivation of extraordinary youth. SRA invests in first-generation college students from low-income communities who have demonstrated a deep commitment to education and strength of character while overcoming tremendous odds. We help each student realize his or her potential by guiding and supporting them through college graduation and into the workforce. Our graduates are breaking the social and economic cycles within their own families, serving their communities, providing a new generation of employees and leaders from diverse backgrounds, and accelerating positive change.

uCANRise participants from SRA include:

- Lorna Contreras-Townsend: Managing Director of Student Programs
- Isabella Flores: Content Manager
- Carolina Martín: Executive Director
- Veli Waller: Manager of Student Programs

Summary

This is an exciting time for those of us focused on educational equity. In response to persistent inequities in higher education, students across California are developing initiatives and enacting programs that ensure college access, participation, and completion are available to underserved populations. The door is wide open for direct-service organizations to partner with California's student leaders—to listen to their challenges, support their causes, and work with them to drive lasting, statewide, systemic change. We only need to step through it.

In this report, we illuminate possibilities for college access and success direct-service organizations to mobilize underrepresented students to play a central role in the development and implementation of policies and practices that advance student success. We illustrate our theory of change and draw connections from that theory to current, successful student-led advocacy work in California. What follows is the heart of this report: 20 Promising Practices for college access and success organizations that want to begin, or enhance, their work in student-led advocacy. We invite you to join us in experimenting with these Promising Practices as we build our vision of the role of direct service organizations in supporting students fighting for educational equity.

Our work here is the culmination of the first 18 months of an organizational community of practice, uCANRise. The three college access and success organizations involved in this effort—Southern California College Access Network (SoCal CAN), Students Rising Above (SRA), and uAspire—collaborated with generous support from The James Irvine Foundation to advance educational equity among California college students.

Purpose, Passion, and Collaborative Action: uCANRise and Educational Equity

In the spring of 2017, The James Irvine Foundation provided multi-year funding to three California-based nonprofit organizations—Southern California College Access Network (SoCal CAN), Students Rising Above (SRA), and uAspire—under their Postsecondary Success focus area.

Along with generous funding to invest in our student-facing advising programs for college students, the following September the Irvine Foundation brought our organizations together—all with different program models, organizational structures, and advising approaches—to embark on what Irvine Foundation Program Officer April Yee described as a "collective learning journey."

Based on her deep experience both leading previous communities of practice and a career in higher education spanning twenty-five years, Laurie Jones Neighbors was tasked by Irvine to design and lead the community of practice during its initial phase and throughout the first year and second years. With her support we formed a community of practice that kicked off at the end of 2017 and met quarterly in 2018 to find synergy and uncover new approaches for moving the field of college access and success forward.

The backbone of our community of practice is our belief that education is more than a powerful tool that low-income people, people of color, and other underrepresented people can use to transform our society into one that is characterized by a fair distribution of economic and social resources and is inclusive of all people. We believe that equitable opportunity and access to education is an empowering right, and that the U.S. educational system in its current state does not meet these basic requirements of educational equity.

> When given the chance to meaningfully engage, students not only develop thoughtful solutions, but also expand their leadership and civic skills to thrive in the current climate and throughout their careers.

> The organizations in uCANRise inspire, prepare, and mobilize underrepresented students to play a central role in the development and implementation of policies and practices that advance educational equity, and we support other organizations in growing their ability to do the same.

Today's underrepresented students face multiple barriers as they move through the college experience. These experiences are multifaceted and require innovative thinking and inclusive problem-solving. Our students, predominantly low-income, of color, and immigrant students, are hardworking, talented, dedicated, resilient, and full of opportunity and potential. And yet every day, they face countless challenges as they navigate the costly and complex higher education system.

For example, remedial course requirements have long been a roadblock for students working toward their degree. Remediation is costly to students without allowing them to accumulate college credits, and at the same time has been shown to inhibit degree completion when compared against accelerated learning pathways.[1] In addition, rising tuition, fees, and living expenses, and complex financial aid systems are additional barriers to college success—particularly for low-income students.

Through our uCANRise community convenings to date—in addition to drawing on our own individual and collective knowledge and expertise—and talking with policy advocates from the college access and success field, we spoke with many students who encounter obstacles as they move through the educational pipeline. We talked to students who almost left school due to their frustrations with bureaucracies and inequities. And we engaged students who came together in campus and community organizations in order to strengthen student action in the fight for educational equity. It's fair to say that the expertise students brought to the table has been the defining feature of our model and approach moving forward.

uCANRise believes that underrepresented students have the strongest and most valuable perspectives needed to address systemic educational inequities. When given the chance to meaningfully engage, students not only develop thoughtful solutions, but also expand their leadership and civic skills to thrive in the current climate and throughout their careers. While our initial, broad goal was to determine how college access and success direct-service organizations can best support underrepresented students, our time with community college and university students in this project led us to a powerful, exciting narrowed focus: The organizations in uCANRise inspire, prepare, and mobilize underrepresented students to play a central role in the development and implementation of policies and practices that advance educational equity, and we support other organizations in growing their ability to do the same.

Now, in the second year of the community of practice, our organizations are each experimenting with a subset of the Promising Practices in this report. We look forward to updating you on those experiments in the near future. In the meantime, this report summarizes our shared learning. We hope it can serve as a resource and call-to-action for other college access and success organizations who are committed to educational equity.

The Opportunity for College Access and Success Organizations

We must prepare and trust our students to determine and prioritize effective advocacy strategies for achieving educational equity for all of California's underrepresented college students.

Together, California college access and success direct-service organizations have relationships with hundreds of thousands of students. We've had opportunities to work with and learn from students who are already building strong advocacy skills on their own or through their participation in on-campus organizations. In fact, with so many empowered students in our networks, it might be tempting to think of our students as an army we can mobilize on behalf of educational equity policies and programs we think are the most important, have the best chance of success, or address the issues we care most about. But we know that won't work. Students aren't going to maintain interest in fulfilling our agendas, using our approaches, for our intended outcomes and measures of success.

Instead, we must decenter ourselves. We must prepare and trust our students to determine and prioritize effective advocacy strategies for achieving educational equity for all of California's underrepresented college students. Rather than asking what we want them to do for us, we should be asking ourselves what we can do to best support them.

We believe that students are in the best position to enact change in the communities where they live, work, and learn. This belief is grounded in students' first-hand expertise in the challenges they face, as well as the reality that the best direct-service organizations can do at times is empathize with students who experience distinct hardships.

As college access and success organizations, it is our responsibility to reconfigure our work and shift our power to equip students with skills by engaging them in reflective practice, amplifying their voices, and empowering them for strategic, skillful advocacy. If we increase student awareness and confidence in their own agency, we trust they can transform the institutions and systems of which they are part. Furthermore, engaging students in student-led advocacy will equip them with lifelong skills that position them to be successful in their careers and civically engaged throughout their lives.

Empowering Students for Systems Change

Our model is grounded in empowerment theory,[2] which has successfully argued that social problems, such as inequities in health, governance, and education, exist due to environmental factors rather than individual behavior. In the case of educational inequity, an empowerment approach points to a systems-level problem—the unequal distribution of and access to resources.

Using an empowerment approach, we encourage a collaborative relationship between college access and success direct-service providers and underrepresented students, rather than one where organizations are positioned as experts. Empowerment interventions require us to learn about students' cultures, worldviews, motivations, struggles, and preferences. In other words, we must engage in deep, ongoing listening.

Empowerment theory urges us to collaborate with students to develop interventions to educational inequity. These interventions should facilitate mutual help among students, develop advocacy tools particularly suited to their own causes, and lead to supporting others who may be impacted by the unequal distribution of and access to resources—both on campus and in their home communities. All of this can help build capacity and student numbers to create momentum necessary for societal change.

Empowerment theory allows for impact and analysis at three levels: individual, organizational, and community. Though described separately, each level of impact is inherently connected to the others. Individual, organizational, and community empowerment are all mutually interdependent. Working from the bottom up, our students are both products of and change agents in their home and school communities. As we interact with students, our own organizations change and grow, and students shape their own on-campus organizations by disseminating the support we have provided to them. At the individual level, students gain skills and knowledge that will serve them well in the short-term as advocates and as students, and the long-term in their career pathways. Coming full circle, this knowledge will positively impact their abilities to catalyze change in their home communities.

We encourage a collaborative relationship between college access and success direct-service providers and underrepresented students, rather than one where organizations are positioned as experts.

Theory of Change

STUDENTS
Underrepresented students — low-income, of color, and immigrant — gain skills that serve them throughout their lives.

Students learn communication, collaboration, project management, advocacy, public speaking, and negotiation.

RESULTS
Students lead in creating socially and economically just communities for all.

RESULTS
California is an equitable state where higher education prioritizes student needs, and underrepresented students most impacted by local and institutional policy lead decision making.

Students return to their communities with knowledge, skills, and empowerment to lead local movements and decision making.

Colleges and universities include students in policy and planning decisions.

Local governments and public institutions prioritize current and former underrepresented students in policy decisions.

COMMUNITIES
Students pave the path to educational equity, inside and outside colleges and universities.

ORGANIZATIONS
Student-led organizations (SLOs) and college access and success direct-service organizations (DSOs) engage in shared leadership and decision making.

Student governments include low-income, of color, and immigrant students, focus on educational equity, and on racial, economic, and social justice.

DSOs adjust their missions to prioritize and prepare students to be advocates for educational equity.

SLOs increase movement and policymaking knowledge and strategies.

RESULTS
Educational equity: When beliefs, actions, and policies enable all students to have access to and participate in quality learning environments and experience successful outcomes.

It is our responsibility to create environments, determine activities, and define outcomes that will advance student-led advocacy. We believe that the following framework leads to long-lasting transformational change. We encourage you to consider all three carefully as you craft your plan.

	INDIVIDUAL **STUDENTS**	STUDENT-LED AND DIRECT-SERVICE **ORGANIZATIONS**	STUDENTS' SCHOOL AND HOME **COMMUNITIES**
ENABLING ENVIRONMENTS reflect the policies, resource flows, relationships, and capabilities that facilitate student investment.[3]	**EXAMPLES INCLUDE:** Settings that celebrate student leadership and uplift the agency of students to act and lead.	**EXAMPLES INCLUDE:** Partnerships and connections to resources that promote and encourage students to set advocacy agendas.	**EXAMPLES INCLUDE:** Governance structures that allow and welcome students to lead, make decisions and take on complex political and social issues.
EMPOWERING ACTIVITIES support students in gaining critical understanding of their social environments through structured tasks that develop skills for solving problems and making decisions.	Opportunities for increased, effective organizational, and community involvement, followed by reflection and goal-setting.	Exposure to and practice in authentic shared leadership and decision making, including getting and giving feedback, practicing consensus, and democratic decision-making.	Opportunities to strategically plan for, access, and evaluate use of community resources, including government, media, and technical and political assistance.
EMPOWERING OUTCOMES support direct-service providers and students in analyzing the impact of enabling environments and activities in order to enhance applied learning.	Measurable gains in specific critical thinking, decision-making, negotiation, and strategic planning skills developed through program activities.	Measurable gains in development of advocacy tools for collective engagement, such as organizational networks, effective resource acquisition, and policy leverage.	Increased evidence of local resident empowerment, existence of multi-issue organizational coalitions, accessible, fairly distributed, and strategically deployed community resources.

In our first year as a collective, we began this work by getting comfortable using and talking about tools, such as root-cause analysis and analysis through interlocking oppressions. While in our second year, we'll test whether this framework can or cannot support transformational change for educational equity.

As we began to explore the literature about systems thinking, we are convinced that now is the open moment, a time of great urgency combined with a time of widespread willingness to transform systems and achieve equity. As Natasha Winegar, Susan Misra, and Ashley Shelton pointed out in *Nonprofit Quarterly*[4], one contribution to this movement toward systems change is developing "an ecosystem of leaders who are systems thinkers and doers."

We believe that direct-service college access and success organizations are well positioned to catalyze the development of that ecosystem, and that the leaders we are looking for are underrepresented college students. If we support them to become systems thinkers and doers, they will transform the systems of institutionalized racism, classism, sexism, and xenophobia that are the root causes of educational barriers to success.

Implementation: Drawing the Map Together

College access and success organizations are uniquely positioned to learn about the institutional barriers students face and support students as they advocate for change on their campuses. We exist to help students overcome the inequity of systems fueled by drivers such as remediation and lack of college affordability. Beyond direct service to students, our policy and advocacy efforts can help advance this work. Collaborating with students to determine policy priorities and assisting their movement-building, for instance, are key activities that will allow us to ensure underrepresented students are well positioned to successfully advocate for themselves and to push the system to make critical changes for generations of students to come.

We know there are challenges—especially that our focus on the Bay Area and Los Angeles doesn't evenly disperse our work across the state. Our colleagues in regions without a history of such advocacy may be less clear on the opportunities they have to lead in and participate in student-led systems-change work.

Similarly, you may not feel your organization has the capacity or structure necessary for a successful outcome, and cost of implementation may be a prohibitive factor. We hope that this report is just the beginning of conversations we can have with you to share strategies for mapping student-led advocacy assets in the communities where you work and building and funding successful initiatives.

See page 14 for examples of empowered student-led organizations.

Students Making a Change

Students Making a Change (SMAC), a student organization at the City College of San Francisco (CCSF), has become a leader in student-led advocacy and empowerment. Executive Director Lena Carew and dedicated SMAC fellows have created a space where first-generation students of color establish themselves as powerful changemakers, organizers, and advocates who have the ability to advance student equity. While developing leadership and organizing skills, SMAC students transform systemic barriers impacting underrepresented students.

As marginalized students, SMAC students know best the issues their communities face. Participating in SMAC enables them to create and lead campaigns they identify and prioritize. In recent years SMAC has focused on four key priorities:

1. Accelerating Pathways to Student Success
2. Expanding Access to Resources for Students and their Families
3. Institutionalizing Equity at CCSF
4. Centering Undocumented Student Achievement

To learn more,visit studentsmakingchange.org.

Rise Free

Founded in 2017 by graduate student Maxwell Lubin, Rise Free serves as a lobbying group and coalition of students leading the fight for free college tuition, and more generally for the restructuring of California's higher education budget and spending. Amid a climate of rising college costs, which greatly impacts access to basic needs like housing and food for college students, Rise Free amplifies the voices of students affected by unaffordable tuition policies and mobilizes students to tell their own stories to enact change.

To learn more about Rise, visit risefree.org.

20 Promising Practices

Many college access and success organizations may not think they have the knowledge and skills to directly support student advocacy. Fortunately, there are many small actions direct-service college access and success organizations can take to begin putting student advocacy at the forefront of the work we do. Based on our discussions with students and researchers, we have developed a list of twenty practices to engage in the next phase of our project.

At the same time, we must constantly remind ourselves to look at the big picture. As practitioners, particularly direct-practice providers, it's easy for us to focus on the small successes we see (and should keep seeing!) every day. Systems change work demands that we also learn to step back and see the complex web of issues, relationships, and events that contribute to outcomes for the students with whom we work. As Winegar, Misra, and Shelton explain:

"Birds rarely fly in a straight line to their destinations; they change course constantly in response to weather, food sources, other birds, and a host of different factors. Likewise, nonprofits may have clear visions for their communities and the planet, but they must be flexible and nimble in how they achieve results because the broader context is constantly changing."[4]

The researchers go on to explain that the nonprofits they studied are building capacity for systems change by getting their staff and partners in the habit of looking for and recognizing patterns and making adjustments and engaging in continuous learning through rapid feedback loops.

Part of our work in the next phase of uCANRise will be engaging in experimentation practice, and creating and sharing tools for you to learn about and practice continuous learning and rapid feedback. As we begin to experiment with each of these practices, we will also be creating additional indicators, benchmarks, and tools that will help us determine to what extent these practices contribute to systems change for deep educational equity.

We encourage you to experiment with the following practices and share your results with us!

Activities to Promote Advocacy for College-Bound Youth

[01] **Become a student advocacy organization "clearinghouse."** Research and promote on-campus, student-led advocacy organizations when advising college-bound students. Collect stories about student-organization experiences from college students in your program and share them with incoming students through online profiles, fliers, and college guides. Once you've built up your expertise, you might even want to implement a "matching" program between interested incoming students and seasoned student advocates at their new campuses!

EFFORT/COST: Varies **IMPACT:** ●●○

[02] **Serve as a student-centered educational equity news center.** Assign a student to subscribe to and read newsletters and news aggregators such as *Daily Lumina News, Diverse: Issues in Higher Education* and *EdWeek* to track and share educational equity news of interest with college-bound students. Create opportunities, such as in-person or virtual forums, tailored emailed newsletters, or text-based news blasts, by which students can reflect on the impact current events have on their potential success in higher education as they transition from high school to college.

EFFORT/COST: Varies **IMPACT:** ●●○

[03] **Provide high school teachers with advocacy units students can easily implement.** With student staff members or interns, develop a series of short lesson plans that groups of high school students can facilitate in their general education classrooms to introduce student-led advocacy to their peers. Topics should introduce students to definitions of educational equity, provide them with a basic understanding of student-led advocacy, and point them toward advocacy opportunities at college.

EFFORT/COST: ●●○ **IMPACT:** ●●○

EXAMPLE: The Power to Change the World: A Teaching Unit on Student Activism in History and Today from *The New York Times* provides lessons that help young people realize the difference they can make.

Advising and Counseling Activities

[04] **Build your advisors' advocacy competencies and pass those skills on to students.** As you add advising staff and other staff members who have direct contact with students, look for and prioritize candidates who have advocacy background. Provide space for advisors with advocacy backgrounds to train their peers on talking to students about student-led advocacy. Grow your advisors' abilities to point students to specific campus resources that support and build advocacy knowledge and skills, and opportunities to get involved in advocacy activities on campus.

EFFORT/COST: ●●● **IMPACT:** ●●●

[05] **Be an empowering organization.** Train in-house advisors who work on campuses to respond to student complaints about educational inequity with resources for developing student-led advocacy. Build on the uCANRise theory of change with your advising staff to respond to student problems with empowerment strategies. Resources may include fact sheets about student rights, guides for building advocacy campaigns and movements, and contact information for campus advocacy organizations.

EFFORT/COST: ●●● **IMPACT:** ●●●

Bridging Activities

[06] **Partner with campus advocacy organizations.** Reach out to on-campus student groups and organizations to let them know your interest in supporting student-led advocacy for educational equity, provide them with a menu of options for partnership, invite additional ideas, and draw on shared leadership approaches and values in your communication and planning.

EFFORT/COST: ●○○ **IMPACT:** ●●●

[07] **Build relationships with community advocates.** Be a bridge builder between the campus and the community: Draw on local advocacy organization expertise and community advocates to interact with your students through trainings, at celebrations, and informal and formal mentorships and paid internships.

EFFORT/COST: ●●○ **IMPACT:** ●●●

Technological and Social Media Support

[08] **Mobilize students through technology.** If your organization uses texting to communicate with students, include opportunities for student mobilization in your email blasts and via text. Provide contact information for students who want to get involved. Use your organization's Facebook or other social media presence to make students aware of marches, demonstrations, lectures, and events that focus on educational equity, and pass on opportunities for student-led advocacy events.

EFFORT/COST: ●○○ **IMPACT:** ●●○

[09] **Dedicate virtual space to student organizing.** If your organization uses an online platform, consider providing virtual meeting rooms and resources for students to share knowledge and methods, and even mobilize across campuses on a common issue.

EFFORT/COST: ●○○ **IMPACT:** ●●○

Personal Strategic Planning

[10] **Help new college students develop their personal missions.** Offer a workshop on developing personal mission statements and action plans, if possible using more experienced students as facilitators. There's no need to start from scratch—you can find shared curriculum units for developing mission statements and personal strategic and action plans online, many of which are advocacy focused. Students can use this time to think through what issues matter to them most, what roles they are most comfortable taking on, and what skills they can contribute and will need to sharpen. Gather information from this experience to make your program stronger by responding to their needs and interests: What issues do students want to learn more about? What skills do students most want support on? What are their inspirations and challenges when considering advocacy?

EFFORT/COST: ●○○ **IMPACT:** ●●○

[11] **Reconvene students for their learning and yours.** Invite students who attended your personal mission statement workshops and action plans to reconvene (in person or virtually) in one-year increments while in college. Students can share their learnings, recalibrate their strategies, and build their network through self and group reflection. Learn from their experiences and shape your programming to provide stronger future supports for this generation of students and the next.

EFFORT/COST: ●○○ **IMPACT:** ●○○

Real-World Learning

[12] **Listen to students and support their campaigns.** Survey students or host a town hall where students identify the current educational equity issues they care about most. Then work with those students to help them build their own policy platforms and issue campaigns, including short-term action plans for coalition building, resource gathering, issues framing, and more.

EFFORT/COST: ●●○ **IMPACT:** ●●○

EXAMPLE: Cal State Student Association's Policy Agenda articulates the issues that CSU students have identified to be most pressing and require urgent action.

[13] **Take students to Sacramento.** Orchestrate a Capitol visit for students in which you prepare them for legislative meetings on a timely topic of their choice—protecting DACA, increasing college affordability, or universal access to higher education, for example.

EFFORT/COST: ●●○ **IMPACT:** ●●○

[14] **Build authentic connections for movements through allyship.** Define what it means to be an ally and provide a safe space for students to discuss how to be allies. Invite underrepresented students and allies. This workshop can be a powerful opportunity to bring community advocates and student advocates together for brainstorming and collaboration.

EFFORT/COST: ●●● **IMPACT:** ●●●

[15] **Inspire students to make enduring change through policy.** If your organization has a policy arm, host a policy workshop for student leaders. (Or if you don't, think about bringing in an educational equity policy organization to train your staff and students together.) Engage participants in real-world, campus-level policy-making scenarios that allow them to explore student-prioritized educational equity issues on their campuses. Whenever possible, connect learning to ongoing campaigns that students can stay involved with once the workshop is over.

EFFORT/COST: ●●○ **IMPACT:** ●●○

Skill-Building Activities

[16] **Let students take the lead.** Teach event-planning and organizing skills by inviting student advocates to develop and run workshops and events on topics they determine will be of use to their peers. (Be sure to coach and shadow students to prevent outcomes that may be more discouraging than instructive.)

EFFORT/COST: ●●● **IMPACT:** ●●●

[17] **Teach students how to communicate for successful advocacy.** Offer communication skills workshops on such topics as dialogue through disagreement, difficult conversations, or communicating for consensus. You don't have to reinvent the wheel—you can find shared curriculum units and activities online that emphasize compassion and willingness to change. Consider having students partner with you to facilitate workshops.

EFFORT/COST: ●○○ **IMPACT:** ●●○

Advising and Counseling Activities

[18] **Let them learn while they earn.** If your organization works on educational policy, set up an education policy internship to provide structured support for students interested in educational equity for first-generation and low-income college students. Be sure to use the information in this guide about enabling environments, activities, and outcomes to design a high-quality internship experience.

EFFORT/COST: ●●● **IMPACT:** ●●●

[19] **Get involved in Service Learning.** If you would like to host students to learn about empowerment and advocacy for student equity but your organization does not have the funding to offer paid internships, forge relationships with campuses that offer service learning credits, internships, or research stipends. Again, be sure to use the information in this guide about enabling environments, activities, and outcomes to design a high-quality internship experience.

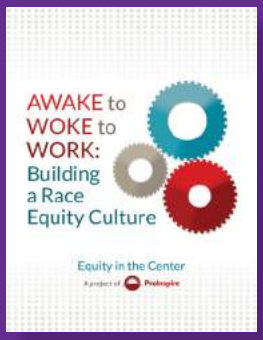
EFFORT/COST: ●●○ **IMPACT:** ●●●

Walk the Talk

[20] **Invite your students to teach you.** Do some organizational soul-searching. What are the limits of your own organizational understandings of and comfort with the ways that student advocates talk about and enact equity, justice, and societal transformation? How well do you understand their goals and your place in the new world they envision? "Walk the talk" by inviting student advocacy groups to teach you and your staff about justice on their terms, using their frames and language, in a series of workshops for organizational reflection. Reflect on how you can best put your learnings into practice to serve a truly just society.

EFFORT/COST: ●●○ **IMPACT:** ●●●

EXAMPLE: Awake to Woke to Work: Building a Race Equity Culture from Equity in the Center, a project of ProInspire, is a guide to support your organization in improving capacity to impact systems for race equity by integrating a race equity lens into all aspects of your organization.



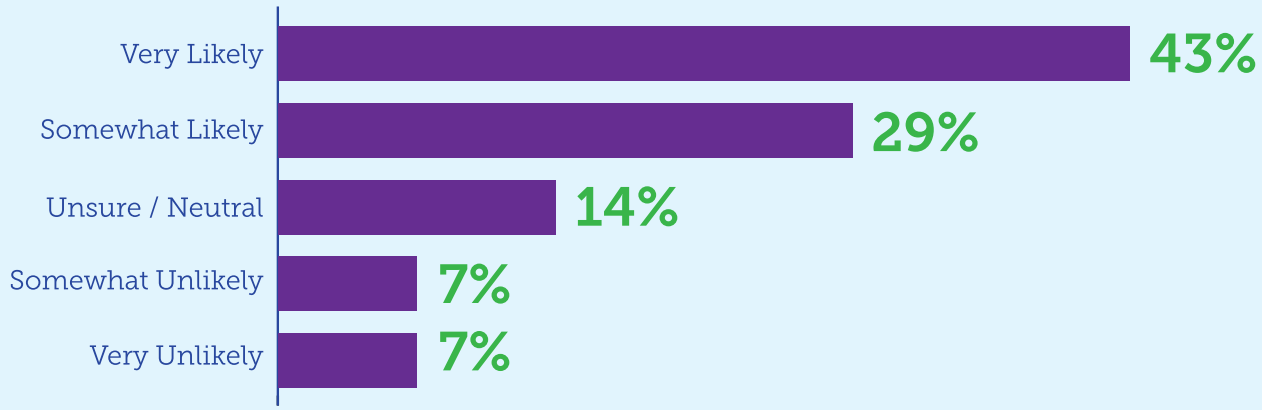
Resilience: Lessons from Student Advocates in California

As we completed the end of our first year together and began preparations for our second, uCANRise hosted a day of discussion and workshops for students from 11 California campuses. The event, titled "Resilience: Lessons from Student Advocates in California," featured a panel that included students Helen Yasko from Students Making a Change, Emilia Martinez from RISE Free, and Genesis Jara, California State University Long Beach Associated Students, Inc., and was held in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles at the i. am. College Track facility. The event attracted students from Northern California, Southern California, and the Inland Empire. Attendees expressed a wide range of experiences with and perspectives about advocacy.

For instance, while a few students identified as "brand new" to advocacy, most were a bit more experienced, though still considered themselves to be somewhat inexperienced. While a few felt that the appropriate role of students was to take their cues from teachers, administrators, and others on the best way to approach educational equity, the majority felt that students should take the lead in organizing and movement building.

Most felt that students should build skills and networks through a variety of methods, including participation in student government, membership in clubs like the Black Student Union, Hermanos Unidos, and the Asian Student Union, and through service and organizing activities in their home communities with local community groups. Most students, we found out, were at least somewhat likely, if not very likely, to return to their home communities for advocacy activities, as shown in the table below.

Likeliness of returning to home community to engage in advocacy



When students at the gathering were given the opportunity to prioritize educational equity issues that they were most concerned about, they chose as their top four issues food and housing insecurity, college affordability, college completion/success, and student mental health support. During the event, students broke out into four groups to more deeply discuss how to address and solve these issues. The following summarizes highlights from their conversations.

Food insecurity and homelessness: Students shared experiences of attempting to implement well-functioning food pantries to relieve college student hunger. In addition to dealing with administrative hurdles and licensing (such as for food safety and refrigeration), other issues have included keeping the pantries stocked; securing ongoing funding to ensure continued operation with a stable inventory; and determining and procuring healthy food options that are nonperishable. While food pantries have provided some support for student food security needs, they have not solved the student hunger crisis.

Participants in the food insecurity and homelessness group also discussed the difficulties that students have accessing food with campus meal plans due to restricted dining hall hours and distances between dining halls and classrooms on large campuses. Students sometimes have to choose between food and housing, and so they cancel their meal plans to make housing payments. Many learn to go without food and some develop eating disorders. Calorie restriction takes it toll on their physical, mental, and emotional health.

College affordability: Students shared experiences of working several jobs, taking classes multiple times because they have to drop them so they can work, having hungry days in class when they knew there would be nothing to eat at home because their aid money went not just to tuition and books, but to cover high housing costs in California cities. Some students shared stories of homelessness or of crowding 12 students into one-bedroom apartments to be able to afford rent.

Participants pointed out that while administrators think "affordability" is about tuition costs, what students are really struggling with is living expenses. Just meeting basic needs of food and shelter for full-time students in California is a

huge struggle. And that struggle has a ripple effect, impacting school performance, mental health, debt, and even family stability.

College completion/success: Students shared their experiences of beginning college classes only to find that they were not as prepared as their peers were, despite the strong effort they put into their community high schools, including taking extra courses in summer school and completing advanced placement classes. Participants faulted a lack of rigor in their high school courses, where they experienced less demanding curriculum being taught by less seasoned instructors.

Participants also noted a lack of support in the college setting, where students had difficulty navigating the maze of general education requirements without trained, committed advisors to help steer their learning plans. Financial aid was an additional concern, with money and financial stressors being one of the biggest trends affecting college completion. Students emphasized that some of these issues must be shepherded by administrators, faculty, and staff. First-generation and low-income students don't always have the capacity to self-advocate on top of all of the other stresses and responsibilities they carry.

Student mental health supports: Students were largely concerned with the lack of available mental health services on their campuses. They shared stories of wait times of up to a month or more for students to see campus mental health counselors, and some students noted that many resources are not visible to the students who need them. Some noted that a lack of student insurance creates a barrier for low-income students who need more than one or two meetings with a mental health professional, since subsequent visits must be made with off-campus providers.

Participants acknowledged that first-generation college students carry a particular burden when it comes to mental health issues. First-generation students face a great deal of pressure to succeed and are profoundly aware of the sacrifices other family members may have made for them to pursue a college degree. Yet their family members may not understand the demands that come with being full-time students, and thus may not be able to provide emotional support and understanding that students need as they navigate the system on their own.

Advocacy Priorities

Students in each breakout group identified their priorities by the following issue areas:

FOOD AND HOUSING INSECURITY

- fighting for a CSU-wide rapid rehousing bill
- connecting youth-focused homelessness services in the community to student needs on campus
- improving emergency housing intervention programs to create accessibility for students who do not wish to take out loans
- increasing number and quality of food pantries on California campuses
- easing restrictions on campus basic needs programs and CalFresh program

COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY

- building statewide student coalitions where ideas, knowledge, and resources could be pooled
- implementing loan forgiveness programs, and tuition freezes
- increasing funding for students that addresses the burden of living expenses associated with specific California campus locales

COLLEGE COMPLETION/SUCCESS

- ensuring more guidance for resources available to students
- encouraging proactive support from campus faculty and staff
- increasing emphasis on and support for student mental health
- building an awareness of intergenerational, cultural requirements for first-generation and other students

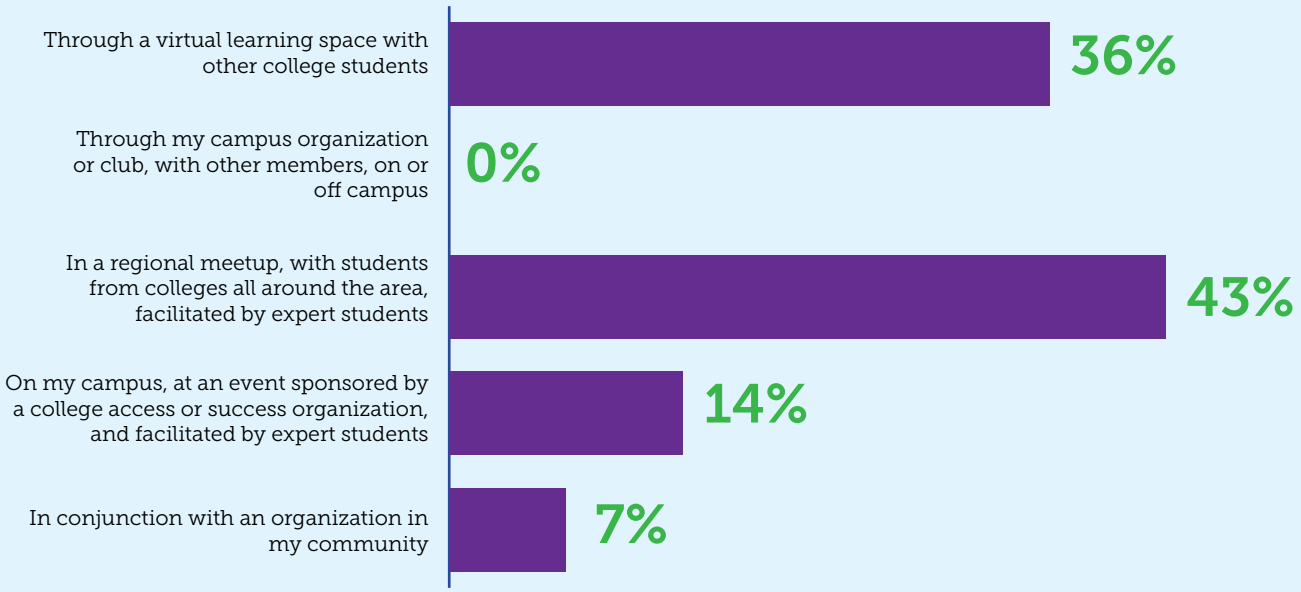
STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

- providing on-campus safe spaces for students to seek out support
- making widely available information about mental health issues that students may face, especially to incoming students immediately upon becoming part of the campus community
- reducing mental health stigma across campus, including by persistently shaping student, staff, faculty, and administrator attitudes

Training Formats

In thinking about our future work with these students and students like them, we plan to draw on their preferences for training formats. When asked what training formats appealed most to them, students preferred online learning spaces and in-person training events that allowed them to network with students from other campuses. They were less interested in training through community organizations in their home towns and neighborhoods and on campus with college access and success organizations, even when expert students would serve as facilitators.

Preferred format for receiving additional resources



The event concluded with a strong sense of optimism among students in response to the uCANRise's commitment to them and future student-led activism. But the success of this initiative wouldn't have been possible if not for the time and dedication the students gave in the early phase of this two-year process. We are lucky and excited to continue working side-by-side with students to support their empowerment as change agents in educational equity.

Looking Ahead

As direct-service organizations strive for greater equity in college access and success, we recognize that it can be challenging to find opportunities to effectively reorient ourselves and our work toward amplifying students' efforts, strategies, and voices. Hopefully, the information in this report, including the 20 Promising Practices, have inspired you to integrate this work into your vision and programs, whether in a small, experimental way or through a large, organizational transformation.

Thank you for joining us on this journey as we seek to inspire, prepare, and mobilize underrepresented students to play a central role in the development and implementation of policies and practices that advance student success. It is our hope that our theory of change and resource guide will catalyze direct-service organizations to further enhance how they support students. We recognize this work is challenging and will require effective, sustained collaboration with students and a range of community-based organizations. As a collective, we commit to pursuing that collaborative work and invite you to connect with us as we advance equity and social justice in higher education.

Endnotes

[1]For more on this issue, see https://accelerationproject.org/About-Us

[2]Zimmerman, Marc A. "Empowerment Theory: Psychological, Organizational, and Community Levels of Analysis" in *Handbook of Community Psychology*, Julian Rappaport and Edward Seidman, eds. New York: Kluwer Academic/ Plenum Publishers, 2000.

[3]Adapted from The Kresge Foundation, "Community Investment: Focusing on the System A Working Paper;" 9-14. https://kresge.org/sites/default/files/Kresge-Community-Investment-Focusing-on-the%20System-March%202015.pdf

[4]Winegar, Natasha, Susan Misra, and Ashley Shelton. "Influencing Complex Systems Change." *Nonprofit Quarterly,* May 3, 2017.

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