



# LEADING WITH HOPE

## Supporting Latina Leaders for a Better California

By Cynthia Moreno, Dalia Gonzalez, Arpita Sharma, Rachel Rosner, and Manuel Pastor  
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**USC** Dornsife  
*Equity Research Institute*

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MARIA CADENAS '17, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF SANTA CRUZ COMMUNITY VENTURES

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This work would not have been possible without the generous funding provided by a few key partners including the California Community Foundation, The James Irvine Foundation, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Wells Fargo Foundation. We are also grateful to Assemblymember Wendy Carrillo who helped secure a budget allocation from the 2021 California State Budget to fund this report. A special thank you to Efrain Escobedo of the California Community Foundation for identifying the need for this data and making the original investment to initiate this study.

This work was a team effort by staff at the USC Equity Research Institute who wrote literature reviews, created data collection tools, embarked on survey collection and interviews, analyzed survey data and coded interview transcripts, and synthesized findings into what turned into this report. Cynthia Moreno, Data Analyst II, and Rachel Rosner, ERI Research affiliate, worked closely with HOPE to connect with the women featured

in this report, manage the team, and distill findings. Rhonda Ortiz, Managing Director, helped establish the scope for this work and provided input at key times throughout the process. The rest of the core ERI team includes: Arpita Sharma, Dalia Gonzalez, Emma Yudelevitch, and Shannon Camacho. Graduate student researchers Carolina Otero and Adriana Valencia-Wences also contributed greatly in each of these efforts. Thanks to Manuel Pastor, Director, for his insight, direction, and feedback; to Sabrina Kim and graphic design consultant, Cristina Rutter, for designing an engaging end-product; and to Eunice Velarde Flores and Jamie Flores for administration and finance management, as well as Gladys Malibiran and Lauren Perez for all things related to communications and promotion.

Most of all, we are deeply grateful to the women who provided their thoughtful insight through our survey, interview process, or focus groups. We hope this report is a testament to your success, will encourage other Latinas to choose the path of leadership, and convince others to invest even more in developing leaders like you.



MARINA E. PEREZ '17, MANAGER AT CA STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD - LEADING HER HLI GROUP DURING LEGISLATIVE MEETINGS IN SACRAMENTO

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The land where USC ERI conducts its work is located within the ancestral homelands of over 150 California Native American Tribes.<sup>1</sup> While the state is home to many indigenous groups, including people from Tribal Nations that were the original inhabitants of what we now call California, there are also many Native Americans from other regions of what we now call the United States (representing hundreds of non-Californian Tribes and Native Nations), indigenous immigrants (including Canadian First Nations and Inuit, Mexican, Central and South American indigenous peoples, and Pacific Islander nations and people), many of whom were also forced into California as a result of U.S. policies and actions abroad.

We acknowledge that the land we reside on was taken by a settler-colonial society that exploited native, immigrant, migrant, and enslaved people – stealing labor, knowledge, and skills – to build what we now call California. As we work to produce meaningful research, we must grapple with what it means to live on stolen land, understand our role and responsibilities as guests on Native American homelands, and be committed to supporting the struggle for Native Nations' sovereignty and self-determination.

## FOREWORD

### **Assemblymember Wendy Carrillo, 51st California State Assembly District**



The importance of this report cannot be overstated, above all because it provides evidence for something I have long known; HOPE and the Latinas they train are not only changing the face of California leadership but are also making our state a more equitable and just place for all. Their commendable achievements continue to exemplify what it means to pursue civic leadership. The following report will use the HOPE Leadership Institute as a case study for Latina Impact in California. As a proud HOPE alumna, the voices of my hermanas will bring to light their hard work, advocacy, and perseverance, as we work collectively for a better future.

I look forward to witnessing how the findings of this report will help the State, local governments, and non-profit institutions better understand the leadership trajectories of Latinas, as well as bring to light their economic and civic contributions. In aiding the development of effective recruitment strategies, the report will allow our state's most important institutions to prepare the next generation for success. Through their findings, the USC Equity Research Institute and HOPE have given us a powerful tool to help further strengthen the contributions of Latinas, allowing them to maximize the well-being of all Californians. To truly build back better than ever before – we must invest in Latinas.

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### **Antonia Hernández, President & Chief Executive Officer, California Community Foundation**

With the release of this groundbreaking study, USC Equity Research Institute gives irrefutable evidence as to why investing in Latina leadership development is an investment in the future of our state and our nation. This report showcases how Latina leaders advocate and bring issues forward that matter to historically marginalized communities, create bridges through multiracial efforts, and tend to lead with racial equity and economic justice in mind. In addition, the report outlines the challenges and barriers Latinas continue to face, such as sexism, discrimination, economic disparities, and lack of investment, which hinder the full potential of their transformative impact.



The combination of demographic data and primary accounts from some of the state's most influential Latinas pinpoint their path not only to their professional success, but to how they have been able to create positive change for California communities. The common trajectory for these leaders has been their connection to Hispanas Organized for Political Equality (HOPE) and the Latinas who make up their network. For these Latina leaders, HOPE was a gamechanger. Every sector from government, corporate, and philanthropy need to make a large investment in the future of Latinas to secure a better future for all. Our investments now, will begin to improve the lives of underserved communities today and ensure we are building up the next generation of Californians to thrive.

## FOREWORD

HOPE's mission is to uplift our communities through education, advocacy, and the development of a Latina leadership pipeline. We are proud to introduce this report which showcases how the HOPE Leadership Institute has built up the power of Latina advocates who have made California a better place for our communities over the last three decades and makes the case for urgent investment in amplifying the impact of Latinas leaders. From the first-generation college students to the women who become the first and only to take on a position of leadership in their field, Latinas are pioneers in being the first and, as this report shows, are well poised to increase our leadership in the most diverse state in the nation.

In addition to telling the demographic story of Latinas as a key part of the future of our state, this report provides concrete evidence that Latinas are leaders who center equity and collaboration. They are building power in their communities civically, economically, and politically with a racial equity lens. This type of leadership is crucial to building a more equitable California.

Latinas are nearly 20% of California's population, 10% of America's population, parents to over half of the children in California, and yet they face some of the most challenging economic, educational, and health barriers. Despite the challenges and lack of philanthropic investment in Latinas, we continue to find a way to survive. This report is a bold declaration that we can no longer afford to sideline, pass up, and gloss over the existence of Latinas and their contributions.

We are extremely grateful to the USC Equity Research Institute for their thought partnership and commitment to boldly telling the story of Latina leadership. Thank you to the team who put data, narrative, and heart, to our vision: Cynthia Moreno, Rachel Rosner, Rhonda Ortiz, and Dr. Manuel Pastor. This study would not be possible without the financial support of great partners who believe in the transformative power of HOPE and Latina leaders.

By investing in Latinas, we stand to gain more adaptive and responsive leaders capable of supporting stronger and more equitable communities. Where Latinas are leading, Californians are being well served. Where Latina voices are heard, equitable strategies are put in place to advance all citizens. This report shows us what we stand to gain, and what we stand to lose at this crucial moment in history. We can no longer afford not to center gender, race, and ethnicity in every single conversation about the economy and civic society.

We dedicate this report to the women who have gone through HOPE's leadership programs, and to the millions of Latinas living across the United States whose stories of leadership have not been captured in this report and who, without recognition or accolades, are building a better nation for us all.

With hope toward the future,

Helen Torres – CEO, HOPE

Rosie Arroyo – Board Chair, HOPE

Maya Gomez-O'Cadiz – Director of Communications and Research, HOPE





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The support that goes into supporting other Latinas is so important and unseen work. Whether it's something like the behind the scenes work of advancing another Latina's name for a board, commission, promotion, etc., or just the support we give each other through friendships and networks that gives us the fuel to continue to persevere in our professional life and goals. The friendships I have built through HLI have definitely provided me that support and is something that's not quantifiable. I see those friends also doing that for so many others.

*- Sara Arce '17, Vice President of Policy and Advocacy, The Campaign for College Oppourtunity*

Latinas comprise nearly twenty percent of the population of California, representing the largest share (at thirty-nine percent) of California women, and in their role as mothers, are raising more than half of the children in the state. Sixty-eight percent of Latinas also participate in the labor force. In many ways, how Latinas fare helps determine the future of the state, both in terms of their own well-being and the prospects for California's next generation. But it is deeper than this: this report suggests that California Latinas tend to lead in ways that center equity, build bridges, and will be key to sustaining a robust multiracial democracy.

Given their critical role, there is some good news to share: despite a slew of barriers ranging from educational challenges, sexism and discrimination in the workplace, and persistent wage disparities that limit the financial capital needed to start businesses and run political campaigns, Latinas have made remarkable progress at assuming new positions of leadership, particularly in the public and non-profit sectors. We hope that the stories we share in this report will inspire readers as we highlight how Latinas seek to address ongoing economic and social inequalities that have left communities even more vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath.

But it is important to realize that this stepping up to leadership is not something that has occurred by chance: programs like the HOPE Leadership Institute (HLI), led by Hispanas Organized for Political Equality (HOPE), have sought to impart the skills, create the networks, and build the infrastructure needed to lead and build power among Latinas in California. HOPE is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that conducts programming to strengthen communities via Latina leadership training and legislative advocacy. The organization is committed to ensuring political and economic parity for Latinas, as such, the organization does not support or oppose any political party or any candidate.



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HOPE has recognized what the research tells us about the importance of mentoring, the specificity of Latina leadership styles, the barriers that stand in the way, and the dual role of networks in creating opportunities to both be lifted up and to lift up others. In fact, it is this type of work that builds and strengthens the leaders who are key to overcoming the systemic and structural inequities that plague our state.

As proponents of an ecosystem-based approach to building power among communities to tackle inequities, we posit that reaching equity does not and cannot fall on one type of organization but instead requires a healthy ecosystem full of leaders with different strengths and full of organizations that focus on specific power-building strategies. As an organization that specializes in developing strong Latina leaders, generating research, and leading bold advocacy and policy efforts, HOPE and its HLI leaders advance several essential components of the power-building ecosystem throughout the state.

This report offers a deep dive into the HLI program and its alumnae and a look into how HOPE contributes to a broader power-building framework that seeks to bring marginalized communities into spaces they have historically been excluded from. To this end, we draw on existing research, secondary analysis of key Latina demographics and economic data in California, as well as our analysis of survey results for nearly 300 HLI alumnae, interview data from 30 individual interviews, and three

geographically distinct discussion groups. Among HLI alumnae that were surveyed: 20 percent are immigrants, 54 percent are second-generation U.S.-born citizens; 77 percent are first-generation college students; 43 percent work in the public sector, 33 percent work in the private sector, and 24 percent work in the non-profit sector; and 80 percent credit HOPE with expanding their Latina network. After a brief overview of the data and the literature, we turn to three main areas of analysis: (1) How Latinas have learned to lead—through HOPE and the HLI network; (2) How and where Latinas are leading—across issue areas and sectors; and (3) How investing in Latina-focused organizations and programming can be beneficial for the entire state of California.

We offer eight main takeaways from our work:

**1. Latinas bring forward and advocate for issues that matter to historically marginalized communities—and more can be done to expand roles and broaden issue sets.** HLI alumnae connect their lived experience or their Latina identity to their work, community engagement, and commitment to see through structural changes for communities of color. Many feel that when others find out they are affiliated with HOPE, they are taken seriously and people in power listen. Such

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

alumnae could have even more impact if new areas of focus included reproductive rights, criminal justice reform, and environmental/ climate justice in the state. Yet another area could be corporate boards and commissions—dedicated effort to increase Latina appointments in the public sector is already successfully underway and could be duplicated in the private sector. A continued focus needs to be on business: Corporations need to appoint Black, Latina, Indigenous, and Asian American people to the C-suite beyond the token few—and they need to alter corporate culture to ensure their presence is valued.

**2. Networks of support help Latinas magnify their talents and reach—and boosting mentorship would yield big dividends.** HLI alumnae stress the far-reaching influence of the HLI network, noting the statewide reach and emphasizing how they felt empowered to stand up for issues affecting Black and brown communities, women, and low-income communities. But it is also personal support: women referred to the HLI network as akin to a sisterhood, a comfort zone where the women did not have to justify their perspective or feel out of place because of who they are. They also stressed how their peers go out of their way to help with job searches, recommend them for important appointments, or provide advice about running small businesses or running for elected office. HLI alumnae keep each other accountable and acknowledge their responsibility to elevate the voices of Latinas and all women of color who

come after them. Continuing to build the network and providing Latinas with the training and resources to mentor others, could be useful for the state.

**3. Latinas have achieved greater political representation—and we need to do more and address lags in areas outside the public and non-profit sectors.** More than ever, Latinas can be found at almost every level of government in California. Nonetheless, participants repeatedly pointed out that this is not the case in more male-dominated spaces, such as the private sector. While Latinas' gender and ethnic identity has had its advantage – providing differing insights, skills, and perspectives that make for impactful leadership in their communities – addressing challenges of sexism and racism in the workplace and pushing hard for advancement in the public, civic, and private sectors is critical and could benefit the state as a whole.

**4. Latinas tend to create bridges through multiracial efforts—and more needs to be done to encourage such collaboration and intersectionality.** HLI alumnae stress the need to infuse racial equity in policy, budgets, programming, and organizational culture not just for the benefit of Latinos, but for the benefit of all communities of color. Our interviewees stressed mentoring and hiring other women of color and noted

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the importance of standing in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. In general, there is a need for more collaboration across race and ethnicity and to elevate the voices of Latinos of all races, as well as the aligned voices of other communities. Cross collaboration needs to happen in advocacy work and in the public and private sectors, with a particular role for progress in the corporate sector.

**5. Latinas tend to lead with racial equity and economic justice in mind—and this can benefit the entire state.** Many respondents connected their experiences as descendants of immigrants or immigrants themselves and coming from primarily working-class backgrounds to the sort of professional work and impact in the community they want have. Racial and economic equity are not after-thoughts: as noted in the report, Latinas have declared racism a public health issue, demanded and secured affordable housing from developers, advocated for green spaces in communities of color, showed solidarity with immigrant communities, fought for street vendors, steered funds to marginalized communities, and fought for equal access to California beaches. In a state that consistently ranks in the top five states in terms of income inequality, it is critical to have leaders who realize that their rise up the ranks requires that they extend a hand to others and that they also lift up the bottom rung so all have a decent living and a chance at success.

**6. Latinas face numerous barriers to becoming leaders—and we need to recognize both the professional and personal challenges.** Advantage and disadvantage are generational – and many Latinas who want to run for office do not have their own funds or access to wealthy donors and funders. This is one of the reasons that Latinas and women of color more broadly need access to something like the HLI network. The network also helps address “personal” issues such as the challenges of care work, families that may be unsupportive, and the struggles with confidence that can come when one is the “first-through” a system that was set up for others. This makes the network and mentoring all that more important.

**7. Latina leaders need organizations that can create and promote pipelines—and that should start with a reach to young people.** Because many HLI alumnae were the first or only in many spaces, they expressed a commitment to guiding new generations of leaders. HOPE has identified this need – representation at a younger age matters – and developed a youth program. However, HLI alumnae’s influence extends beyond this specific institutional space. Latina leaders and HLI alumnae mentor a wide range of individuals, including men, women, LGBT and non-binary individuals of a variety of ages but the majority of those mentored by our respondents were



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overwhelmingly women, particularly young adult/early career women. This needs to continue and expand.

**8. Latina leadership benefits the entire state—and this deserves far more philanthropic support than is currently being invested.** As we have noted, Latinas are fundamental to the fabric of the state, constituting almost 20 percent of the state and raising over half of the state's children. They also tend to lead in ways that are inclusive of other communities—and, particularly when supported by programs like HLI, they tend to make sure that other leaders can also step into their own. But philanthropic funding for these types of efforts is frequently inadequate to the long-term tasks—and opportunities—at hand. And it is our hope that this report will both help to document what Latinas and HLI are doing for California and help to stir philanthropic interest in supporting Latina leadership development.

We live in a world on fire: we face the challenges of climate change, income inequality, unaffordable housing, immigrant inclusion, educational disparities, over-policing and over-incarceration, and so much more. With so much at stake and so much on the plate, it is easy to become paralyzed and simply fall prey to despair about our future. But among the bright spots that can perhaps give us hope is this growing network of Latina leaders who are making a difference for their communities and for the state.

By continuing to support HOPE and similar organizations that are committed to this work, ripple effects will be felt and seen throughout private and public sectors of leadership, communities of color, and by all Californians. Latinas are key to the future of the state, if they can lead with hope and enjoy the support from organizations like HOPE, there is a better California in store for all of us.



HLI CLASS OF 2019 AT THE CALIFORNIA STATE CAPITOL

## INTRODUCTION

### A SNAPSHOT OF LATINA LEADERSHIP IN CALIFORNIA

Latinas comprise nearly 20 percent of California's population and are the largest share (at 39 percent) of the state's women. Sixty-eight percent of Latinas also participate in the labor force.<sup>2</sup> Yet their leadership is often under-recognized, under-utilized, and under-supported. Organizations like Hispanas Organized for Political Equality (HOPE) and their Leadership Institute (HLI) have sought to address this gap by providing the professional and personal support that equips leaders with the skills and networks necessary to fight for equity for all Californians. This report seeks to contribute to the emerging research on Latina leadership with a specific focus on California and on the interventions that HOPE has made to promote such leadership.

As proponents of an ecosystem-based approach to building power among California communities to tackle inequities, we posit that reaching equity does not and cannot fall on one type of organization. Instead, it requires a healthy ecosystem full of leaders with different strengths and full of organizations that focus on specific power-building strategies. As an organization that specializes in developing strong Latina leaders and leading bold advocacy and policy efforts, HOPE and its HLI leaders advance several important strategies of USC Equity Research Institute's Power-Building Ecosystem Framework.<sup>3</sup>

While the main focus of our analysis here is on HOPE and their HLI program, we note that they are but one example of how to build a base of leaders that can move the needle

on justice and equity. We seek to build further interest among philanthropy and others to specifically invest in Latina-based community solutions and, more generally, addressing disparities in the funding of women-of-color-led organizations.

To this end, we drew on existing research and our analysis of key demographic and economic data to represent Latinas in California at large; and then drew on a survey of nearly 300 HLI alumnae, 30 individual interviews, and three geographically distinct discussion groups. After a brief overview of the data and the literature, we turn to three main areas of analysis: (1) How Latinas have learned to lead—through HOPE and the HLI network; (2) How and where Latinas are leading—across issue areas and sectors; and (3) How investing in Latina-focused organizations and programming can be beneficial for the entire state of California.

We conclude by uplifting eight key takeaways from the work including the important role of networks and mentorship, the need to achieve greater Latina representation in the private sector, the benefits of Latina leadership that is multiracial and intersectional in its approach, and the need to create pipelines that reach a younger generation. We close this last section by noting the ways that Latina leadership benefits the whole state and calling for more philanthropic investment in programs like HLI.



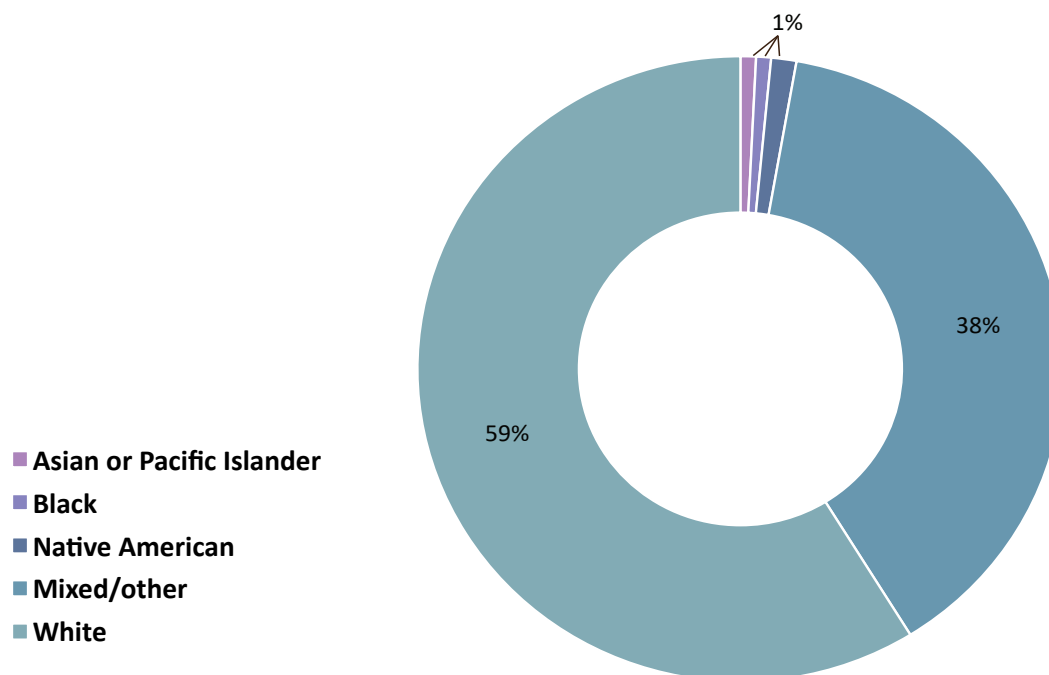
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### A SNAPSHOT OF LATINA LEADERSHIP IN CALIFORNIA

Before jumping into the demographic and economic context, it is worthwhile to start by interrogating the term “Latina,” partly to avoid conflating racial and ethnic identity. Figure 1 shows various racial identities of those who identify themselves in the Census as both female and Hispanic or Latino. Note that Latinas may identify as any race—white, Black, Native American, Asian or Pacific Islander, or mixed—and this illustrates the many nuances and often invisibilization of certain groups within Latino communities. *In Pursuit of Latina Liberation* by Elizabeth Martinez poses the important question:

*Who and what is a Latina? Ignorance, confusion, and often impassioned controversy make it necessary to begin this commentary with such basic questions. Latinas, like Latinos, are in general a mestizo or mixed people. They combine, in varying degrees, indigenous (from pre-Columbian times), European (from Spain's invasion of the Americas), and African roots (from the millions of slaves brought to the Americas, including at least two hundred thousand to Mexico alone).<sup>4</sup>*

Figure 1. Latina Racial Identity, California, 2015–2019



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA.  
Note: Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

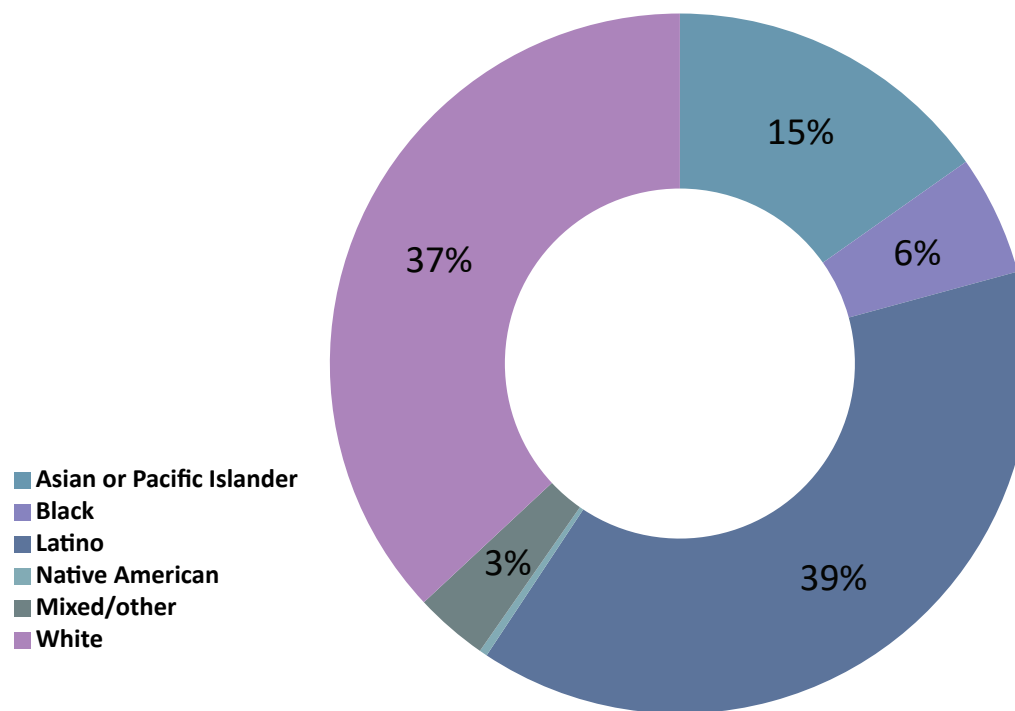
## INTRODUCTION

### A SNAPSHOT OF LATINA LEADERSHIP IN CALIFORNIA

In addition to the racial diversity within those who call themselves Latina, we can also see in Figure 2 that Latinas make up a significant part of California. Constituting just under 40 percent of all women in the state, they are important demographically in another way: they constitute 43 percent of the mothers in California with children under the age of 18 living in their households—see Figure 3 on page 17.

This is partly because Latinas, with a median age of 28, are much younger than non-Latina women who have a median age of 43—see Figure 4 on page 18. Looked at another way, of children under the age of 18 with a mother living with them, more than half have a Latina mother. How Latinas fare is critical to how their children do—and thus to how the state will do.

Figure 2. Race/Ethnicity of Women in California, 2015–2019



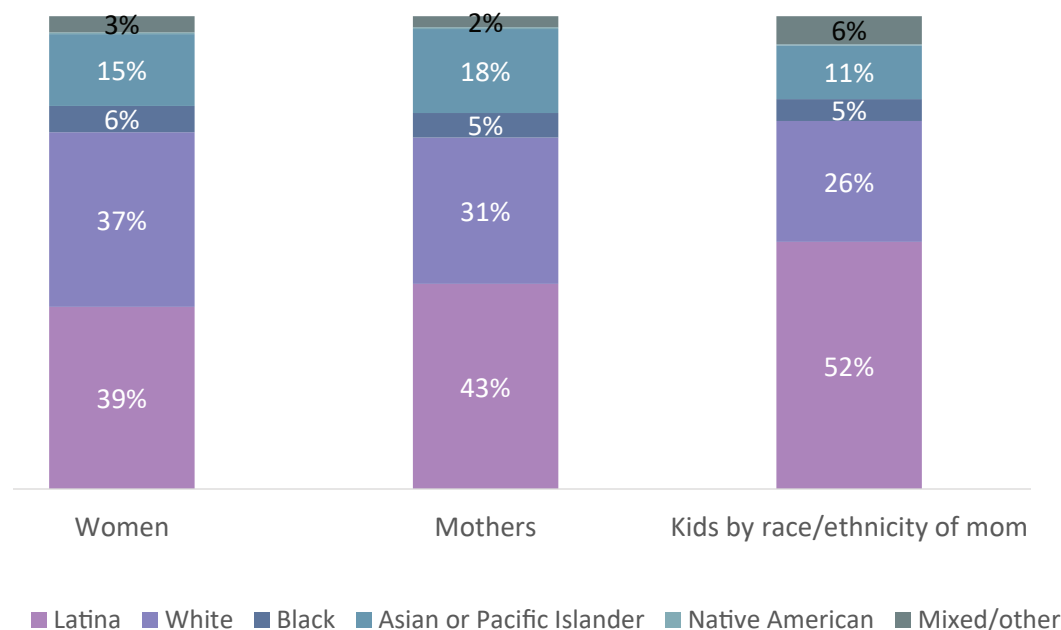
Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA.  
Note: Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.



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### A SNAPSHOT OF LATINA LEADERSHIP IN CALIFORNIA

Figure 3. Women, Mothers, and Children by Mother's Race/Ethnicity, California, 2015–2019



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA.  
Note: Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

While Latinas may be central to the state's society and economy, they consistently face the widest pay gap compared to other racial/ethnic groups.<sup>5</sup> They also remain vulnerable to economic downturns. For example, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, almost 30 percent of Latinas lost their jobs through May 2020 compared to 9.4 percent of white women.<sup>6</sup> An earlier study showed that Latina-owned startups relied heavily on their strong connections but had fewer contacts for business-related information than their Latino counterparts.<sup>7</sup> Networks matter for business—and as we point out later, they also matter in

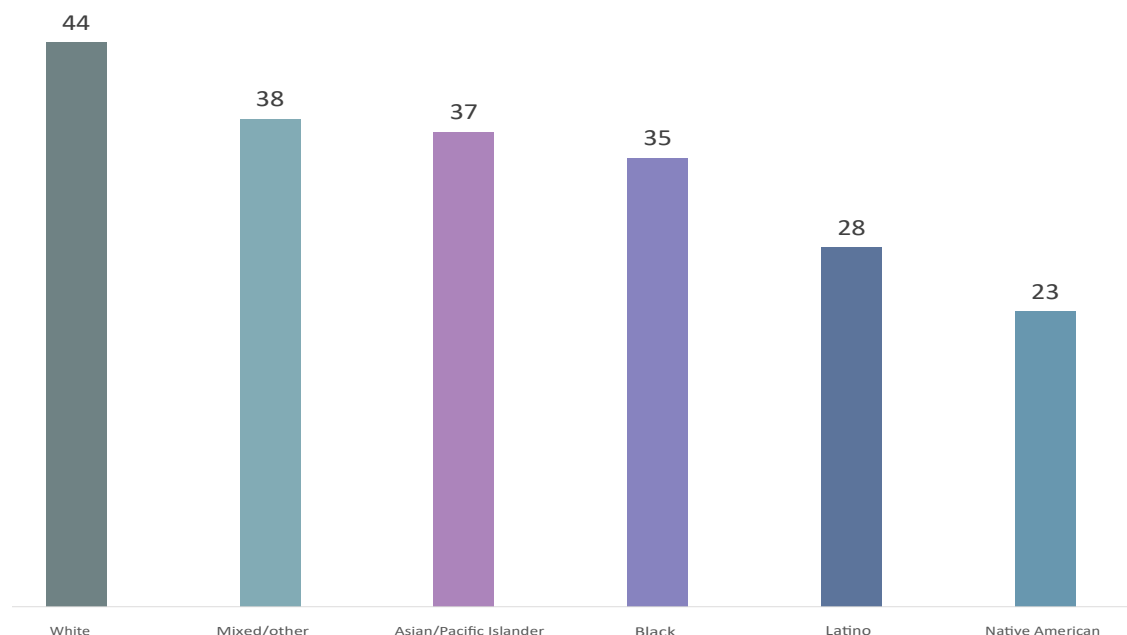
nonprofit, public, and civic sectors. They certainly matter for reaching the heights of influence, as well: Latinas make up only 3.3 percent of women appointed to California public company boards.<sup>8</sup>

**Professional Advancement and Mentorship.** The number of Latinas in leadership positions has grown; however, there is room for increased representation and advancement. A study on Latinas in corporate America found that many have expressed feeling pigeonholed to certain markets because of their ethnicity, which

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### A SNAPSHOT OF LATINA LEADERSHIP IN CALIFORNIA

Figure 4. Median Age of Women by Race/Ethnicity, California, 2015–2019



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average.

has prevented them from building experience in other areas. Additionally, Latinas that were born outside of the U.S. were more likely to face discrimination.<sup>9</sup>

Latina women of working age, between 25-64, are located in occupations that are often overlooked and under-paid such as: office and administrative support, building and grounds cleaning and maintenance, and sales.<sup>10</sup> Ensuring Latinas have access to leadership positions often requires higher levels of education—which, as seen in Figure 5, is still a barrier for many when compared to those who identify as Non-Latina women. This barrier is systemic and

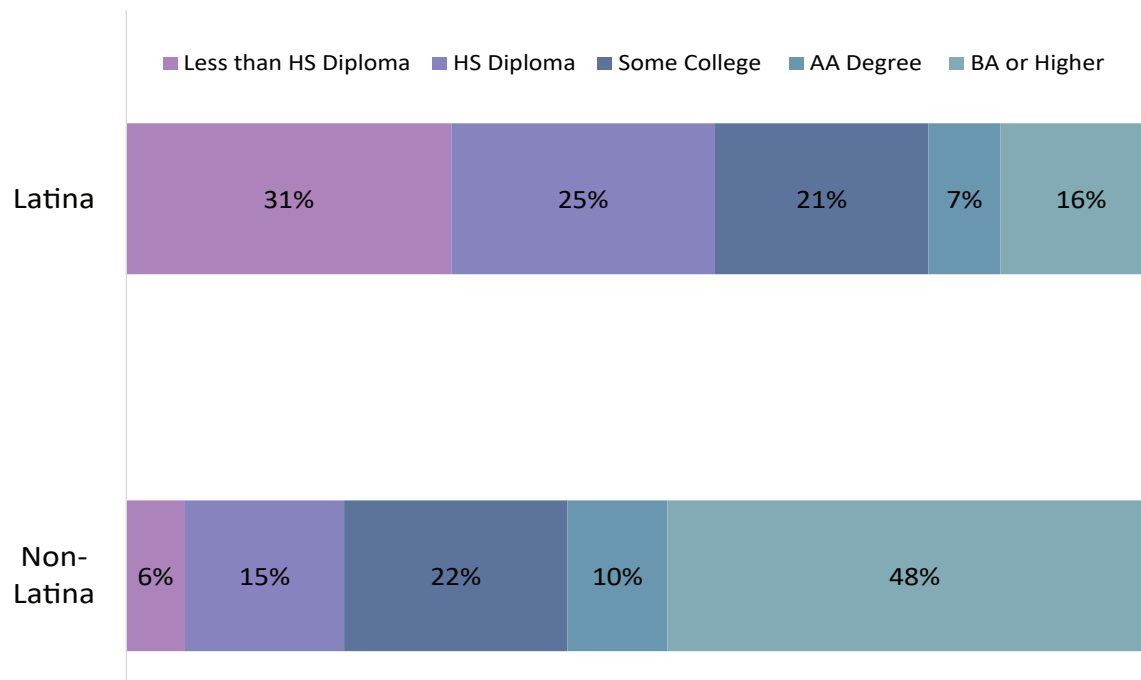
starts early for Latinas as many attend under-resourced K-12 schools and lack adequate support systems when they do enter college.<sup>11</sup>

Even when in leadership roles, a McKinsey & Company report found, “senior-level women are twice as likely as senior-level men to spend more time than men on work that falls outside their formal job responsibilities, such as recruiting employees from under-represented groups and supporting employee resource groups. A lot of the emotional labor that women managers are doing including Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) work is overlooked.”<sup>12</sup>

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### A SNAPSHOT OF LATINA LEADERSHIP IN CALIFORNIA

Figure 5. Educational Attainment of Latina and Non-Latina Women, Ages 25-64, California, 2015-2019



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average. Non-Latina women include women of all other racial/ethnic groups who do not identify as Hispanic/Latino.

A profile of Latina leadership in the U.S. found six positive characteristics that Latinas often hold as leaders: successful educational attainment, participating in leadership training, possessing self-confidence, having role models, religious influence, and family influence. Four critical obstacles identified were: lack of mentors, lack of opportunities, cultural obligations, and family obligations.<sup>13</sup> These findings hold true for many of the women surveyed and interviewed as part of this report.

In addition, according to a report entitled *Race to Lead* that focused on the nonprofit

sector, women of color expressed higher levels of negative impact related to their gender and race in their career advancement compared to men of color, white women, and white men. Among many of the disparate findings, it was found that despite similar levels of educational attainment women are less likely to hold CEO or senior management positions compared to men, and women of color were less likely to have mentors within their organization as compared to men of color and white women.<sup>14</sup>

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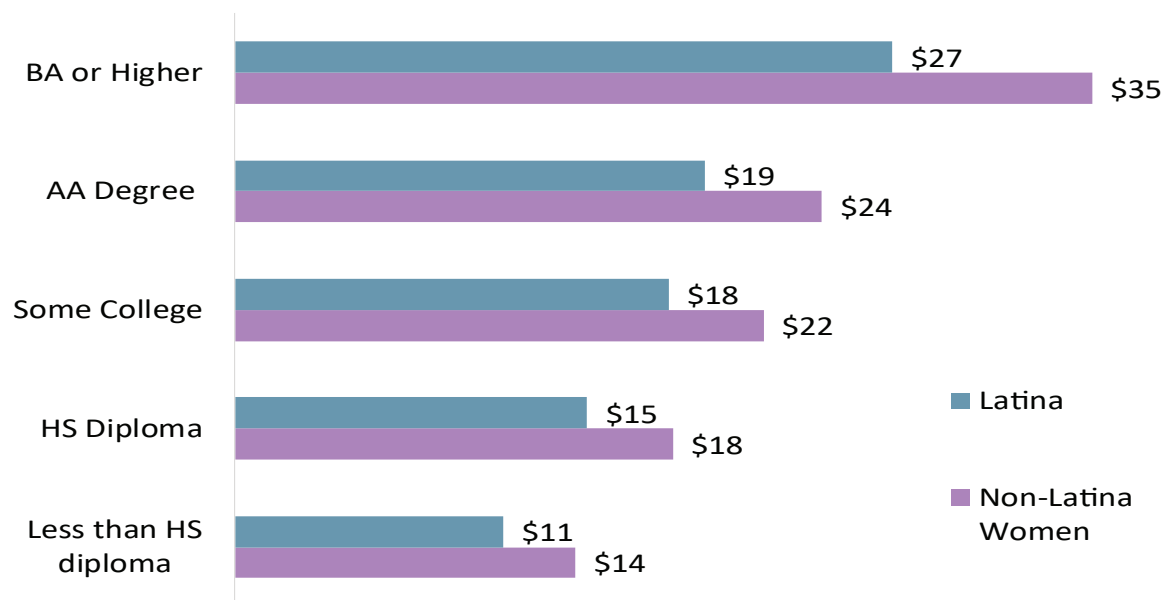
### A SNAPSHOT OF LATINA LEADERSHIP IN CALIFORNIA

This may be one of many reasons that even as Latinas reach higher levels of education, they do not always see higher wages, an outcome seen in Figure 6. Overcoming persistent discrimination can be easier when there are mentors; the importance of mentoring for career support and success is a persistent finding in the available literature. However, since there are frequently fewer people of color in leadership positions, finding Latina mentors or sponsors with positional power in the

organization is more limited.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, mentorship and sponsorship need not fall solely on the shoulders of people of color.

**Types of Leadership and Approaches.** The literature suggests that women tend to lead in ways that are different than the (male) norm: they are more relational, less authoritarian, and less hierarchical. In keeping with this, when Latinas explain their activism, they

Figure 6. Median Wages for Latinas and Non-Latina Women by Educational Attainment (\$2019), Ages 25-64, California, 2015-2019



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA.  
Note: Data represent a 2015 through 2019 average. Non-Latina women include women of all other racial/ethnic groups who do not identify as Hispanic/Latino.



## INTRODUCTION

### A SNAPSHOT OF LATINA LEADERSHIP IN CALIFORNIA

link family and community as one entity.<sup>16</sup> As Latinas draw on their own experiences to organize their communities, they pay greater attention to gender dynamics and forms of leadership: shared, behind the scenes, and in service of the larger community.<sup>17</sup> They also encourage interdependence and cooperation.<sup>18</sup>

Latina leadership approaches and practices come from an awareness of their social location and inequalities (i.e. gender, race/ethnicity, social class) which has motivated them to lead while centering the needs of the communities they serve.<sup>19</sup> Research has also shown how Latina activists—and communities of color at large—are leading intersectional organizing that differs from single issue organizing that may obscure the experiences and efforts of those at the intersections of multiple marginalities.<sup>20</sup> In addition, organizing by Black and Latina leaders has pushed for more structural and institutional changes.<sup>21</sup> However, this sort of leadership is often unseen; for example, studies of the labor movement show how Latina leadership, while impactful, has often gone under-recognized in sectors like the Los Angeles garment industry.<sup>22</sup>

As with business opportunities and economic participation, networks matter. One study that did focus on Latina networks found that Latinas, “built social capital and confidence in self through sharing knowledge and experiences in intimate, *mujerista*, or Latina womanist spaces.”<sup>23</sup> Another study found the supportive social networks are developed through relationships, trust, or *confianza*.

In these spaces, women developed reciprocal relationships that often included exchanges of resources, professional guidance, in addition to personal encouragement.<sup>24</sup> This is in keeping with a more relational and community-centered approach to leadership and government agencies should both account for this and encourage it when considering how to recruit and retain more Latina leaders.

### Political and Civic Engagement.

In terms of elected positions, Latinas—much like women of color, at large—are still underrepresented in statewide and federally-elected positions, but also at all levels of government. Some progress is apparent as Latinas now have a stronger presence as school board trustees in California with increasing gains in municipal offices, as well.<sup>25</sup> Existing research also shows that overall Latina political participation is largely motivated by the experiences of their families and the needs of their particular ethnic communities.<sup>26</sup>

Across a variety of indicators, Latinas exhibit a level of civic engagement on which leadership development programs can build and philanthropy can support. For example, Figure 7 suggests that the share of U.S.-born and naturalized voters is comprised of more Latinas than Latinos. In addition, Latinas are more likely to turn out to vote than their male counterparts.

## INTRODUCTION

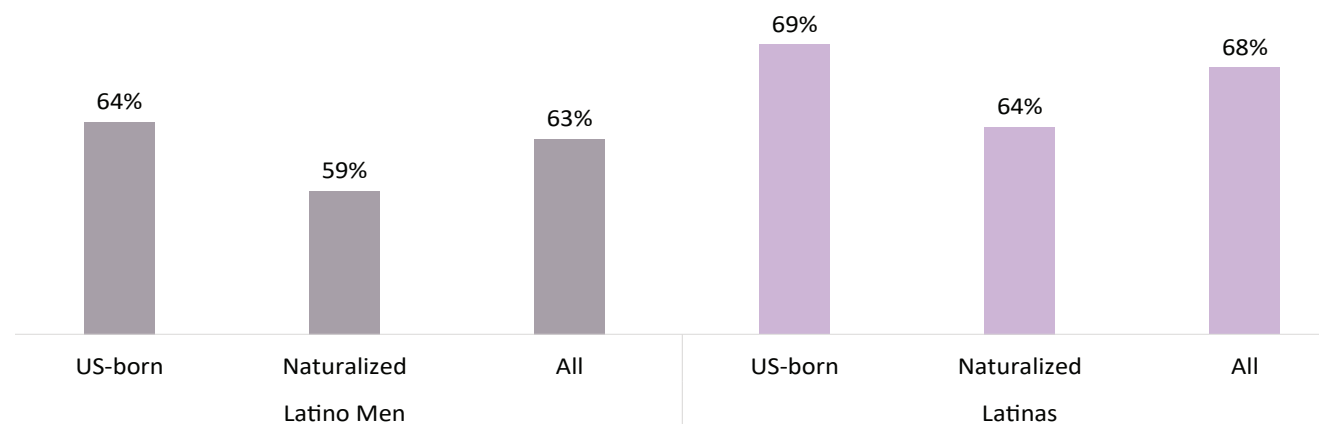
### A SNAPSHOT OF LATINA LEADERSHIP IN CALIFORNIA

How would California benefit from more Latina political leadership? In general, gender makes a difference: in states with the highest percentages of women representatives, women introduce and pass more priority bills dealing with issues related to women, children, and families than men in their states, as well as more than their female counterparts in low representation legislatures. As for Latinas, a study exploring perceived differences in the priorities and policy successes between Latinas and Latinos credited Latinas with expanding the types of issues seen as priorities by Hispanic/Latino caucuses. The authors conclude:

*If Latinas continue to increase their presence in all levels of elective office, it is likely that this intersectionality will play an increasingly significant role in many distinct aspects of American politics.<sup>27</sup>*

However, as we discuss below, it is not just the job of Latinas to increase their own representation, but also that of leaders with the authority to prioritize their training and access to such opportunities.

Figure 7. Voters as a Share of Citizen Respondents (age ≥ 18) in California, 2020 General Election



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of November 2020 Supplement of the Current Population Survey Voting and Registration Supplement. Universe includes Latinos (men and women) who voted in the November 2020 general election who are U.S. born or naturalized citizens.

## INTRODUCTION

### A SNAPSHOT OF LATINA LEADERSHIP IN CALIFORNIA

Political and economic power require much more than electoral politics. It is multifaceted power-building strategies such as leadership development, advocacy, narrative change, and alliances and coalitions that keep elected officials and institutions accountable to all communities. In that vein, Hardy-Fanta argues that for women, power means the ability to effect change rather than to be in positions of power. This paper echoes some of the studies listed above, in terms of Latinas' approach to leadership, politics, and civic engagement—which can be often overlooked in the literature and conversations on political participation.<sup>28</sup>

As mentioned at the start of this review of Latina leadership literature, it takes a village. Thus it is important to adopt an ecosystem-based framework to building power as a way to address inequities. This requires the existence of different types of organizations that focus on distinct strategies. As such, it is crucial to recognize that developing Latina leaders and equipping them to advocate for policy change in their respective sectors—all of which HOPE and HLI aim to accomplish—are critical contributions to the power-building ecosystem. This work is key to developing multifaceted strategies of long-term and deep civic engagement in California.<sup>29</sup>

Figure 8. Types of Organizations in the Power-Building Ecosystem



Source: USC Equity Research Institute, "California Health and Justice for All Power-Building Landscape: Defining the Ecosystem." Los Angeles, CA: October 15, 2019.

## METHODOLOGY

After reviewing the existing literature on Latina leadership and related fields, the ERI research team embarked on a data collection and analysis process that involved multiple pieces. Alongside the literature review, we examined statewide demographic data primarily using the American Community Survey Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, [www.ipums.org](http://www.ipums.org), 2019 American Community Survey 5-year sample, and the Current Population Survey. These various strands of literature and data sources informed the analysis in the introductory section.

To capture the impact HLI alumnae have created in their leadership trajectories, the team also developed a survey that was sent to the full HLI alumnae base—with a final response count of 275 responses. A second method of gathering information: interviews with 30 HLI alumnae that were highlighted by HOPE as leaders in their respective issue areas or sectors. The final piece of data collection came through three discussion groups of Latina leaders who were selected through snowball sampling – recommended by HLI alumnae in the survey or interview process. The groups had a mixture of HLI alumnae and non-HLI participants and had a regional focus to capture differences across the state.

Analysis began with survey submissions, which were analyzed in SPSS programming. Results were organized into charts and key results appear throughout the findings of this report.

Free response questions were analyzed separately in Excel and summarized. Interview analysis required an in-depth qualitative coding procedure where the research team collectively created a bank of codes to analyze each interview transcript using Dedoose. Each code was then downloaded and summarized separately to help inform the body of the report. The findings are heavily based on what we surmised from participant interviews, as well as free response survey questions. Finally, discussion group transcripts were summarized and appear in the form of regional discussions featured under each of the three major findings.



HLI MEMBERS AND HOPE STAFF AT PROCLAMATION  
OF LATINA HISTORY DAY AT L.A. CITY COUNCIL  
CHAMBERS

## FINDINGS OVERVIEW

So how do we further Latina leadership in California? To get at this question, this report focuses in on a group of Latinas that completed the HLI program through HOPE and now belong to an influential network collaborating and working throughout California. HOPE is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that conducts programming to strengthen communities via Latina leadership training and legislative advocacy. HOPE is committed to ensuring political and economic parity for Latinas, as such, the organization does not support or oppose any political party or any candidate.

One of their programs is the HOPE Leadership Institute (HLI), the first statewide Latina-focused leadership program: “The goal of the Institute is to train Latinas in vital leadership and advocacy skills, enabling them to create fundamental change within their local neighborhoods and across California.”<sup>30</sup>

HLI’s alumnae base is full of some of the most influential Latina leaders in the state. Table 1 and Figure 9 provide a snapshot of the survey respondents’ profiles. As shown below, the racial background of survey respondents reveals that 51 percent identified as white, 28 percent identified as multi-racial, 17 percent identified as Indigenous to the lands outside of the U.S., and 3 percent identified as Native American or Alaska Native. Responses to this survey question on racial background largely resemble how Latinas across the state identify racially (see Figure 1 above). In addition, among HLI alumnae that were surveyed: 20 percent

are first-generation immigrants, 54 percent are second-generation U.S.-born citizens; 77 percent are first-generation college students; 43 percent work in the public sector, 33 percent work in the private sector, and 24 percent work in the non-profit sector; and 80 percent credit HOPE with expanding their Latina network. Alumnae are leading in foundations, the California legislature, non-profit management, housing development, and more throughout different regions of the state. This research aims to highlight how HLI and the network that surrounds it suggest how the power of Latinas in California can be harnessed and strengthened for the benefit of all Californians.





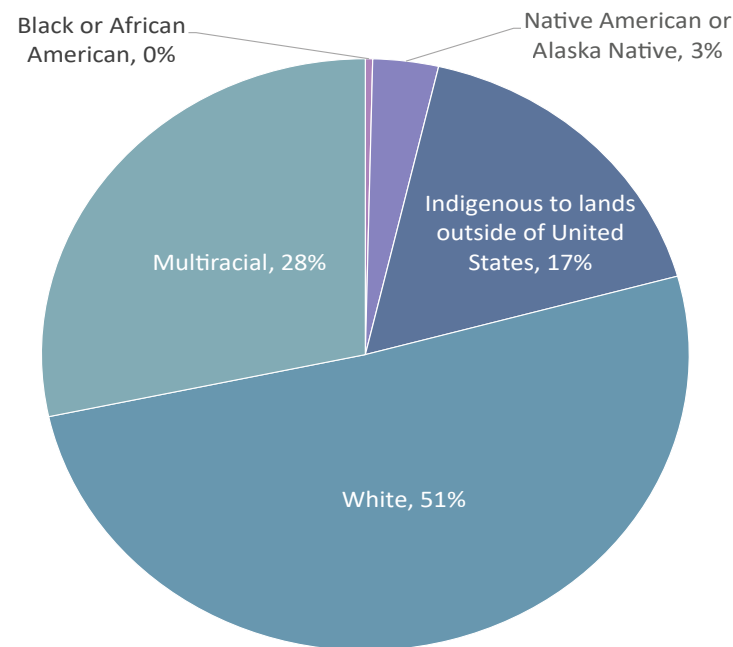
## FINDINGS OVERVIEW

Table 1. Overview of HLI Alumnae, 2021

Range from 27 – 84 years old	77% were first generation-college students
74% are either immigrants or second-generation U.S.-born citizens	73% are employed full-time; 15% are self-employed or business owners
61% serve on a board or commission	41% are either executive level or president/owners
Alumnae have worked in a majority of counties across the state	Sector: 43% public, 33% private, 24% nonprofit/foundations
94% mentor at least one person	Elected office: 9% expect to run; 7% in office; 35% considering
80% credit HOPE with increasing their Latina network	88% remain connected to HOPE to some extent; 38% remain connected to a great extent

Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. Universe (n=275) reflects all individuals who began a survey submission; universe size varies as not every participant completed the survey. See appendix on survey for more.

Figure 9. Racial Breakdown of HLI Alumnae, 2021



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. Universe (n=275) reflects all individuals who responded to the question, "How would you describe your race? (select one). Note: The category "Indigenous to Lands outside the U.S." is intended to capture those that identify as indigenous to areas that are not included in the lands we currently call the United States, such as indigenous groups from lands in what we now call Latin America.

## FINDING #1 LEARNING TO LEAD

### ► Section Roadmap

In this section, you will see how support for Latinas amplifies their leadership with exponential impacts:

- HOPE & the HLI Network: Preparing Latinas to Lead
- The Added Value of Latina Networks: Overcoming Systemic Barriers
- Alumnae Give Back and Give to Each Other
- Central California: Empowering the Next Generation of Latinas

As women and people of Latino ethnicity, HOPE Leadership Institute (HLI) alumnae have encountered substantial personal and systemic barriers throughout their trajectories. These challenges have without a doubt impacted their professional pursuits and leadership development. Given the fact that many of the women we surveyed and interviewed are first-generation college students or the first Latinas in their positions, stepping into leadership has often proven to be difficult and lonely. As we learned throughout this research, it is not an easy route when one walks alone.

At its core, networks, like the one that the HLI program provides, deliver the personal support that is necessary to face these barriers and the professional support to enter and succeed in leadership positions.

In this section, we uplift the ways in which our respondents were supported by HOPE and the HLI network as they navigated systemic barriers to assume leadership positions, and in turn, how alumnae are moved to give back to a network that has given them so much.

“

I am honored to be a part of the HOPE family of Latina leaders who inspire me every day. By participating in the HOPE Leadership Institute, I gained a whole network of other career-driven, hard-working, intelligent women...Latinas that are passionate about making a difference in their communities...I got the self-assurance that I needed to feel confident that I could be successful as a Latina, as a professional, and as a mother, and that I had this powerful network behind me.

– Karmin Noar '16, Executive Director, Biocom Institute



FROM LEFT: SAN DIEGO COUNTY SUPERVISOR, NORA VARGAS '01, NAPA COUNTY SUPERVISOR BELIA RAMOS '01, AND BEVERLY CORREA '11, SR. RELATIONSHIP MANAGER AT BANK OF AMERICA AT HOPE LEADERSHIP ALUMNAE SUMMIT

## FINDING #1 LEARNING TO LEAD

### HOPE & the HLI Network: Preparing Latinas to Lead

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The HLI program was an eye opening experience. It made me realize what type of leadership was possible by Latinas, one I was unaware of. By showing us what other Latinas were doing in leadership, that opened up my world to what was possible for me. It also provided a network of Latinas that provided a level of emotional support that I had never had access to. I knew I could count on the HLI women and the other folks I met through the network whenever I was facing any type of leadership challenge. I knew there were Latinas with expertise and most importantly the willingness to help.

– HLI Alumna

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At the outset, HOPE's programming helps prepare participants for the next level of their careers. The HOPE Leadership Institute (HLI) incorporates into its training the programmatic values of experiential learning, personal and group skill development, and fellowship among participants and other leadership training programs. The program provides content and skill-building that develop effective advocates to focus on the interrelated issues of health, employment,

and education. The learning objectives aim to have each participant: understand and engage in the dynamics of local, state, and national political processes; acquire individual and group competencies to become active and effective advocates on issues impacting Latinas; and analyze, and implement strategies to affect the development of sound public policies. A critical piece of the program is also the network that provides lasting relationships and the support necessary to utilize this network as a way to leverage resources, connections, and collaborations—a resource that many identified as invaluable to their success.



[W]hen I received the call from the Governor's Office for this job, it was largely a result of HOPE lifting me up, weighing in and saying, 'This is somebody that you should contact. She is an alumni, she is doing work in this space.' So...staying involved and engaged...with the leadership of HOPE...[has] been really helpful to me and it's opened opportunities.

– Lourdes Castro Ramirez '04, Secretary, CA Business, Consumer Services and Housing

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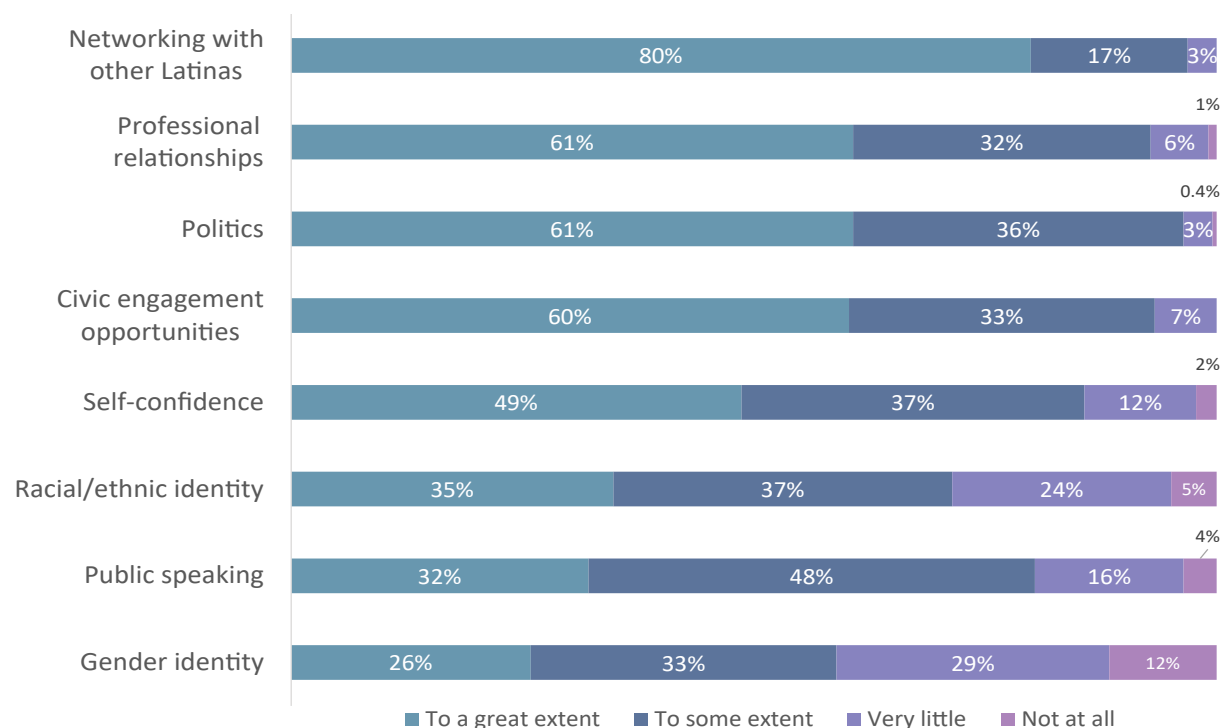
While discussing the support and connection that the HLI network provides, participants stressed how HOPE as an organization intentionally provides a

## FINDING #1 LEARNING TO LEAD

space to come together and collaborate across sectors and across the state; gain understanding of the broader sociopolitical landscape; and support each other in running for office, boards, or commissions or applying for new positions. As can be seen in Figure 10, networking was the skill most appreciated by HLI participants, closely followed by professional relationships.

Networking has often opened doors, helped prepare alumnae for interviews, and provided the social capital that may not have been afforded to them otherwise. When it comes to helping Latinas enter exclusive spaces, HOPE serves as an instrumental resource to entering influential positions that many participants currently hold. Alumna Dr. Sandra Salazar '09, Physician and Board Trustee at Cerritos College highlighted that although

Figure 10. Extent to which HLI increased Awareness or Skills in Different Areas, 2021



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=224) is restricted to only those who responded to the question, "To what extent did participating in the HLI program increase your awareness or skills in the following:"

## FINDING #1 LEARNING TO LEAD

there is no clear pathway for Latinas to serve on boards, especially corporate boards, the credibility of HOPE and the HLI network have facilitated this challenge for her and other alumnae. As shared by Teresa Alvarado '02, Regional Vice President, Pacific Gas and Electric Company, Independent Director and Chair of ESG Committee, GreenWaste, and Founding Board Member of Parks California:

*Without the support of HOPE, I may not have come to the attention of the Governor's office. The Governor appoints all 9 members of the CA Water Commission and I was proud to serve as chair, dealing with the most critical resource issues in our state. HOPE facilitates identifying and promoting qualified Latinas for these leadership roles.*

### The Added Value of Latina Networks: Overcoming Systemic Barriers

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So what are the specific ways in which the HLI network helps Latinas overcome obstacles to accessing spaces of leadership? Many women came from immigrant-headed households or are immigrants themselves and thus lacked social and financial capital crucial to access and navigate male-white dominated opportunity structures. This, coupled with experiences of discrimination and sexism, only heightened alumnae's lack of confidence or trust in themselves. HLI is designed to address these obstacles by empowering women to come into their own as leader.

### Access to Higher Education.

Across the board, most alumnae emphasized the importance of higher education as a great equalizer that allows Latinas to overcome other barriers and state data shows the importance of education for the broader Latino community. During the 2021-2022 school year, 56 percent of students enrolled in K-12 public schools identified as Hispanic/Latino.<sup>31</sup> Further, during the University of California (UC) application cycle for fall 2022 admissions, students identifying as Chicano/Latino comprised the largest share of applicants.<sup>32</sup> Still, during fall 2021, Chicano/Latino students only represented 25 percent of students enrolled in the UC system.<sup>33</sup> Research shows that barriers, such as college preparation and support during college persist for Latinos.<sup>34</sup> Similar to the narrative these illustrate, HLI alumnae expressed the challenges that persist for Latinas in accessing education despite their desire to obtain higher education.

As noted above, the theme of access to higher education and subsequent career opportunities was very much tied to alumnae's first-generation college graduate experience or immigrant background. For example, many did not have the resources, social capital, or networks to understand the pathway to higher education (taking SATs, applying for financial aid, etc.). Others noted they were unaware of the career trajectories available in sectors



## FINDING #1 LEARNING TO LEAD

like public policy and STEM until entering college. As a result, many alumnae learned to navigate these systems largely on their own. In addition, those that were the first in their family to attend college set the precedent for their family members. Of our 275 survey respondents, 77 percent shared that they were the first in their family to attend college. As shared by alumna Sara Arce '17:

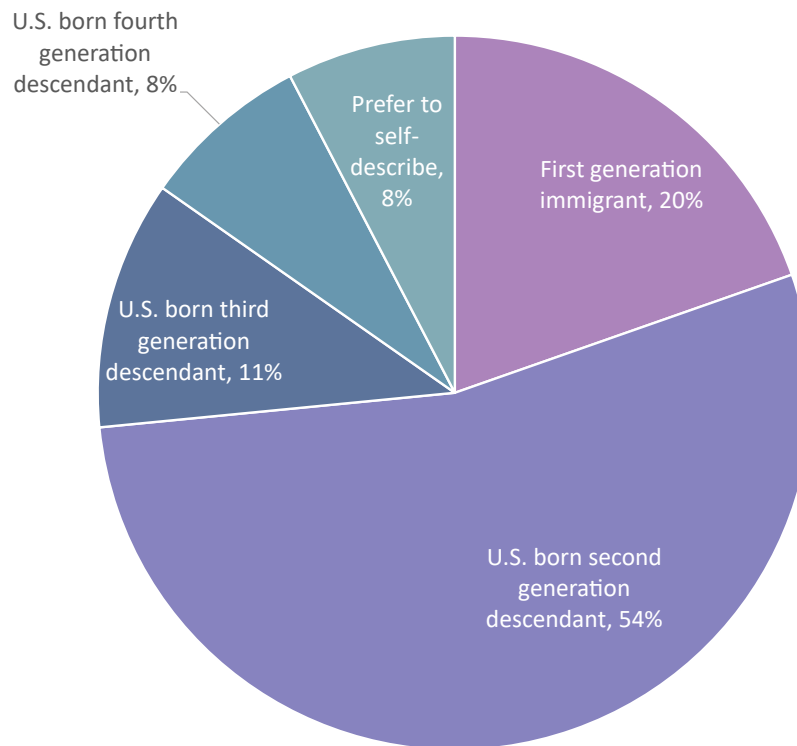
*I am the oldest of three daughters who were born to parents who immigrated here from Mexico...went on to go to college at UC Santa Barbara and majored in communications and English...growing up in a family like mine the goal had always been to get to college, and so I found myself at college...but kind of unclear on what I was going to do next. And I bring that [up] because, I think of an internship program that I kind of stumbled my way into as really kind of leading the trajectory for me where I am today. I participated in the UC Center Sacramento program, which was a policy internship program...meant for folks who were majoring in political science. I didn't know what public policy was or that you could have a career in government...so, I did that right after I graduated. Had an internship at the time with an Assembly member who at that time was the chair of the Legislative Latino Caucus...that was really like the first time that I sort of understood the opportunities of public policy.*

For alumnae who are immigrants themselves or those who are or had previously been undocumented also experienced a significant lack of resources. Of our survey respondents, 20 percent are first-generation immigrants in the U.S.—see Figure 11 on page 32. One interviewee noted that becoming a legal permanent resident was a pivotal moment in her life when she was finally able to access resources and opportunities she could not have had otherwise, such as higher education.

Some of the HLI alumnae we engaged with described having had access to a specific program, community organization, or teacher or counselor that was critical to informing their educational and career trajectory. For many, their parents were not equipped with the information necessary to provide guidance on educational and career pathways. This is perhaps unsurprising since over 70 percent of those we surveyed are either immigrants or second-generation U.S.-born citizens who may have less access to educational opportunities and certainly less familiarity with how to navigate U.S. educational structures. Still, parents emphasized the importance of education and provided support in other ways.

## FINDING #1 LEARNING TO LEAD

Figure 11. HLI Alumnae's Generational Status, 2021



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=275) reflects all respondents to question, "Are you (select one)."

Throughout the interviews, alumnae expressed that HOPE was instrumental in providing that professional support as they navigated the uncertainties of determining their professional trajectories. Nora Vargas '01, San Diego County Supervisor shared:

*HOPE is powerful because of the women that are part of HOPE. During many times in my life where I was not clear about my journey or what my next step would be, I always felt like the women*

*of HOPE had my back. My HOPE sisters gave me the courage and the strength to keep doing what I was doing. While I've always had the full support from my family, having the encouragement from women who have gone through the same is uplifting..it's a really interesting dynamic to have to live through.*

## FINDING #1 LEARNING TO LEAD

**Sexism & Ethnic Discrimination.** Alumnae shared with us that throughout their careers, they have faced a double barrier of ethnic and gender-based discrimination. They reported varying degrees of sexism; one elected official noted that, Latinas can be an afterthought while Latino men tend to receive more recognition, even while Latinas are also making significant impacts. Intertwined with this lack of recognition is also the need for equitable pay, as Latinas experience the widest pay gap of any group, persistent across educational attainment and sector.<sup>35</sup> Research shows that in California, in 2019, Latina women earned about 57 cents for every dollar earned by White, non-Hispanic men.<sup>36</sup> Several alumnae emphasized the importance of leaning on the support systems and networks they have established when dealing with navigating patriarchy in the workplace.



When I became an elected official, what was helpful was to lean on my networks, to lean on the women that came before, to say, 'Hey, I'm dealing with this; how do you deal with it?' Or they reach out to [check-in] on me...and so I think it makes all the difference...because I think people don't realize the depths to which our society is still patriarchal and we have to navigate different levels of privilege which is a huge challenge for Latinas.

– Gabriela Plascencia '13, Councilwoman,  
Riverside City Council

In general, interviewees shared they experienced racism in the workplace in different forms such as microaggressions; a lack of representation in certain sectors; discouragement from—often male-dominated—sectors like ocean conservation; and backlash from colleagues when pushing bold policy or appointing diverse candidates to certain positions.

Another theme that surfaced is the existence of pre-conceived notions of who should be a leader. Related to this, alumnae noted that Latinas are often viewed as less skilled even though they are qualified to hold the positions they do. These perceptions had ripple effects for interviewees and Latinas in general, as alumnae noted it discourages Latinas from striving for leadership positions. In addition, it creates feelings of self-doubt for those who are in those positions already. In the experience of some elected officials, because Latinas are perceived differently, they felt an added pressure of having to be to be cautious with the decisions they make.

## FINDING #1 LEARNING TO LEAD



I belong to a rural community...where you get questioned a lot, especially as a young Latina. I remember running for office and people questioning me why I was eligible to run or even had the ability to serve when, little did people know, I had more education and more experience than even those that were sitting on the dais at the time. But because of how I looked, people made judgements. And even today, I think that is the continual struggle...always fighting other battles aside from kind of your day-to-day job. You are always having to answer to folks that question [you]... holding you to a different threshold just because of the color of your skin, because of your gender, or because you have a little bit of an accent.

– Esmeralda Soria '13, Councilwoman,  
City of Fresno

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These systemic challenges often fueled a lack of confidence in their abilities and leadership skills. These feelings are typically referred to as “imposter syndrome,” which is described as having self-doubt and feeling inadequate or like a fraud. Found commonly among high achievers, it can be due to (among other factors) being unfamiliar or unwelcome in spaces that they or their families may not have had access to.



The reality is that Kern is still a conservative region. When I need to get reenergized, I go to a HOPE event or something outside of Kern County to remind me that we're not isolated or the only ones trying to speak up or speak out. There is a larger more expansive Latina network. When you're not seeing movement in the direction that you want in terms of making the playing field more equitable, it helps to see what others are doing. Most of our local representatives aren't reflective of us, so sometimes it makes it difficult to have the confidence to have that voice. Creating the platform and building the space to empower women to feel confident stepping into that space is needed.

– Norma Rojas-Mora '09, Director,  
Communication and Community Relations,  
Bakersfield College and Former President of  
Latina Leaders of Kern County

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Since many of the alumnae are themselves women of color, it became clear that the discussion around imposter syndrome at least partially arose from entering traditionally white-male dominated spaces, whether in their educational institutions or professions.

## FINDING #1 LEARNING TO LEAD

**Access to Capital.** Another barrier that respondents lifted up had to do with access—or better put, lack of access—to capital. For many alumnae, high financial costs have been a barrier to attending college, registering for leadership programs, and running for office. These opportunities are not a possibility unless financial aid, scholarships, or sponsorships are available.



There are barriers to running for office...I can't call dad [for donations] or tio...it doesn't work like that for our people. And there's a lot of systems that don't work. We don't have Latino fundraisers. We don't have a lot of Latino strategists... here in Riverside, it was 1965, I believe, when the first Latino was elected to the city council...I was elected in 2019. Why did it take those many years to elect a Latina? Because...a lot of it is the access to funds to run for office. We don't feel comfortable asking our families...those are our networks, so where do we get money from? So, it's very intimidating when we don't have those systems politically to tap into.

– Gabriela Plascencia '13

Several alumnae shared that for the Latino community in general, access to capital is one of the biggest systemic barriers to tackle. Part of the reason, they shared, is that financial literacy is inaccessible. As a result, many Latinos are

unaware of home ownership options, debt management strategies, financial aid when applying to college, and investment opportunities. Due to this, Latinas also often lack generational wealth.



[A]s we begin to build generationally... [we] will have better access to capital and generational assets...we're very behind in terms of home ownership... [but] I do love seeing how many more Latinas there are in elected office. I think that we have to collectively use that power to help sway the agenda more toward giving people of color more opportunities.

– Christine Villegas '04, Founder, Mariposa Development

Those who have embarked on starting their own businesses, such as Christine Villegas '04 quoted above, highlight how this barrier extends to entrepreneurship, as well. She shared that although she had family members with some experience in small businesses of their own, she felt she did not have access to the same capital that others may have had growing up. It was when she became engaged with HOPE and the HLI network that she found the support she needed (more on this in our next section: Alumnae Give Back and Give to Each Other).



## FINDING #1 LEARNING TO LEAD

Another interviewee experienced an internal battle between wanting to pursue a public service career while simultaneously earning enough to lift their family out of poverty. As Marce Gutiérrez-Graudinš '13, Founder and Executive Director of Azul shared, other fields like ocean conservation are very elitist, as even entry level positions require master's degrees and fellowship experience. Many of the fellowships are unpaid, meaning it is very difficult for individuals from low-income backgrounds to tap into those opportunities. While most of these issues are systemic and there is much work to be done to address the issues that alumnae experienced, they expressed that HOPE and HLI have been instrumental in assisting with fundraising or sponsorships for campaigns and other endeavors.

**Colorism.** Lastly, a barrier referenced by a few women is colorism. Colorism is defined by Dr. Sarah L. Webb as “the social marginalization and systemic oppression of people with darker skin tones and the privileging of people with lighter skin tones.”<sup>37</sup> Several interviewees discussed the privileges afforded to Latinas like themselves with a lighter skin color, while another interviewee noted her darker skin color, highlighted that opportunities are at times not afforded to her due to discrimination based on skin color.



...we've got to talk about how systemic racism really is real in the systems that we're in. CNN just featured a study by the Pew Research that said that colorism is very real for Latinos...colorism has been an issue for them [Latinos] in obtaining a job or rising up in their settings...And as someone who happens to be darker skinned I can attest to that.

– Yammilette Rodriguez '02, TCS Trainer, Youth Leadership Institute

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While barriers to reaching success are numerous and deep, HOPE and the HLI network creates the space where Latinas observe how other Latinas ascended into leadership roles and positions of power; confide in their network to navigate challenging circumstances and problem solve; and gain confidence in the process. A program and network of supportive leaders will not eliminate systemic obstacles permanently, but it was reported as a key factor for Latina alumnae to advance in their careers to powerful positions.

## FINDING #1 LEARNING TO LEAD

### Alumnae Give Back and Give to Each Other

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I always feel a sense of responsibility to help other women succeed...pay it forward. I have been blessed with wonderful opportunities, it is my responsibility to help others along the way.

– Denise Garcia '09, Chief of Staff, Office of Vice-Chair Nora Vargas, County Supervisor, First District

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Because of the value and benefit of the HLI network, many women offered stories about giving support to both HOPE as an organization and to fellow HLI alumnae. This ranged from supporting alumnae or the organization financially in their various endeavors or campaigns, to speaking at HOPE events, to encouraging more Latinas to join the HLI program. These countless examples demonstrate that creating intentional spaces and allocating support for Latinas is critical in developing and amplifying their leadership.

Moreover, it leads to exponential impacts as Latinas are inspired by the support they received and recognize as well as embrace the need and responsibility to give back to one-another. As evidenced in Figure 12, building personal and professional relationships, as well as connections to professional resources and opportunities were identified as the top key ways in which alumnae support each other. The pattern below suggests that investment in Latina leadership is the gift that keeps giving.



HOPE [is] a network that [is] all about women and supporting Latinas to reach their full potential and get to the next level...the network for me has been extremely critical...when I ran for office the very first time. Many of them supported me financially. Many of them showed up and walked precincts for me. Many of them would call me, or I could call them when I just needed someone to talk to.

– Esmeralda Soria '13

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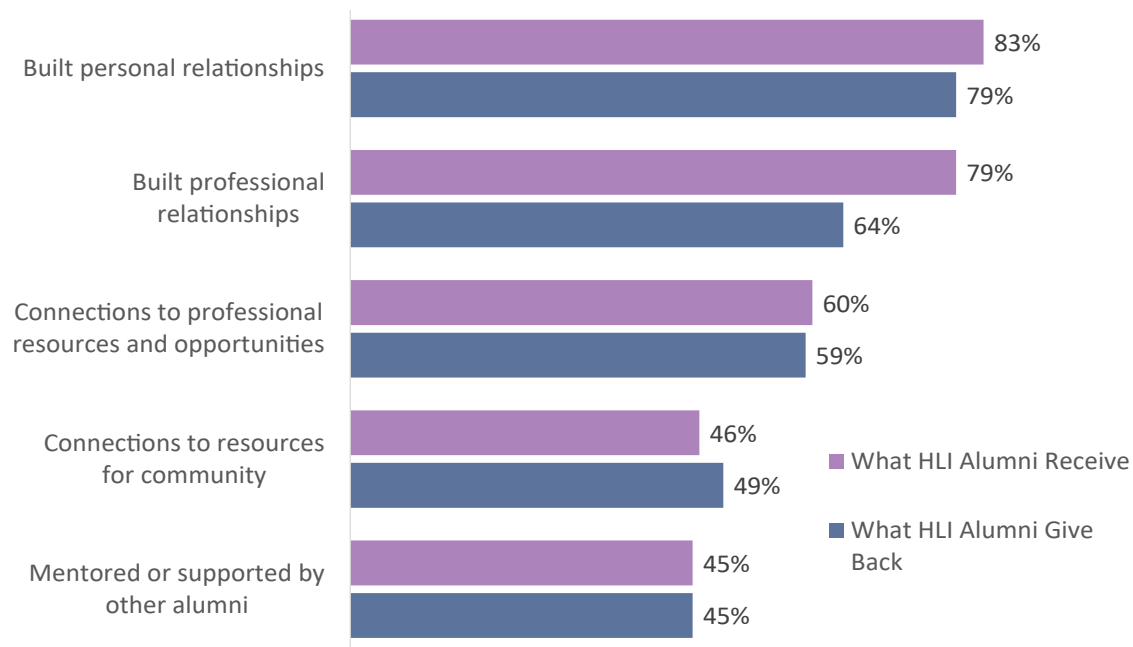
I get texts and calls all the time from HOPE folks...that say, 'Hey, we need someone from Central Valley...who do you recommend?' [And]...I feel a lot of pride and gratitude to be able to be that link to the Central Valley for HOPE.

– Yammilette Rodriguez '02

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## FINDING #1 LEARNING TO LEAD

Figure 12. Ways in which HLI Alumnae Support Each Other, 2021



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=224) is restricted to individuals who responded to the question, "How have you been able to support others in the HLI network? (select all that apply)."

“

I was the first one from San Diego to be in [HLI], and now we have hundreds of women from San Diego that apply and participate. Knowing the positive impact of HLI, I'm really committed to making sure that more women from San Diego apply.

– Nora Vargas '01, San Diego County Supervisor

“

Lena Gonzalez is my HOPE sister...when she was running for city council, I went out to help...our HOPE sister Esmerelda ran for city council in Fresno. I went up to Fresno to help with her campaign. So even though I wasn't running for office, I was helping my HOPE sisters.

– Gabriela Plascencia '13

## FINDING #1 LEARNING TO LEAD



After I completed the Leadership Institute, a few of us, including a HLI Cohort member, created the Sacramento Latina Leaders Network. The intent was to have a space/network where women can come together, connect, find mentorship, look for opportunities to gain professional development and for us to just, take a step back from our day to day jobs...You have to be very intentional about your networks; there are not many spaces for Latinas to come together, you have to create them.

– Mariana Corona Sabeniano '15, Chief of Staff, California State Senate

Recognizing the importance of creating intentional spaces for Latinas, Latinas in the Central Valley share the challenges that their region faces and their own efforts to uplift young Latina leaders (see Central California regional discussion on next page).



HLI '19 FROM RIGHT: GLORIA CRUZ, DIRECTOR OF POLICY ADVOCACY AT CHIRLA; AMALIA MEJIA, PH.D STUDENT IN URBAN PLANNING AND PUBLIC POLICY AT UC IRVINE; AND MARIBETH ANNAGUEY, PARTNER AT ELLIS, CIPOLLONE, O'BRIAN, ANNAGUEY LLP MEET WITH LEGISLATIVE STAFF DURING THEIR SESSION ON THE STATE BUDGET AND STATE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

LEADING WITH HOPE  
Supporting Latina  
Leaders for a Better  
California

## REGIONAL FOCUS GROUP

### CENTRAL CALIFORNIA



## Empowering the Next Generation of Latinas in the Central Valley

The Central Valley discussion included Latinas working in the education sector. In addition to their influential roles, they collectively served on numerous boards over their careers that support youth from infancy through college and beyond. This is an especially important role as the Central Valley's educational boards have historically been white and male-dominated, despite the high percentage of Latino youth enrolled in local schools.

Discussion group participants stressed the importance of fostering leadership and access to opportunities through education. To this end, they shared how the Latina Leaders of Kern County was modeled after HOPE's HLI program in an effort to reach leaders in the earlier stages of their life. The program has reached more than 2,000 Latinas helping them to further their education and leadership development. Participants acknowledged the great significance of a powerful and supportive network in their own careers and thus support the same type of opportunity for young leaders emerging in the Central Valley—a place where youth development and organizing is very strong.

The group also raised the lack of attention to the Central Valley as compared to other parts of the state, bringing to light the

need for more resources to come into the region in order to magnify the work already occurring there. It was noted that, rural communities, in particular, are hurting and in need for support.

Despite fewer resources, however, geographic representation in statewide efforts has improved: "...it used to be that you had representation at the northern part of the state and the southern and the central was always somewhat neglected. But all the different associations that revolve around education now either have the representation or have been reaching out to have that representation."

The group agreed that in addition to increasing representation of Latinas and communities of color at influential tables, it needs to be paired with a dedicated level of attention and investment in ensuring they have a voice and ability to steer resources because, "...oftentimes, the resources come in but it is other people making the decisions and the communities that have the biggest needs are left out."

**Participants:** Lucy Ruiz, *State Center Community College District*; Paula De La Riva, *First Five Kern County*; Norma Rojas-Mora, *Bakersfield College*; Lillian Tafoya, *Bakersfield City School District*



## FINDING #2 HOW LATINAS ARE LEADING



### ► Section Roadmap

In this section, you will see how support for Latinas amplifies their leadership with exponential impacts:

- Civic Leadership: A Seat at the Table
- Economic Leadership: Upward Economic Mobility
- Political Leadership: Growing in Number and Influence
- Northern California: Increasing Latina Representation in Government Roles

Upon graduating HLI and entering the strong alumnae network described in the previous section, alumnae continue on their trajectory with increased knowledge and strengthened drive to create change on the issues that are important to them. These impacts are not only diverse in nature—as they take place across issue area and sector—they are also lasting and driven by shared values. Through both interviews and surveys, alumnae shared a similar value: the desire to improve the conditions of the communities that they serve or come from.

Most report that this value was instilled early in life by parents, families, or neighbors—who were often the main source of social capital and supportive networks available to alumnae. This common experience was often what propelled them to run for office, help

communities build wealth, address climate inequities, improve educational systems, or tap others for opportunities in spaces that have historically excluded them.

Indeed, Latinas are already leading—even with little dedicated investment in their leadership—and they are centering the needs of their communities civically, economically, and politically.

### Civic Leadership: A Seat at the Table



In my current role as Director of the Department of General Services (DGS), my job duties entail serving on many business operations boards for the state of California. These are the largest boards that inform decisions on the state's business operations and economics, so I or my designee are in a unique position to influence these public boards.

– Ana M. Lasso '04, Director of Department of General Services

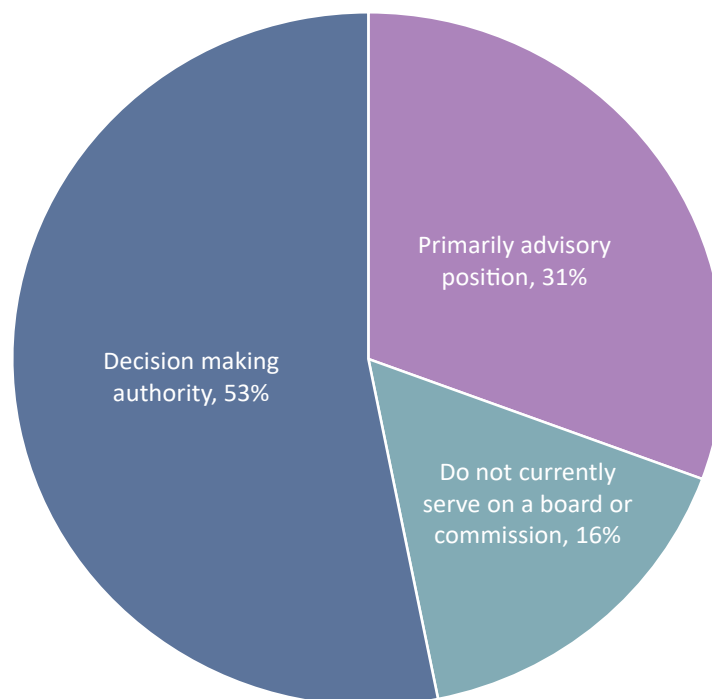
## FINDING #2 HOW LATINAS ARE LEADING

Latinas from HLI are demonstrating leadership that offers innovative strategies to complex civic problems. Alumnae shared that they have created their own organizations; prioritized collaboration with key decision makers; allocated resources to underserved areas; and helped appoint Latinas and people of color as civil servants.

One particularly important avenue through which HLI have advanced their civic impact is serving on some of the state's most powerful boards and commissions. Of our survey

respondents, an impressive 84 percent serve on either a board or commission and have decision-making authority or an advisory position, see Figure 13. While representation for Latinas and women of color on boards and commissions remains low, the impact they are having across different sectors is high—particularly when it comes to garnering influence and introducing important perspectives. Despite improvements, many alumane shared that increased representation is necessary.

Figure 13. HLI Alumnae's Decision-Making Authority and Advisory Positions, 2021



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=271) is restricted to individuals who answered the following question, "Do any of your responsibilities either at your current paid-position or board/commission include having decision making authority over budgets, policies, or programs or are primarily advisory? (select one)."

## FINDING #2 HOW LATINAS ARE LEADING

A lack of cultural representation on a statewide body intended for marine protection left interviewee, Marce Gutiérrez-Graudinš '13, inspired to create her own organization that focuses on bringing Latinos into the work of marine conservation—Azul. In fact, her organization has brought so many Latino community members—Latinos Marinos as they are called—to advocate at the state capitol that it changed the "face of who was an ocean advocate in California." Gutiérrez-Graudinš shared a time she spoke to a Latino legislator who said, 'Wait...you're the first ocean people that look like me that I've ever met.'

In the education sector, Eileen Miranda '10 serves on the West Covina Unified School District and she shared accomplishments around bringing the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum and program to her school district.<sup>38</sup> She shared, "I pushed and pushed to increase the pathway to create a continuum, hence we are the only kindergarten to 12th grade IB public school in the state of California! We offer students the IB Diploma Programme and the IB Career-related Programme. This decision has dramatically improved the college-going rate of students of color."

To support the growth of IB schools, Miranda shared that she also, "worked with my colleagues on the board to support and place a school bond on the ballot. The community passed that bond by a decisive 70 percent margin to build a brand new Olympic sized pool, sports complex, and an events center."<sup>39</sup>

In the public sector, Alumna Ana M. Lasso '04 serves as the Director of the Department of General Services (DGS) — appointed by Governor Newsom in 2021. Lasso's work before her appointment to DGS was as General Manager of Exposition Park in Los Angeles, which experienced "unprecedented growth" during her tenure.<sup>40</sup> In addition, Norma Edith García-González '03, Director, County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation and Los Angeles County Regional Parks and Open Space District, initiated an assessment to ensure that communities of color have equitable access to parks and open space—see Spotlight #1.

Teresa Alvarado '02 also shared how her identity was important to her work while on the Parks California board:

*As a founding board member of Parks California, I supported state parks...[and] because of my influence, we talked about access and how to remove barriers to kids who don't have the ability to either get transportation there, or pay for the costs associated with appropriate clothes, or whatever the case may be...I brought my perspective as an environmentalist, as a Latina, as a woman.*

Their growing experience has afforded alumnae greater credibility and expertise while fostering strong networks during their service. Table 2 below provides a snapshot of other alumnae's impact while serving on boards and commissions.

## FINDING #2 HOW LATINAS ARE LEADING

Table 2. Examples of HLI Alumnae's Impact Serving on Boards and Commissions

Board or Commission	Alumnae Experience
County Health Services Advisory Board of San Diego County	"[We are] responsible for overseeing the budget for Health and Human Services...we get briefed monthly, advise chief staff on what's going on." - Ana Melgoza '10, Vice President of External Affairs, San Ysidro Health
Coastal Conservancy Board of Directors	"[W]hen we come to Sacramento and we talk about the budget at the Coastal Conservancy, where that money is invested, that's real change." - Marce Gutiérrez-Graudiņš '13, Founder and Executive Director, Azul
University of California Board of Regents	"[B]y sitting on the board you can influence the types of discussions that are being held and ensure equity and diversity are at the forefront...this type of laser focus on increasing diversity at the executive levels is crucial to increase representation of Latinas and all people of color at the University of California." - Maria Anguiano '12, Executive Vice President - Learning Enterprise, Arizona State University
Taller San Jose	"I'm an advisory board member to a group called Taller San Jose here in Santa Ana...that's a workforce development program...the nexus was to get the cohort that was in construction into construction jobs...and plugged into these bigger general contractors...those jobs are really paying great...[I] want to ensure that I can help those youths get those kinds of jobs." - Christine Villegas '04, Founder, Mariposa Development
South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD)	"The AQMD regulates air quality in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino counties- over 17 million people who are majority Latino. I feel a great sense of responsibility as the first Latina Vice-Chair to strive for transparent leadership and advocate for the underserved." - Vanessa Delgado '02, Vice Chair, South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD) Governing Board and President, Azure Development

## ALUMNA SPOTLIGHT #1

### Norma Edith García-González '03, Director of the County of Los Angeles Department of Parks conducted an L.A. County Park Needs Assessment, a first of its kind

Led by Garcia-González, the *Los Angeles Countywide Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment (Needs Assessment)* was the first of its kind of research endeavor, engaging academics, community-based organizations, and park equity advocates.<sup>1</sup> The research focused on creating comprehensive data assessing park and open space disparities throughout L.A. County.<sup>2</sup> In addition, this research directly led to the shaping and approval of Measure A in 2016, the “Safe, Clean Neighborhood Parks, Open Space, Beaches, Rivers Protection and Water Conservation Measure.” A measure with a striking 75 percent approval rate<sup>3</sup> that dedicates 30 percent of funding for projects in underserved areas.<sup>4</sup>

Norma Garcia-Gonzalez noted that park access is critical particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, as park use increased. Yet, communities of color were more likely to live in dense communities and did not have the opportunity to walk to a park within a half mile or 10 minute walk. Moreover, the Prevention Institute in partnership with other base-building organizations, have taken this Needs Assessment as a model to expand the research.<sup>5</sup>



The impact is that this study, this dedicated funding stream, will create parks and park access, and park infrastructure in Los Angeles County in perpetuity.

– Norma Edith García-González '03



<sup>1</sup> <https://opr.ca.gov/docs/20200624-PlanningForHealth-LosAngeles-case-study.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://lacountyparkneeds.org/pna-home/>

<sup>3</sup> [https://ballotpedia.org/Los\\_Angeles\\_County,\\_California,\\_Parks\\_and\\_Open\\_Space\\_Parcel\\_Tax,\\_Measure\\_A\\_\(November\\_2016\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Los_Angeles_County,_California,_Parks_and_Open_Space_Parcel_Tax,_Measure_A_(November_2016)) ; <https://www.laparks.org/measure-a/projects>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.dailynews.com/2022/02/23/26-million-for-la-county-parks-comes-from-measure-a/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://preventioninstitute.org/sites/default/files/uploads/Park%20Equity%2C%20Life%20Expectancy%2C%20and%20Power%20Building%20Community%20Profile%20for%20South%20Los%20Angeles.pdf>



## FINDING #2 HOW LATINAS ARE LEADING

**HLI Sub Networks: Promoting Local Leadership Development.** Another power-building strategy that HLI alumnae have harnessed in their local communities is creating new organizations with a focus on leadership development to build a base of new leaders in their areas of California. The mission of the organizations mentioned by participants range from opening opportunities for youth, to building confidence among women, to increasing awareness among those who are not civically engaged. There were multiple examples geared towards students and youth such as an annual conference, called *I Matter: Girls Empowerment* that focuses on young girls and women that is organized by Norma Edith Garcia-González '03.<sup>41</sup>

In some cases, belonging to a network such as HLI has led to creation of new organizations, in other cases it has inspired growth in existing ones. One important example of this emerged in California's central region with Latina Leaders of Kern County. Norma Rojas-Mora '09 was once president of the organization, remains on the board, and reflected that, "it was through [HLI] that I recognized that I really needed to step into that leadership role...for Latina Leaders of Kern County. I felt this huge responsibility to magnify the organization and help grow it." That growth that Norma contributed to was then able to strengthen the organization in a way that has created tangible and lasting impacts for Latinas in California's central valley:

*I feel really proud [of] Latina Leaders of Kern County as president and now...I have seen a huge change in women stepping into their own leadership. I have heard them say 'it was because of our Latina Leadership Institute (LLI) that I decided to apply for that promotion' or 'it was because of the program that I went back to school and got my doctorate' ... LLI is really helping women start to position themselves in leadership roles throughout Kern County in different ways that are making a huge impact on the community.*

HLI alumnae attribute much of their ability to step into positions of leadership to what they learned in the HLI program, thus building HLI-like opportunities for more leaders throughout the state has become a priority for them. The examples provided above and in Table 3 below are among the many efforts that demonstrate the cumulative impact Latinas are having across the state through community-based organizations focused on leadership development—all of which are making their own contributions to the California ecosystem of organizations geared toward improving conditions and building power among communities.



## FINDING #2 HOW LATINAS ARE LEADING

Table 3. Examples of the Local Networks HLI Alumnae Have Developed

Organization	Alumnae Experience
Latinx Young Democrats of Sacramento	<p>"In 2017, a group of us cofounded an organization called Latinx Young Democrats. The mission is to promote and get Latino candidates elected...in our community, folks don't... see themselves in elected office and it's really important, at all levels, especially at the local levels, like school boards and city council."</p> <p>– Mariana Corona Sabeniano '15, Chief of Staff, California State Senate</p>
Latina Coalition of Silicon Valley	<p>"[T]he impact of the Latina Coalition of Silicon Valley has been really powerful...it is seen as the go-to organization locally for Latina leadership. They have been effective at recruiting and supporting Latinas to serve on local commissions...they're sought after to speak quite a bit on panels and have established a strong partnership with HOPE whereby we have created a pipeline for local Latinas to engage in statewide leadership preparedness."</p> <p>– Teresa Alvarado '02, Founder, Latina Coalition of Silicon Valley</p>
Central California Latina Network	<p>"[T]he year after I did HLI we started [the organization] ...so that it could be a local space where Latinas could connect...to be informed on local issues and also on state issues so that folks can advocate and be knowledgeable about the issues."</p> <p>– Yammilette Rodriguez '02, TCS Trainer, Youth Leadership Institute</p>

## FINDING #2 HOW LATINAS ARE LEADING

### Economic Leadership: Upward Economic Mobility

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Our research suggests that when Latinas are in leadership positions, they are able to intentionally and successfully steer resources to meet the needs of underrepresented communities. The importance of cross collaboration among sectors, emerged as especially important when discussing economic equity with alumnae. This work is critical as it often opens up funding for programs on issues such as housing or the environment and creates career pathways that otherwise may not have been possible.

**Connecting Corporate Dollars to Community Issues.** Economic influence among HLI alumnae extends to harnessing the power that corporate companies wield with their vast amount of financial resources and connecting those resources to community needs. Some alumnae noted that they have established partnerships with corporations such as AT&T, Pepsi, Coca Cola, PG&E, SoCal Gas, Univision, and Chevron to fund their programs.

California State Senator Lena Gonzalez '13, shared that during her time working at Microsoft she prioritized equitable funding practices by allocating funds to places like Southeast LA—a Latino majority area of



When I was at the Santa Clara Valley Water District, during the last big drought, I established the partnership with Univision to develop a campaign to raise awareness about the drought in the Spanish-speaking community. We sought to ensure our community was well-informed about water restrictions and empowered to make decisions about their water use.

- Teresa Alvarado '02

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LA County. Senator Gonzalez '13 added that her impetus for pushing funding to these areas was:

*Not just [about] giving to Latino organizations for the sake of it, but it's also looking at the organizations...that have been underserved for a very long time and I think that's where Latinas really lead.*

Power of this nature is important as Latina leaders steer investments towards communities that may often be overlooked – and thus work towards systems change with the help of corporate investments.

## FINDING #2 HOW LATINAS ARE LEADING



“If employers...keep an eye on pay equity and...sustainability metrics, the best thing a community can [have] is good employers...the philanthropic portfolio will never ever equal the economic impact that their HR policies will, from benefits to pay...to the vendors they contract with.

- Maria Cadenas '17, Executive Director, Santa Cruz Community Ventures

Indeed, leveraging relationships with corporate actors is an effective strategy to connect community with necessary or long overdue resources. Additionally, as employers and community members, corporations' impact extend beyond the financial wellbeing of their employees (albeit very important), with impacts rippling out to their community. Thus, corporate entities have the ability to create a better economy—Latina leaders are keenly aware of this responsibility.

**Creating Affordable Housing.** Across California, housing affordability remains a major barrier to economic well-being for many and leaders from HLI's network have taken both notice and action. In Fresno, one alumna had a hand in creating an affordable housing development that was unlike any other at the time it was built. Esmeralda Soria '13, shared that the development included, “a community health clinic...and

our first neighborhood senior center... it's already been a catalyst to future developments ...we're seeing now more development in that corridor as a result of that investment that I worked on for six years.”

Other alumnae have been part of successful programs that have garnered attention and further investment. Lourdes Castro Ramirez '04 shared that her work led to the creation of a federal Jobs Plus program:

*Jobs Plus, was a demonstration project funded for five years by several national funders...over time they tracked data... [on] the success of public housing residents in LA being able to not just connect to employment but also able to increase their wages overtime...we had many positive outcomes that enabled the research team to establish evidence and make a case at the federal level, to HUD, to replicate Jobs Plus—essentially scaling from a demonstration to a national program. So, at HUD there is funding for Jobs Plus programs across the country; built out of the pilot program that I led and [done] along with public housing residents from Imperial Courts and William Mead.*

These types of accomplishments have led HLI alumnae to be awarded large projects that have created a difference in their

## FINDING #2 HOW LATINAS ARE LEADING

regions. For example, Christine Villegas '04, increased the size of developments she leads, "When I started, I think I might have had a budget at most of maybe \$300,000... now I'm managing projects that are about \$30-million-dollars." Meanwhile in the public sector, Gabriela Plascencia '13 has made housing a priority by seeking and securing affordable units in new developments to her region:

*[W]hen I meet developers...we really advocate to make a percentage of them... 10 percent or 20 percent for affordable [units]... I actively reach out to developers, affordable housing developers to try to get them to purchase property.*

### **Elevating Access to Employment**

**Opportunities.** Beyond steering important resources, alumnae alluded to the need to better connect communities of color and youth to employment opportunities. As such, through their roles, alumnae are opening access to opportunities through different strategies. For example, Norma Edith García-González '03 has worked on career pathways—by making certain career opportunities available that may not have been otherwise. García-González '03 worked with LA County Supervisors to increase access to lifeguard careers for Black and Latino youth.<sup>42</sup> Karmin Noar '16

is also connecting Black and Latino students to opportunities in bioscience, as featured in Spotlight #2.

Previously we mentioned the impacts that Ana M. Lasso '04 made during her time in Exposition Park. This passion and vision enacted by Lasso left an economic legacy as well, as she, "worked directly on deals that brought the LA Football Club to fruition." Not only has her work been far-reaching and lasting, as the director of DGS, her work is now employee-focused as she has an eye on sustainability for her large organization of 3,600 employees.

## ALUMNA SPOTLIGHT #2

### Karmin Noar '16, Executive Director of Biocom Institute, brings a Bioinnovation Lab to 12 schools throughout the Crenshaw District in LA

At the Biocom Institute, Karmin Noar launched the South Los Angeles (SOLA) BioInnovation Lab, in partnership with the 10th Council District, Humanizing Education for Equitable Transformation (HEET) Community Schools, and a Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) initiative focusing on school-based equity. The purpose of the lab is to build the capacity of schools and teachers to expose Black and historically underserved students to bioscience through hands-on projects, connections with nationally recognized life science experts, and college and career readiness opportunities. Launched in January 2022, the program is projected to reach about 1,400 Black and underrepresented students from the South Los Angeles area in its first year.<sup>1</sup>



With the rapidly growing bioscience industry in Los Angeles, it is critical to partner with education, government, and industry to empower, engage, and expose Black and Latino students to careers pathways in bioscience. Funding and other inequities have historically limited Black and Latino students' access to high-quality science equipment, resources and curricula resulting in fewer Black and Latino students majoring in STEM related fields and pursuing bioscience careers with family-sustaining wages. The SOLA BioInnovation Lab aims to address these disparities and create more equitable opportunities in science learning.

– Karmin Noar '16



<sup>1</sup> <https://cd10.lacity.org/articles/10th-council-district-biocom-california-institute-lausds-humanizing-education-equitable>

FINDING #2  
HOW LATINAS  
ARE LEADING

The examples provided by HLI Latinas about how they lead economically is in line with a general trend in the data: alumnae continually stress the importance of keeping others' needs in mind. This was especially true when it came to retaining critical staff of diverse backgrounds who may struggle entering sectors that may have historically excluded them.

In addition, other alumnae have stressed the importance of workforce development programs to better equip communities of color to enter the workforce as exemplified in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Examples of HLI Alumnae Creating and Supporting Workforce Development Programs

Program	Alumnae Experience
Maria Anguiano '12 ASU sponsors the Starbucks College Achievement Plan and Uber-ASU partnership. Employees from both companies can obtain a free ASU degree.	<i>"And we're trying to get more corporations to sign up to offer the same benefit. That is the only way we will increase diversity and create more equity in corporate America, giving everyone a chance to advance their educational attainment."</i>
Karmin Noar '16 While working on a personal project where she helped youth and adults acquire soft skills, Noar was introduced to an opportunity to work for a local workforce development board. She started as a manager and eventually rose to director of programs.	<i>"Increased funding from approximately \$250,000 to over \$3 million resulting in workforce development programs that received local and national recognition and over 10,000 youth and adults placed in jobs and internships."<sup>43</sup></i>



## FINDING #2 HOW LATINAS ARE LEADING

### Political Leadership: Growing in Number and Influence

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HOPE has [built] the political power by having women in different spaces. So now you're not having to figure out who is there that may be able to help you...if you don't know how to use your network, then those barriers are still going to be there, so I think that's also what HOPE has taught us. How do you use your network? How do you leverage the resources so that it helps you but then in turn also helps those communities that you're representing?

– Esmeralda Soria '13

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HOPE and HLI have played a role in increasing the representation of Latinas in political spaces, by equipping them to enter politics through trainings on the political process and political landscape. In addition, HOPE's credibility has been invaluable when it comes to connecting Latinas to employment opportunities or recommending Latinas to leadership appointments. Indeed, the number of Latinas in government positions has increased over the last decade.<sup>44</sup>

Xilonin Cruz-Gonzalez '14, Board Member of Azuza Unified School District and Deputy Director of Californians Together,

a statewide education advocacy coalition, shared that she has seen a growing Latina presence over the last 20 years of her career. She sees "a rise in Latina leadership and...people looking to them to be the leaders. It does feel like we are positioned to really expand our political capital." Marce Gutiérrez-Graudins '13 agreed that:

*In the last ten years... [I started] feeling at home as a Latina [in the California State Capitol] ...there is this whole leadership structure in the Capitol... [and] I know for a fact there are many Latinas that are part of it.*

The extent of the political impact that Latinas wield—HLI alumnae, their colleagues, and others—is too vast to do justice in one report. The following examples highlight a fraction of the local and statewide political power alumnae have built through policy and advocacy across a range of issues such as immigrant rights, education, reproductive rights, public health, and criminal justice. As previous examples have demonstrated and as alumnae have noted, these policies are critical in addressing existing inequities not just for Latinos but all communities of color—more on this in finding #3.

For example, alumna Assemblymember of California District 51, Wendy Carrillo '09, has advocated for direct resources in the state's budget to support organizations working with immigrants who hold

## FINDING #2 HOW LATINAS ARE LEADING

Temporary Protected Status (TPS) during a time when immigrant rights were in jeopardy:<sup>45</sup>

*[M]y third day in office...[former] President Trump rescinded all protections for TPS recipients, (Temporary Protected Status)...I worked alongside another member and we were able to put \$10 million of emergency funding in our state budget for TPS recipients so that organizations across the state could hire attorneys to be able to help this community.*

Moreover, Assemblymember Carillo '09 has worked to allocate \$250,000 in the state budget to fund the UCLA Hollywood Diversity Report, which aims to conduct an assessment of the relationship between diversity in key jobs in Hollywood productions and the spending power of diverse audiences.<sup>46</sup> As shared by Assemblymember Carillo '09:

*Latinos, we are the ones that boost the most when we go to the movie theaters, when we participate with our dollars when it comes to Hollywood and entertainment and in movies and all of those things. Yet, we are also highly disproportionately not seen whether it's the small screen or big screen. And this diversity report is also in an effort to showcase that whether it's below the line or above the line Latinos are completely underrepresented, Latinas in particular whether it's directors, writers, producers.*

Sara Arce' 17 also shared her policy advocacy efforts in crafting a historic policy that is transforming student success in community college and paving the way for opportunities to push for even more transformative policies:

*I have helped usher in remedial education reform at the community college level... that has been a huge barrier for Black and Brown students, before even getting to a college level course, the vast majority of Latino students were going to find themselves in remedial courses where their success of getting out of those courses was not high. It was really low, and it was one of the main factors in the racial equity gaps we see in student success at the community college level. The reforms that we helped lead in 2017 and still now work on, have been called one of the most transformative policies for improving student success at California community colleges. Nationally people are looking to California to see how we are going to implement this...And even now, I am leading a coalition of advocates who are all very interested in implementation of this policy and who look to the Campaign to understand what's next and what we should be doing...I'm really proud of that....and now thinking about what the opportunities are at a statewide level that we need to pursue to see this policy through.*

## FINDING #2 HOW LATINAS ARE LEADING

Amidst the COVID-19 crisis, alumnae also stepped up to advocate for bold policies. Recognizing the need to address the digital divide, Senator Lena Gonzalez '13 took immediate action by crafting a bill to expand broadband access for all Californians:

*The second legislative priority I've been working on is the digital divide, or Broadband for All ...a bill that I authored and was signed by the Governor...this bill specifically looked at ways to bring broadband infrastructure investments to places that have no internet. And we often think in California that it's always rural areas that don't have internet, and yes, that's true, but it's also places like West Long Beach and Southeast LA, South Los Angeles, and unincorporated areas like Florence-Firestone and Walnut Park that don't have internet. And so thankfully the Governor has supported and approved a \$6 billion investment so we can get a statewide plan together and now we've made sure underserved and unserved communities are included in the plan... it's opportunities like these during which we've got to take a stand and take bold action.*

The pandemic and racial justice uprisings of 2020 provided an opportunity for leaders like Gabriela Plascencia '13 to take steps to name racism and craft a policy—see Spotlight #3.

While policy has proven to be an important strategy through which alumnae have built the political power of Latinas, equally as important has been advocacy in other spaces (also described in our Civic Leadership section). For example, as co-founder of the California Latinas for Reproductive Justice, Nora Vargas '01 has also worked in partnership with Planned Parenthood to make the case for reproductive justice for women and women of color.

Monica Manabe '04 has impacted policy through her participation on the redistricting committee in her county, emphasizing that:

*I've been on several committees most recently the committee to redistrict our city's district lines. This committee was tasked at looking at the lines and percentages of populations' racial mix by districts to create fairer balanced districts. I've been on the board and was the president for a nonprofit community health center... by sitting on boards and/or committees such as the redistricting, you influence what's going to happen in the future. You also influence those folks that are on the boards and the direction that the organizations take by looking at the bigger picture and what does it mean. Asking the questions to those people [that] are making the decisions.*



IRIS MIRANDA '12, POLICY DIRECTOR AT AYUDA FINANCIAL, GIVES HLI GRADUATION SPEECH AT THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

## ALUMNAE SPOTLIGHT #3

### Gabriela Plascencia '13, first Latina to sit on the Riverside City Council, introduces legislation to address systemic racism

In the wake of 2020 racial justice uprisings and COVID-19, Councilwoman Plascencia introduced a resolution declaring racism a public health crisis in Riverside, working directly with community advocates. Passed in August 2020, some of the provisions call on the city to: adopt anti-racism principles, advocate for policies to promote the health of communities of color, and implement measures to track the City's progress. Antiracist Riverside, a community group, worked in partnership with the City and was also asked to work with the City on its Operational Workplan recommendations.<sup>1</sup>



But that was a catalyst in our city, because out of that came this group that was formed on their own through the community... Antiracist Riverside. They wrote language for us, because we were working on our five-year strategic plan for the city...language that had matrices for making sure our boards and commissions were diverse, unconscious bias training, and things that we hadn't implemented for our city employees at all...we finally are aligning our policies to our values.

– Gabriela Plascencia '13



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.kidsdata.org/topic/755/graduates-race/trend#fmt=1154&loc=2&tf=143,110&ch=10&pdist=73;>  
[https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-us/information-center/admissions-residency-and-ethnicity/;](https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-us/information-center/admissions-residency-and-ethnicity/)  
[https://www.cbsnews.com/losangeles/news/riverside-city-council-declares-racism-a-public-health-crisis/;](https://www.cbsnews.com/losangeles/news/riverside-city-council-declares-racism-a-public-health-crisis/)  
[https://rivco.org/news/board-supervisors-vote-5-0-declare-racism-public-health-crisis/;](https://rivco.org/news/board-supervisors-vote-5-0-declare-racism-public-health-crisis/)  
<https://www.antiracistriverside.com/>

## FINDING #2 HOW LATINAS ARE LEADING

Many more alumnae shared the roles that they have played in policy and advocacy to transform access to resources or opportunities including: the implementation of a dual immersion program in a local district; driver's licenses for undocumented Californians; prohibition of youth from being treated and tried as adults; and many more. These examples demonstrate that in fact more women are becoming politically engaged—whether it be running for office or taking on government administration positions or pushing for innovative policies—filling the halls with hope and change.

Still there is more to be done to expand the pipeline of Latinas in political spaces (see section on Bringing Others Along: Expanding the Pipeline of Leaders section for more). The barriers that Latinas face, as discussed previously, are often magnified when entering the political realm—especially running for office (see Northern California regional focus group below for more). HOPE and HLI cannot be the only source of structural support needed to ensure Latinas enter and succeed in political leadership. More investment in networks of support—including financial support—are necessary to capitalize on this momentum to bolster Latina and women of color's influence in the political realm.<sup>47</sup>



But beyond Latinas, what [HOPE is] trying to do to improve the lives of people in not just California, but in this nation. Because if Latinas are at the table, if Latinas are in positions of leadership at every level of – or at every sector and at every level of government, then our community will be much better off because we're having input in all the various sectors.

– Esmeralda Soria '13

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## REGIONAL FOCUS GROUP

### NORTHERN CALIFORNIA



## Increasing Latina Representation in Government Roles

The Northern California discussion between San Jose and Sacramento Latinas included leaders serving on various positions and boards of higher education. They worked with the state of California and the Latina Coalition of Silicon Valley that has a leadership program similar to HOPE's HLI but specifically targeting college students. Both offered stories of promising increases in Latina representation in the regions. For example, they mentioned that in the Sacramento region, there were three Latina mayors—City of Woodland, City of Davis, City of West Sacramento—and that Latinas are well represented in city government as city managers or assistant managers in various cities. They mentioned how there are also Latinas running for the Board of Supervisors, superintendent and boards of education, as well as the county office of education.

With all the progress with representation, there is still a way to go. According to one participant:

*We don't have any Latinas serving at the state legislature from Silicon Valley, basically any women.... At the Assembly level or at the Senate level, we have no women serving and no Latinas, and it's been like that for a really long time. So, although we have really great local representation, when it gets to the upper echelons of political leadership, we do not – we are not there in our region.*

As noted by another participant: “the political piece of it is huge, because...we have to have those people in places that can make those decisions, can vote and prioritize resources. Without that, we continue to have our disparities in our community.”

Silicon Valley, the hub of innovation and the resources it generates is also one of the most expensive parts of the state to live. The economic inequities and disparities are large, where working families do not benefit from the richness of the region. According to one participant, although we are “making strides and getting people into elected office and decision-making power” there are still wide gaps in pay and opportunities.

Another participant shared how while she sees the Latino community has “been able to do a lot with a little...we really make something out of nothing sometimes,” she sincerely hopes that “that’s not always going to be the case. I hope that we have more resources to leverage, we have more power, we have more economic political parity so that we’re able to do a lot more with a lot more.”

**Participants:** Gabriela Chavez-Lopez, Latina Coalition of Silicon Valley; Caroline Cabias, Latino Economic Council of Sacramento



## FINDING #3 LEADING FOR ALL



ERIKA CONTRERAS '10 IS SWORN IN AS SECRETARY  
OF THE CALIFORNIA STATE SENATE

### ► Section Roadmap

In this section, you will see how investment in Latina leadership can benefit the state:

- Leading with Racial Equity at the Forefront
- Equity-Minded Leadership in a Pandemic
- Bringing Others Along: Expanding the Pipeline of Leaders
- Among the First or the Only
- Southern California: Leading with Equity

As we reflect on the many ways Latinas have led across various sectors, it becomes clear that investing in Latinas means investing in California. Indeed, when Latinas assume leadership, their work is intersectional and it reaches many more communities beyond Latinos. When discussing the corporate sector, Senator Lena Gonzalez '13 shared:

*[W]hen you have Latinas at the helm in corporations...we're going to go all out and we're going to take care of our families and our cousins and our neighbors because we know...the places that have historically not been invested in. And we also know the organizations that always get the funding...[so], I see that more so now and I see Latinas at the helm in these positions and it's really great to see the difference when you have women at the table...*

Throughout the research, it became clear that alumnae often lead with racial equity at the forefront of their work, have demonstrated

leadership during the pandemic, continue to expand the pipeline of other Latina leaders with an intersectional lens and commitment to the work, and have written history by often becoming the first Latina in their positions.

### Leading with Racial Equity at the Forefront

As mentioned in the previous section, across, HLI alumnae have made extraordinary impacts in education, housing, environmental justice, health access, and more. As shown in Figure 14, alumnae identified influencing local politicians, commissions, and boards, as well as advocating for racial justice, as their top contributions to community-wide or systemic change.

Indeed, advocating for racial justice issues emerged as a theme among alumnae. Many had a strong recognition of the intersectionality of different issues and many shared the responsibility they feel to infuse racial equity in policy, budgets, programming, hiring practices, and organizational culture—not just for Latinos, but for the benefit of all communities of color. The examples highlighted in the sections below demonstrate some power-building strategies that HLI alumnae highlighted as critical to advancing racial equity, whether in their work or beyond.

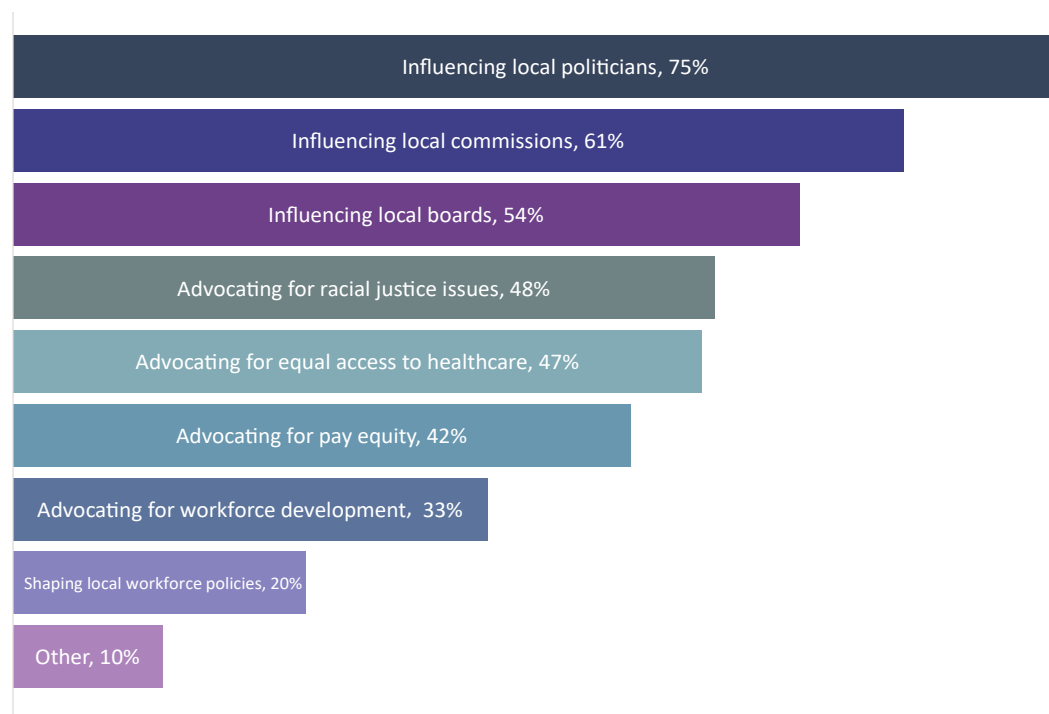
## FINDING #3 LEADING FOR ALL

### Centering and Building Community

**Power.** In keeping racial equity at the core of their work, some alumnae underscored the need to center and elevate the voices not just of Latinos, but all communities of color in order to improve conditions for all. HLI alumna Zulma Maciel '12 is the City of San Jose's Director of the Office of Racial Equity, and as she states below, to achieve lasting results, community voices should be the drivers of equity:

*If you're...truly interested in advancing racial equity so that...race no longer predicts life outcomes, and outcomes for all groups are improved, then we need to center race and community voice...to drive decisions. And couple that with relevant data to ensure accountability for the decisions made that impact Latinos or communities of color.*

Figure 14. HLI Alumnae's Contributions to Community-wide or Systemic Change, 2021



Source: Data from USC Equity Research Institute HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=224) is restricted to individuals who responded to the question, "In your view, how has the HLI alumnae network contributed to creating community-wide or systemic change either in your region, sector, or beyond? (select all that apply)."

## FINDING #3 LEADING FOR ALL

A specific equity issue that surfaced in our research was environmental justice: lower income neighborhoods, with large populations of communities of color, experience the brunt of environmental degradation and pollution. Senator Gonzalez '13 shared this as a top issue:

*...for the residents that I represent its environmental climate justice...they feel like they're not part of the discussion when it comes to the environment...I'm trying to change that because being a Latina that has led on the environment, we often don't see people that look like us on panels that talk about the environment...and you're like, 'Wait a second, you've never lived one day in Southeast LA or Long Beach...' [Y]ou need lived experiences and so that's where I am really pressing on.*

Senator Gonzalez '13 discusses the need to follow the lead of people who have experienced the effects of environmental degradation firsthand. Although there are many proponents of environmental justice, she highlights the invaluable perspectives of those who live in heavily polluted neighborhoods like Long Beach and Southeast Los Angeles and how this must be the model for all.

Patricia Sinay '15, founder of Community Investment Strategies and a Commissioner on the California Citizen Redistricting Commission also shares her intentionality in stepping up to ensure all voices are heard in decision-making spaces, but also creating space for others throughout her leadership trajectory:

*The trajectory of my leadership is that I like to be a background leader versus a leader out in front. Having said that, a lot of times I have stepped out in front because I didn't see the right people stepping up, or I needed to step up. Civic engagement and making sure that all voices are heard have always been the purpose of my career. I started in DC doing international development work around civil society in Latin America and then had this 'aha' moment that there are really smart Latin Americans doing that work. So I don't need to do it as a US Latina immigrant, but maybe I can make a difference with local Latinos.*

Just as important as stepping up to lead is realizing when to make space to center other perspectives that may make more sense. Key to centering and elevating community voices, is the need to ensure the Latino community recognizes and stands in solidarity with others, including and specifically the Black Lives Matter movement. One alumna noted that in the wake of the racial uprisings, she recognized the need to step back and instead actively listen to better support and amplify the needs of Black community members. As Latina leaders work to center the voices of those most impacted on different issues, the outcome of building deep, impactful, and multiracial community power becomes all the more likely.

## FINDING #3 LEADING FOR ALL

**Hiring People of Color and Changing Economic Conditions.** Through their respective roles, many alumnae uplifted the need to intentionally think about how the leadership in their sectors can be more reflective of the communities they serve. As such, alumnae are prioritizing hiring of people and women of color to increase representation in their respective sectors, such as education, public service, housing, and non-profit, among others. In the housing sector, Vanessa Delgado '02 shares how the South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD) board is implementing practices to really advance racial equity by ensuring their workforce is reflective of the populations they serve:

*...if you do cross section of all of our employees, of which we have hundreds and analyze, for example, if the inspectors that are coming to the east side what are their nationalities? Do they speak Spanish? We have the lowest percentage of employees that are Latino, and I believe we should do more to be reflective of the population we're serving. If we need to outreach differently to help people from diverse backgrounds be more aware of job opportunities or contracts, then we need to do that. I feel like that's one of the areas of greatest responsibility for me: how can I make sure that we push for true equity and not just talk about diversity, but something that actually gets implemented at the AQMD to make lasting change.*

Beyond hiring efforts, interviewees also noted the need to address structural barriers, such

as persistent wage gaps—a barrier that is very present for Latinas. Several alumnae are also approaching these barriers by empowering workers of color through efforts such as increasing awareness on equity issues, financial literacy, and skills-building. At the County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation, Norma Edith Garcia-Gonzalez '03 also started an advisory committee to examine the representation of women and people of color in the department she leads. She found that:

*70 percent of our female grounds maintenance workers are single head-of-household women...so, [in the advisory committee]...we realize that there [are] structural barriers for [women] to achieve upward mobility and so, we're working with them on financial education...resume building...[the] skills they need to move [up].*

Although the strategies listed here appear to be straight-forward, alumnae shared that advocating for change is not always easy. Alumnae have experienced backlash from colleagues and others. As mentioned before, this is especially challenging for Latinas that already face discrimination and are often among the first or the only Latinas in their position. For more on the importance of equity to Latina leaders, see our Southern California regional discussion at the end of this section.

## FINDING #3 LEADING FOR ALL

### Equity-Minded Leadership in a Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic presented its own series of challenges that continue to have a resounding lasting impact on us all—with some communities, including Latinas, experiencing disproportionate harm. Yet amidst these challenges, alumnae that were surveyed shared their leadership in navigating the pandemic through different strategies. As Georgina Maldonado '04, Executive Director, Community Health Initiative of Orange County shares below, these efforts did not go unnoticed:

*I think because of the pandemic, Latina leadership was highlighted both in our internal world of our home life and also externally with our community. Together we navigated the uncertainty by handholding and encouraging each other to take the next step forward. And hopefully with this, we will no longer cut our own wings but face this new normal with courage and conviction.*

As seen in Figure 15, alumnae supported transitions to remote work, advocated to support immigrants, and contributed to vaccination efforts, among other efforts. The examples that follow further showcase alumnae's leadership throughout the state.

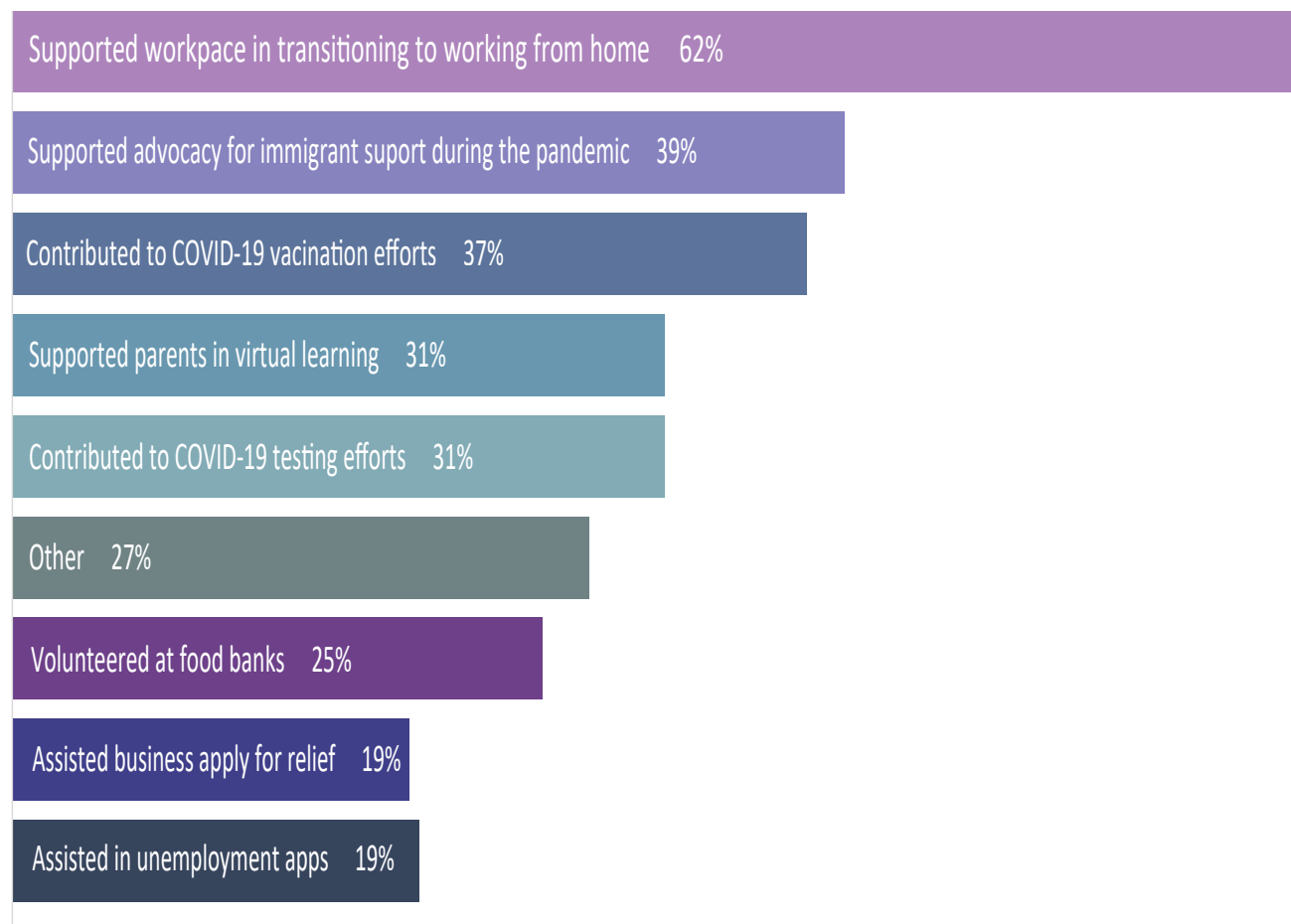
During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, alumnae were quick to coordinate efforts to assist impacted communities. For example, Monica Manabe '04, Assistant Medical Group Administrator at Kaiser Permanente Santa Clara, shared that during one of the early peaks of COVID-19 cases in the U.S.:

*I was in charge of helping coordinate with federal, state, regional and local government/health/EMS agencies, the arrival and care for the evacuees that came from Wuhan to Travis Air Force Base, then those from the Diamond Princess Cruise Line in Japan evacuees, and a third time with the San Francisco Princess Cruise Ships. We decided to treat these events as mass casualty incidents which as the Emergency Department/Base Hospital Director it was my role to designate what hospitals those evacuees with symptoms were going to go. This assisted in ensuring that not any one of our 5 hospitals in Solano County would be impacted. This started early February through end of March.*

In the wake of so many small businesses navigating the various economic effects of the pandemic, Ana Melgoza '10 Vice President of External Affairs at San Ysidro Health kept small businesses in mind as she joined a new board. She shared:

## FINDING #3 LEADING FOR ALL

**Figure 15. HLI Alumnae's Engagement with Communities During the COVID-19 Pandemic, 2021**



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute's HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=226) is restricted to only those who responded to the following question "If you were able to, how did you engage with and help your community during the ongoing pandemic? (select all that apply)."



## FINDING #3 LEADING FOR ALL

*I just joined the National Latina Women's Board Association in San Diego...[there] are a lot of small business owners...my goal with that is to help them succeed...letting them know that if they have employees, they can apply for Medi-Cal if their employees make minimum wage...but also helping them connect to resources that they may not understand. For instance, during the pandemic all these PPP loans that were out there, once again, didn't go to the people who needed it the most.*

Early on, noticing that farmworkers were essential to helping the state weather through the pandemic and that they did not have the adequate supplies, Mariana Sabeniano '15 created her own project:

*I also created my own projects as well during the pandemic. I helped to distribute masks for farmworkers early on in the pandemic when unfortunately no one was really paying attention to them, even though they continued to work as essential workers...*

Latinas in education also made note of pandemic impacts. Martha Garcia '14, Superintendent/President, College of the Desert noted a "tremendous decline in [student enrollment]" as many students entered the workforce to help support their family financially, greatly impacting their education and family's generational wealth. Eileen Miranda '10 shared that

schools became the catch-all, "...under this pandemic, the public realized that schools are not just an academic system but are also key to the social, emotional, and physical well-being of students. More and more schools are providing 360 wrap around services but were not funded to adequately provide all these services."

As vaccinations became available, Nora Vargas '01 of the San Diego Board of Supervisors, was referenced by others for her impactful work throughout the pandemic that brought her district to be 91 percent fully vaccinated as of October of 2021.<sup>48</sup>



[W]hen COVID aid was being distributed in the County of San Diego, the Board of Supervisors thought that it would make sense to distribute the funds equally even though the South County and East County were experiencing higher rates of infection and deaths...it wasn't until Nora [Vargas] got elected that they switched it to a more equitable response where they put more money into areas being afflicted.

— Ana Melgoza '10

## FINDING #3 LEADING FOR ALL

As the pandemic continued, Lourdes Castro Ramirez '04 shared her contributions to developing the state's infrastructure to distribute rent relief assistance to families disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. An important component Castro emphasizes is the need for continued partnerships with state and community-based organizations, as well as coordinated efforts to ensure the state is prepared for any future crises:

*In terms of our work to keep families protected and housed...the state has been working closely with over 140 community based groups to provide emergency rent relief and assist families impacted by COVID to stay safely in their homes by paying off accumulated rental debt. Today, we have delivered \$4 billion in assistance to over 340,000 renter households and landlords; with 56% being women heads of households. This was not an easy program to start up because prior to the pandemic the state didn't have the infrastructure to provide a rent relief program at this scale and pace, so we struggled early on to pull it together and to overcome federal bureaucracy. In the process, we reached out to a number of nonprofit organizations to help with community outreach and to connect families in need— many of these organizations are either Latina led or led by people of color. These are organizations that are trusted institutions in their communities. We saw the importance of having state government develop stronger relationships with organizations that have been in these*

*communities forever—being a resource and a go-to place for support. I hope that we take the lessons learned from how we dealt with this emergency and ensure that this relationship continues, so when we're faced with the next crisis we don't have to start from scratch. We have built the infrastructure to be able to respond more quickly and with care.*

In addition, to the examples featured above, alumnae uplifted efforts in conducting targeted outreach to communities of color during the early stages of vaccine distributions; setting up vaccinations and testing sites in predominantly communities of color; advocating for key legislation such as the expansion of broadband access; centering the need for language access; and ensuring communities of color were connected to resources such as rent relief, and food distribution, among others.

Also, in the wake of the racial justice uprisings, we witnessed the leadership of elected officials like Gabriela Plascencia '13 who were quick to respond by crafting key legislation to address systemic racism (see Spotlight #3 in the Political Leadership section). While Latinas were among one of the groups that were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, they were also among one of the groups that led the state in ensuring the responses were adequate and inclusive of those most impacted.

## FINDING #3 LEADING FOR ALL

### Bringing Others Along: Expanding the Pipeline of Leaders

When Latinas move into leadership positions, they fill large historical gaps of low representation relative to the state's demographics. The goal of increasing the number of Latinas in leadership spaces has inspired many HLI alumnae to take it upon themselves to bring others into the fold. The research here is clear: their perspectives and expertise enrich the spaces they are a part of which have impactful ripple effects for California communities.

As such, interviewees spoke of the importance of representation in leadership positions, particularly in positions long dominated by white males. One alumna shared, "...we can create more pipelines for other women leaders. I think it's harder to do when there is not representation, and so there is all sorts of implicit bias that come into play and exclusion in terms of who looks like a leader, who represents a leader and that's definitely happened to me applying for roles."

Due to their experience, many alumnae identified valuable building blocks to expand the Latina leadership base, either by encouraging Latinas to apply for jobs; referring other Latinas to HLI; or recommending Latinas to meaningful positions, networking, and mentoring. Unsurprisingly, among the Latinas surveyed, 94 percent noted that they provide mentorship to at least one person.

Recognizing the strengths that Latinas bring to politics in California, elected officials like Nora Vargas '01 of the San Diego County Board of Supervisors have sought to create more pathways for others in their work—a type of impact that aims to continue diversity in the policymaking arena. Nora Vargas shared, "I was very intentional in my hiring and I hired the best and the brightness for my executive team and they happen to all be Latinas, most of them are HOPE sisters from San Diego that are exceptionally talented in their profession."

Some alumnae made a point to highlight the future of their own positions either on boards or commissions or professional roles. A few women spoke specifically of those who they would like to see succeed them and the work they are doing to prepare incoming leaders.



I'm constantly trying to tap on women to run for something...and make sure we do succession planning...I appointed a Latina to our Riverside Public Utilities Commission...I appointed a young Latina that I hope she succeeds me on the council...since I've been in office, I make sure that I'm mentoring people and succession planning, and make sure when I decide that it's time for me to move on, that person's ready to replace me.

— Gabriela Plascencia '13

## FINDING #3 LEADING FOR ALL

In the education sector, Eileen Miranda '10, continuously convenes with other Latinas in her region:

*I firmly believe in building and strengthening the Latina pipeline. Once I was elected, myself and Xilonin Cruz-Gonzalez '14 from Azusa Unified School District, started gathering Latinas to meet a few times a year to network, support, and teach each other. We are growing the leadership of other Latinas who are in political office, because collectively it benefits all of us in the San Gabriel Valley.*

Beyond hiring and appointing women of color, many alumnae also pointed to the importance of connecting women to their networks to ensure they can thrive in their positions. Norma Edith García-González '03 describes how she prioritizes this and how she keeps in mind how new leaders will need continued support:

*...when I resigned from the board of trustee position it was very important for me to recruit another woman of color to run for my position...[to] pass that baton...but we also have to give them the support...and I continue to be in contact with the person that is now elected... [I] brought together friends from the profession that could be her village.*

As this pipeline of leaders expands and continues to visibilize the presence of Latinas in different sectors, alumnae noted the ripple effects: more women are encouraged to step

into positions of leadership. Esmeralda Soria '13 emphasizes:

*[The] visibility of Latinas in power is really encouraging other women to... step into those spaces...to effect policy changes from everything from education to income inequality to also racial justice. We're seeing more women talking about those issues and then collaborating too with, for example, our African American community and building coalitions... we know how to collaborate and work together and build broader coalitions in order to effect change.*



CONSUELO MARTINEZ '10 BEING SWORN IN VIRTUALLY DURING THE PANDEMIC TO REPRESENT THE CITY OF ESCONDIDO ON THE SAN DIEGO COUNTY WATER AUTHORITY

Another reason to continue to invest in Latinas and their networks is to expand the base of mentors across sectors. Because there are relatively few Latinas

## FINDING #3 LEADING FOR ALL

in leadership positions, alumnae noted it can be exhausting work that continuously falls on the same few leaders. As Zulma Maciel '12 explains:

*What concerns me, though, is that institutions are quick to tap people of color [Latinas] to problem solve all-things 'inequities' without the necessary training, skill development or resources to make transformational change. This quickly leads to burnout. The work of HOPE and Latina Coalition of Silicon Valley has become increasingly important. Not only in creating a pipeline of civic-minded Latinas, but leaders with the capacity to operate with an equity mindset. The moment calls to be intentional about accelerating that pipeline harnessed with equity practioners.*

In addition, the small base of mentors also means that the few token Latinas may not be as accessible, as pointed out by Dr. Sandra Salazar '09 below. Having a larger base of mentors accessible to Latinas can minimize the burnout that is caused by relying on a few token Latinas that may be overwhelmed by the demand:

*As a professional Latina, you may reach a certain level but the next level seems unattainable. If you aspire to reach certain professional goals, the pathway is not always clear. Unfortunately there are not many Latinas in high level positions. The first challenge a first generation professional encounter is the lack of resources. The second challenge is finding the guidance needed to help reach our professional goals.*

While Latinas are opening doors for others, multiple women stated that it is important that the path for up-and-coming Latinas be fairer and more equitable. Building a deeper bench of Latina leaders requires training, mentoring, and networking—all of which are important for thriving in leadership positions where they have been historically excluded. Proactive investment to expand and strengthen the Latina leadership base helps ensure and support more Latinas to grow into their leadership and meet the demands of their communities and the state.

In the long-term, building a strong base of Latina leaders can create a more sustainable ecosystem of leaders in California since emerging leaders will eventually no longer have to navigate the challenges of being the first or the only Latina in certain spaces (see section titled Among the First or the Only for more). In addition, Latinas already in leadership can confidently make succession plans knowing there is a pool of leaders prepared to continue the work.

In our concluding section, we summarize the research learnings and offer directions for philanthropy to be a part of creating a more equitable California. Latina recruitment and representation are essential to creating greater equity in California; however, being prepared and supported to be in these positions is also necessary.



## IMPACT FEATURE

### AMONG THE FIRST OR THE ONLY

While recent years have brought us more diversity across California's sectors, becoming the first or the only in a space remains the experience of many Latinas—both HLI alumnae and non-alumnae alike.



**NORA VARGAS '01, SAN DIEGO COUNTY SUPERVISOR**

“

I currently serve as a director of...the County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation and the Director of the Los Angeles County Regional Park and Open Space District. I am the first woman, the first person of color to serve as a director of the department since its inception in 1944...I am responsible for over 70,000 acres of park land...over 2,400 employees, [and] 183 park facilities.<sup>49</sup>

– Norma Edith García-González '03

“

I currently serve as the first Latina in the near 200-year history of the County of San Diego Board of Supervisors. I'm also the first immigrant, first binational, and first woman of color on the board. I've had the honor of serving as a first in many spaces, from the first Latina executive for Planned Parenthood of the Pacific Southwest, and the first Latina on the California Teachers Retirement Board (CalSTRS).

– Nora Vargas '01



## IMPACT FEATURE

### AMONG THE FIRST OR THE ONLY

---

“

It always amazes me that there are still glass ceilings to break on all levels. When I initially ran for office and won, I was shocked to discover that—here in the City of West Covina, which is in LA County—I am the first Latina to serve on the West Covina School Board.

— Eileen Miranda '10

---

“

I'm the first woman and Latina appointed by the Governor to serve as the Director of the Department of General Services. DGS serves as the business management backbone to the state of California and strives for excellence in serving our clients.

— Ana M. Lasso '04

---

Being among the first or the only in a certain position is certainly a proud accomplishment, though it can also be isolating for the person occupying that position. Additionally, many alumnae noted that it sometimes feels like an incremental improvement for the communities they come from.

More investment is required to ensure that the isolating “the first or the only” experience becomes both less common and more valued—something that is seen as positively benefitting society as it is likely to ensure more perspectives and experiences are considered at decision-making tables like the ones that HLI alumnae occupy.



NURY MARTINEZ '00 RECEIVES A STANDING OVATION AT A HOPE ANNIVERSARY AWARDS DINNER FOR BEING NAMED THE FIRST LATINA PRESIDENT OF THE LOS ANGELES CITY COUNCIL

LEADING WITH HOPE  
Supporting Latina  
Leaders for a Better  
California

## REGIONAL FOCUS GROUP

### SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA



## LEADING WITH EQUITY

The Southern California group convened women from Orange County, San Diego, and Los Angeles. The sectors that they came from were as diverse as their regions: labor, health, civil rights. Like many HLI alumnae, in addition to leading an organization, they also sit on numerous boards that support their communities. With their stature, the group shared a sense of duty both in and outside the workplace, as one participant shared feeling both privileged and under great responsibility to be known as a leader in her area.

This shared sense of responsibility included increasing equity throughout their work and organizations. One participant shared that, as Latina leaders, she must prioritize equity issues because it feels like it is “embedded and baked into our role.” Another participant added that although Latinas, as a whole, might be on different pages when it comes to prioritizing racial justice, those that put it at the forefront of their work also tend to look internally at their own community issues with racism, particularly in the fight against anti-Blackness.

Later in the conversation she added: “These issues are not easy; they’re tough, and I really think it’s going to be people like us being in intentional relationship and making space to go to that mountain top to have those retreats...[about] how we can proactively lead this state.”

There was a sobering acknowledgment that there has been push back on the progress that has been made in Southern California in places like Orange County where politics can be especially contentious—whether around policing or workers’ rights, tensions still remain. Because all three of the participants in this group discussion were engaging and leading in multiple spaces, they noted how it will be important to also take care of themselves to be effective leaders. They agreed that opportunities for greater equity in California should include “investing in and sustaining leaders for the continued fights.”

**Participants:** Ada Briceño, *Unite HERE Local 11*; Berenice Nuñez Constant, *AltaMed Health Services*; Norma Chávez-Peterson, *ACLU of San Diego and Imperial Counties*

## IN SUMMARY

### EIGHT LESSONS

We have presented a wealth of information both on the general context for Latina leadership in the state of California and on the specific contributions of HOPE's HLI programming and network to the development of talent. We have stressed that Latina leadership already exists and is having impact, that when Latinas lead they tend to lead in ways that are both relational and intersectional, and that leadership development programs such as HLI can make a difference by offering training, mentors, models, and networks.

We recognize that it is a lot to absorb – heck, it was a lot to research and write – but in the spirit of making the reader's job a bit easier, we offer eight key takeaways from this work, lessons that we hope will help future researchers who will build on this work and, just as important inform philanthropic partners who may be eager—and we would argue, should be eager—to support HLI-style programs and networks.

#### **1. Latinas bring forward and advocate for issues that matter to historically marginalized communities—and more can be done to expand roles and broaden issue sets.**

Time and time again, HLI alumnae connected their lived experience or their Latina identity to their work, community engagement, and commitment to see through structural changes for communities of color. This is at the center of their passion for political and economic

equity. HOPE plays a major role in this as the women uplifted the benefit of a statewide organization that was helpful in speaking to the broader issues and challenges beyond, yet still very important, local issues. As underscored in this report, HOPE has exhibited an ability to bring Latinas together across sectors and regions.

But there is more to be done. Some respondents voiced how it would be beneficial for HOPE to also consider how other leadership positions beyond those currently in focus (i.e., running for elected office and boards and commissions) have untapped potential as do other areas of focus. As often shared by alumnae, when others find out they are affiliated with HOPE, they are taken seriously and people in power listen. Such alumnae could have even more impact if new areas of focus included reproductive rights, criminal justice reform, and environmental/ climate justice in the state. Yet another area could be corporate boards and commissions—dedicated effort to increase Latina appointments in the public sector is already successfully underway and could be duplicated in the private sector. A continued focus needs to be on business: Corporations need to appoint Black, Latina, Indigenous, and Asian American people to the C-suite beyond the token few and change culture to ensure their presence is valued.



NANCY COLEMAN-CHAVEZ '17, PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT MANAGER AT CHASE, GREETS A LEGISLATOR ON THE STEPS OF THE CALIFORNIA STATE CAPITOL

## IN SUMMARY

### EIGHT LESSONS

#### **2. Networks of support help Latinas magnify their talents and reach—and boosting mentorship would yield big dividends.**

A sentiment echoed by HLI alumnae was the far-reaching influence of the HLI network both personally and professionally. Respondents shared how being a part of the network, despite not being physically in the same space, they felt empowered to stand up for issues affecting Black and Brown communities, women, and low-income communities. Others shared how the network has bolstered them during family challenges, when they needed to temporarily step away from the work, and also how the network has been an important source of support for those running for office.

Several times during data collection, women referred to the HLI network akin to a sisterhood, a network where the women did not have to justify their perspective or feel out of place because of who they are. Professionally, alumnae stressed how their peers go out of their way to help with job searches, recommend them for important appointments, or provide advice about running small businesses or running for elected office. Women credited HOPE and the HLI network for helping them gain recognition for their work and moving along their names for appointments to state committees or commissions. Further, participants mentioned how their peers are role models for them and help keep them accountable to implement

equity and elevate the voices of Latinas who come after them. Continuing to build the network and providing Latinas with the training and resources to mentor others could be useful for the state.

#### **3. Latinas have achieved greater political representation—and we need to do more and address lags in areas outside the public and non-profit sectors.**

Latinas now more than ever can be found at almost every level of government in California. Nonetheless, participants repeatedly pointed out that this is not the case in more male-dominated spaces, such as the private sector. Some alumnae stated that their gender and ethnicity impacted their careers: some were passed over for promotions and or moved up the ladder slower to men, were spoken over, or not taken seriously. Women also voiced that speaking up at work led to being labeled as "difficult" and that in addition to navigating patriarchy at work, they also had to deal with it in families that questioned the role of women as leaders.

There are also other challenges. For example, care work either for children or aging parents can impact their careers by taking them out of the workforce completely, reducing their presence in the labor market and community, or restricted their choices for employment.



## IN SUMMARY

### EIGHT LESSONS

Addressing these challenges of sexism and racism in the workplace and pushing hard for advancement in both the public and the private sector is critical. Both our research and the experience of the HLI alumnae suggest that Latina's gender and ethnic identity have also been advantageous: it has provided them with differing insights, skills, and perspectives that make for impactful leadership in their communities. The whole state could benefit by more such leadership in all sectors of civic and economic life.

#### **4. Latinas tend to create bridges through multiracial efforts—and more needs to be done to encourage such collaboration and intersectionality.**

Throughout data collection, HLI alumnae highlighted the need to infuse racial equity in policy, budgets, programming, and organizational culture not just for the benefit of the Latinos, but for the benefit of all communities of color. This is because Latinas saw how addressing existing structural inequalities—experienced not only by Latina(o)s—benefit everyone. Alumnae highlighted growth among Latinas who have learned to create bridges with other communities. One of the main avenues by which they have done this by was hiring/appointing other women of color and people of color once they themselves are in leadership positions. Related to this, alumnae also mentored people of color aiming to open doors that were once opened for them.

Beyond mentoring and hiring, participants also reiterated the need to ensure that the Latino community stands in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. Despite these efforts, there is a need for more collaboration across race and ethnicity and to elevate the voices of both more Latinos of all races, as well as other communities. Cross collaboration needs to happen in advocacy work and in the public and private sectors yet there needs to be greater headway made in the corporate sector.

#### **5. Latinas tend to lead with racial equity and economic justice in mind—and this can benefit the entire state.**

Many respondents connected their experiences as descendants of immigrants or immigrants themselves and coming from primarily working-class backgrounds to their professional work and impact in the community. In their professional roles, Latinas point to the importance of infusing both racial equity and economic justice lenses in the spaces they are a part of. As mentioned in the report, Latinas have declared racism a public health issue, demanded and secured affordable housing from developers, advocated for green spaces in communities of color, showed solidarity with immigrant communities, fought for street vendors, steered funds to marginalized communities, and fought

## IN SUMMARY

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for equal access to California beaches among tackling pandemic-related issues.

Latinas took on these issues and stances despite negative campaigns against them, backlash, and many times standing alone in their place of work. As illustrated, Latinas moved beyond establishing racial equity principles and focused on implementation through policymaking, programs, and practices. Latinas have also understood that accountability is at the center of addressing structural and institutional racism; HOPE and the HLI network plays a role in the women's accountability. In a state that is consistently ranked in the top five states in terms of income inequality, it is critical to have leaders who realize that their rise up the ranks requires that they extend a hand to others and they lift up the bottom rung so all have a decent living and a chance at success.

#### **6. Latinas face numerous barriers to becoming leaders—and we need to recognize both the professional and personal challenges.**

Latinas are making tremendous strides in working towards political and economic equity. However, when participants were asked what the barriers they faced generally and then barriers to running for office, specifically, one overarching theme was access to capital. Unlike long-term politicians and well-connected individuals, those that want to run do not have the same access to wealthy donors and funders.

This then impacts their fundraising and ability to remain in races, as fundraising is arguably one of the most important pieces in running for office. Latinas went so far as to say they felt uncomfortable asking their already financially strained family, friends, and communities for money. One more dimension that surfaced was how challenging it was to run and remain in office because of the compensation of some public office positions despite the required workload. In particular, this was a challenge for single mothers and Latinas caring for aging parents. For example, one respondent mentioned that she could not afford to be in public office as the pay was \$300 a month.

We have outlined the specific professional reasons Latinas and women of color more broadly need access to something like the HLI network. However, the personal resources that Latinas highlighted were discussed just as much as the professional ones. We recognize that these are not strictly “personal” and converge with the professional. The need for these resources are often the result of systemic challenges such as the persistent gender wage gap, low compensation for public office, lack of parental leave policies, racism and sexism, etc. These barriers are limiting the success of Latinas in achieving political and economic parity – and support is needed.



## IN SUMMARY

### EIGHT LESSONS



Latinas are leading in transformational ways. As we continue to work to build a strong economy and future for our state and nation, it will be critical for philanthropy, the public, and corporate sectors to make meaningful investments that support Latinas. As we have seen, Latinas have an important voice and role to play to advance much-needed change and policies that are rooted in equity, opportunity, and access.”

– Rosie Arroyo '07, Senior Program Officer,  
*Immigration, California Community Foundation*

#### **7. Latina leaders need organizations that can create and promote pipelines—and that should start with a reach to young people.**

Because many respondents were familiar with being the first or only in many spaces, they expressed a commitment to guiding new generations of leaders. Overall, respondents wanted to make it easier for the next generation of Latinas and leaders of color, emphasizing that individuals cannot succeed on their own. Alumnae also highlighted the reality of burnout and the inaccessibility of Latina leaders that are in more visible positions to mentor. This is due to their continued relatively few numbers in prominent positions. This latter point specifically highlights the need for ongoing support once Latinas are in positions

of power. Supporting Latinas’ growth requires acknowledging and addressing these and related barriers.

Youth are integral to building this base. HOPE has identified this need and as one interviewee described, it is crucial that HOPE has and continues its youth program because representation at a younger age matters. This type of resource earlier in life can make even greater, deeper impacts for leaders and their communities. Although tapping Latina youth, their talent and excitement, is integral to building capacity and continuing to move towards greater representation, Latina leaders and HLI alumnae mentor a wide range of individuals, including men, women, LGBTQ and non-binary individuals of a variety of ages. However, the majority of those mentored by respondents were overwhelmingly women, particularly young adult/early career women. These mentees are generally first-generation students, bachelor’s degree holders, co-workers, interns, or former students/employees/interns. It is also common for Latinas to informally mentor family members including nieces, nephews, godchildren, and other relatives and friends. Although HOPE as an organization supports youth through their high school and college programs, alumnae’s influence extends beyond this space.



LOURDES CASTRO RAMIREZ '04, SECRETARY OF CALIFORNIA BUSINESS, CONSUMER SERVICES, HOUSING AGENCY SPEAKS AT HOPE LEADERSHIP ALUMNAE SUMMIT

## IN SUMMARY

### EIGHT LESSONS

#### **8. Latina leadership benefits the entire state—and this deserves far more philanthropic support than is currently being invested.**

As highlighted throughout this report, Latinas are fundamental to the fabric of the state, constituting the largest ethnic-gender grouping in the state and literally raising nearly half of the state's next generation. They also tend to lead, as noted above, in ways that are inclusive of other communities and other concerns – and they tend, particularly when supported by programs like HLI, to work to make sure that other leaders can also step into their own.

The key question we see is how we can scale up these activities. Resources are key but frequently scarce: Foundation data reveals that between 1999 and 2009, U.S. philanthropic dollars targeting Latinos stood at less than 2 percent (or 1.3 percent) of the total foundation dollars.<sup>50</sup> Given the restrictions on campaign funding and political involvement by philanthropy, funders are unable to address one of the most pressing barriers Latina women face on the road to political leadership: campaign finance. They also have less direct influence over another challenge we raise: the barriers to moving up the corporate ladder and being able to exercise positive economic influence from that perch. However, funders can continue to create funding structures and directly invest in Latinas and Latina organizations that will bolster their leadership, families, communities and all CA communities.

What does such investment and support look like? Although Latinas already have much valuable experience, there is a need for ongoing training and support even when Latinas reach public office or other leadership positions. Latinas cannot feel alone in these spaces and thrive. They need a village of support. Before getting to this stage and in preparation for prominent leadership positions, Latinas—who are often first-generation college students and come from immigrant backgrounds—need tailored support and networks that help them gain knowledge to navigate hidden curriculums in historically white spaces. They need to be able to visualize themselves in leadership and see how that can have positive impacts not just for themselves but for their communities.

In short, they need hope – and more specifically, they need organizations like HOPE. In a world facing what seems like an endless series of crises about climate change, economic inequality, immigrant vulnerability, and even democracy itself, we need programs that train leaders to move past paralysis to action, past polarization to collaboration, past division to shared destiny. HLI is one such program – and supporting programs like this and others will yield ripple effects that will be felt and seen throughout the private and public sectors, within and between our communities of color, and across all of California.

## LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

The following HLI alumnae participated in the interviews that informed this report:

**Teresa Alvarado**, 2002, Regional Vice President, Pacific Gas and Electric Company, Independent Director and Chair of ESG Committee, GreenWaste, and Founding Board Member of Parks California

**Maria Anguiano**, 2012, Executive Vice President – Learning Enterprise, Arizona State University

**Sara Arce**, 2017, Vice President of Policy & Advocacy, The Campaign for College Opportunity

**Rosie Arroyo**, 2007, Senior Program Officer, Immigration, California Community Foundation

**Maria Cadenas**, 2017, Executive Director, Santa Cruz Community Ventures

**Wendy Carrillo**, 2009, Assemblymember, 51st California State Assembly District

**Lourdes Castro Ramirez**, 2004, Secretary, California Business, Consumer Services and Housing

**Erika Contreras**, 2010, Secretary of the Senate, California State Senate

**Mariana Corona Sabeniano**, 2015, Chief of Staff, California State Senate

**Xilonin Cruz-Gonzalez**, 2014, Board Member, Azusa Unified School District and Deputy Director, Californians Together

**Vanessa Delgado**, 2002, Vice Chair, South Coast Air Quality Management District Governing Board and President, Azure Development

**Norma Edith García-González**, 2003, Director, County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation and Los Angeles County Regional Parks and Open Space District

**Martha Garcia**, 2014, Superintendent/President, Imperial Valley College

**Senator Lena A. Gonzalez**, 2013, CA State Senator

**Marce Gutiérrez-Graudiņš**, 2013, Founder and Executive Director, Azul

**Ana M. Lasso**, 2004, Director of Department of General Services

**Zulma Maciel**, 2012, City of San Jose, Director, Office of Racial Equity

**Georgina Maldonado**, 2004, Executive Director, Community Health Initiative of Orange County

**Monica Manabe**, 2004, Assistant Medical Group Administrator, Kaiser Permanente Santa Clara

**Ana Melgoza**, 2010, Vice President of External Affairs, San Ysidro Health

## LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

**Eileen Miranda**, 2010, Board Member, West  
Covina Unified School District

**Karmin Noar**, 2016, Executive Director,  
Biocom Institute

**Gabriela Plascencia**, 2013, Councilwoman,  
Riverside City Council

**Yammilette Rodriguez**, 2002, TCS Trainer,  
Youth Leadership Institute

**Norma Rojas-Mora**, 2009, Director,  
Communication and Community Relations,  
Bakersfield College and Former President of  
Latina Leaders of Kern County

**Dr. Sandra Salazar**, 2009, Physician and  
Board Trustee, Cerritos College

**Patricia Sinay**, 2015, Founder of Community  
Investment Strategies and a Commissioner  
on the California Citizen Redistricting  
Commission

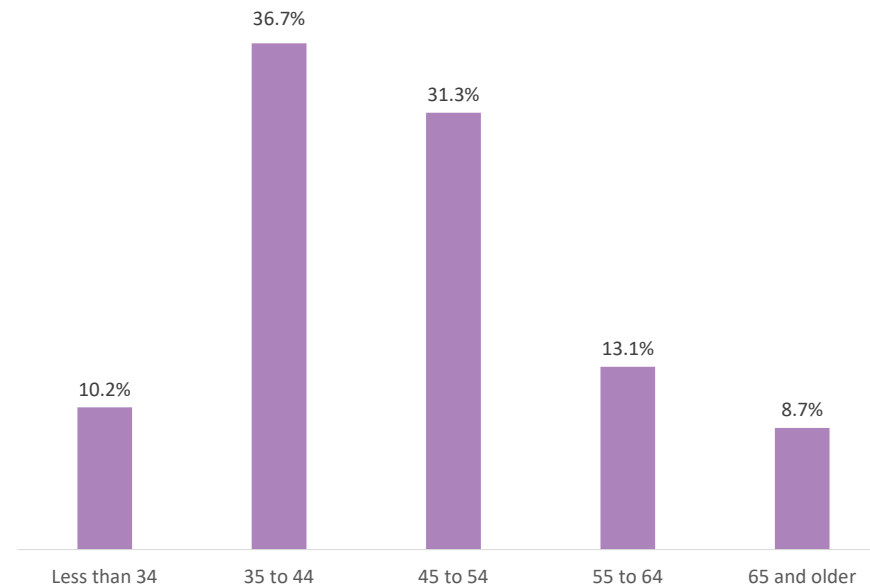
**Esmeralda Soria**, 2013, Councilwoman, City  
of Fresno

**Nora Vargas**, 2001, Supervisor, County of  
San Diego

**Christine Villegas**, 2004, Founder, Mariposa  
Development

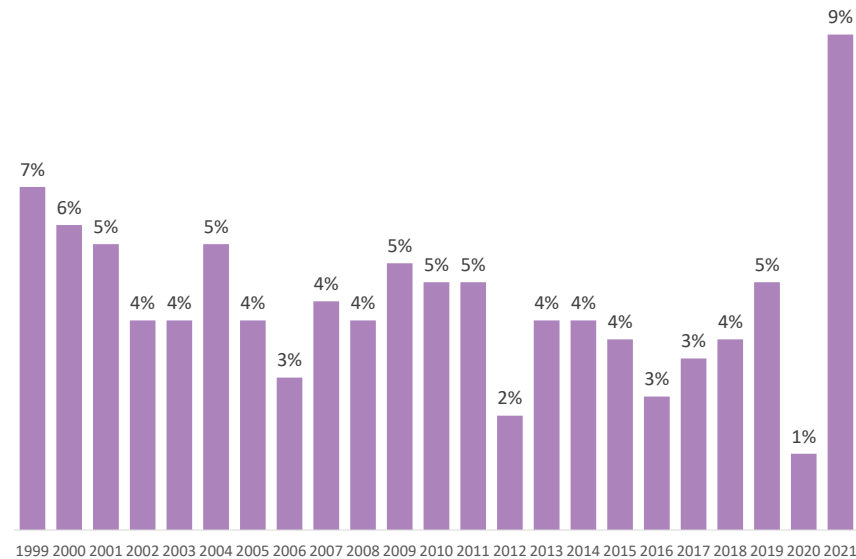
## APPENDIX

Figure 1. Percentage of Questionnaire Respondents by Age (n=275), 2021



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute's HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=275) represents all individuals who answered their age at the time of the survey.

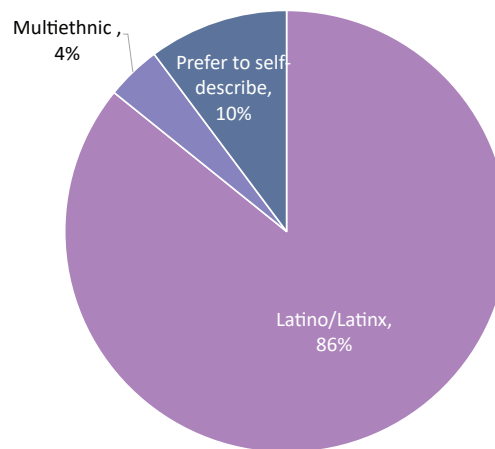
Figure 2. Year HOPE Participants Graduated From Program (n=275), 2021



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute's HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=275) represents all individuals who listed their year of graduation from the HOPE Leadership Institute.

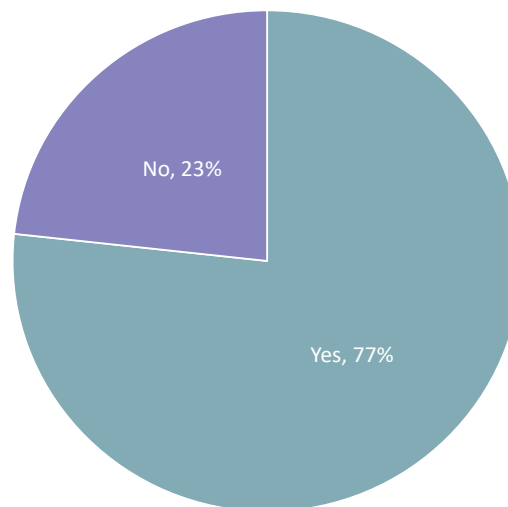
## APPENDIX

Figure 3. Self-Identified Ethnicity of Survey Respondent (n=275), 2021



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute's HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n= 275) represents all respondents to the question, "How would you best describe your ethnicity, i.e. how you identify based on cultural expression and background? (select one)."

Figure 4. Percentage of Respondents Who Were/Were Not First Generation College Students (n=275), 2021

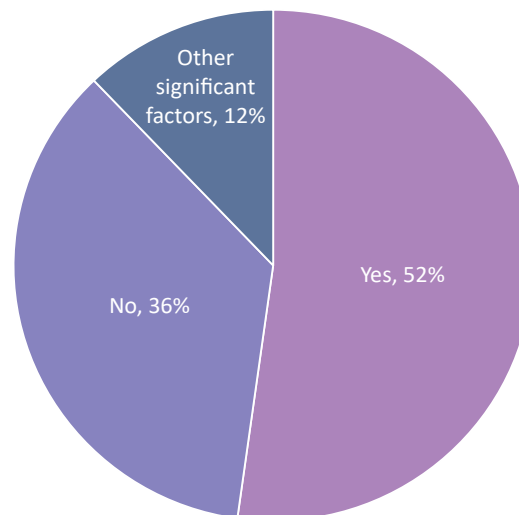


Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute's HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=275) represents all respondents to the question, "Were/are you a first-generation college student, i.e. parents did not attend college? (select one)."



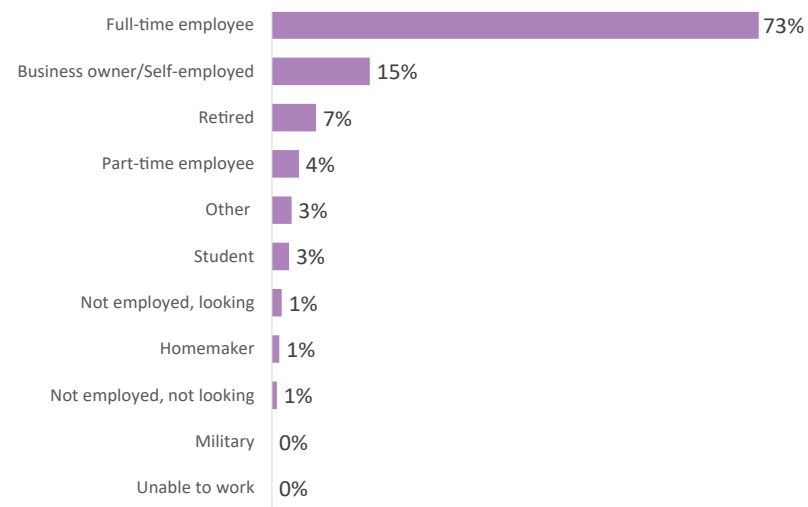
## APPENDIX

**Figure 5. Have Respondent's Professional Or Educational Trajectories Impacted Her Decision To Relocate? (n=272), 2021**



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute's HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=272) represents all respondents to the question, "Have your professional or educational trajectories impacted your decision to relocate?"

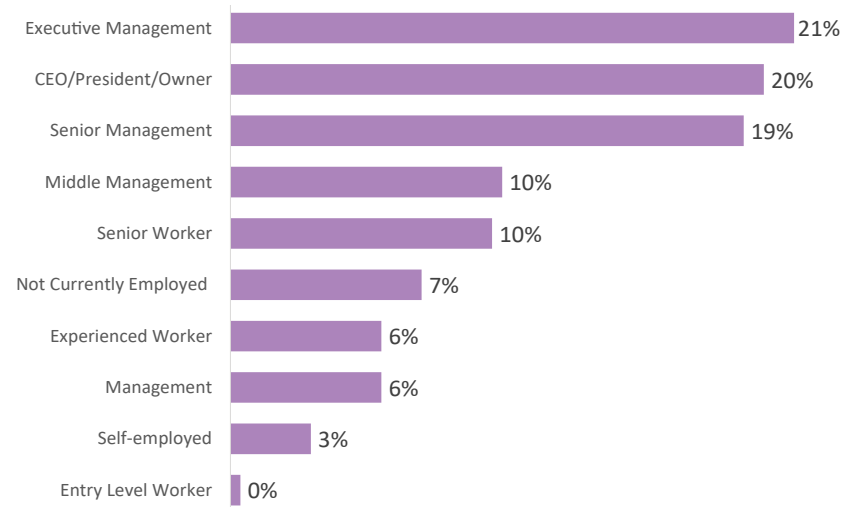
**Figure 6. Respondent's Current Employment Status (n=271), 2021**



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute's HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=271) represents all respondents to the question, "What is your current employment status? (select all that apply)."

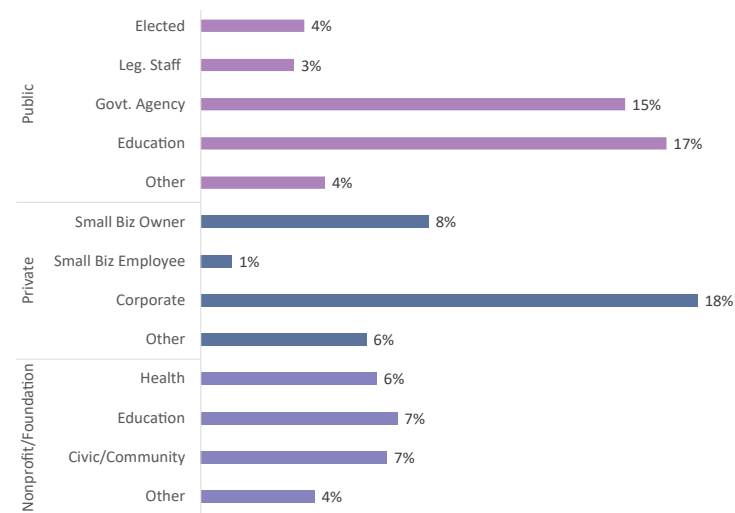
## APPENDIX

**Figure 7. Respondent's Current Job Title or Role (n=271), 2021**



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute's HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=271) represents all respondents to the question, "What level best describes your current title or role? (select one)."

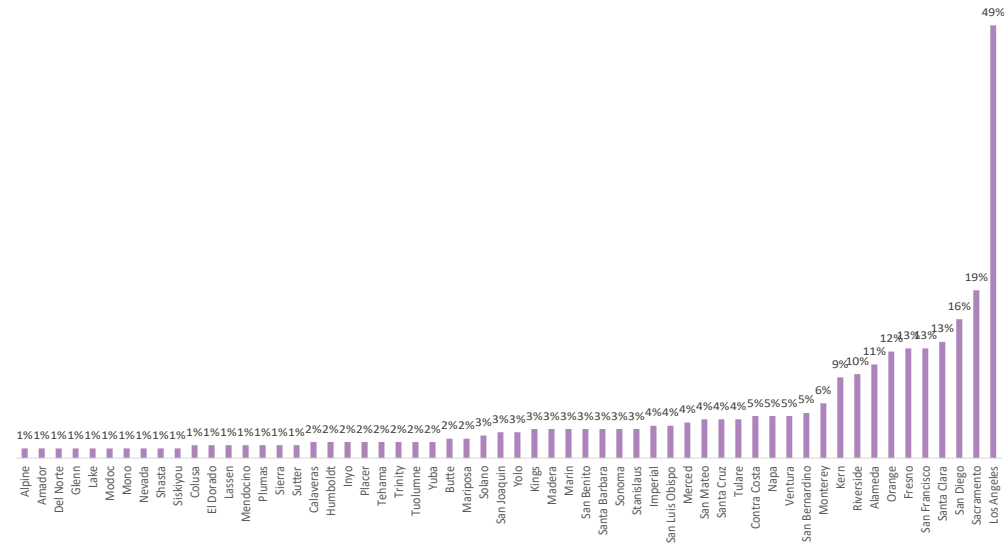
**Figure 8. Sector Where Resondent is Currently or Was Most Recently Employed (n=271), 2021**



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute's HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=271) represents all respondents to the question, "What best describes the sector where you are currently or were most recently employed? (select one)."

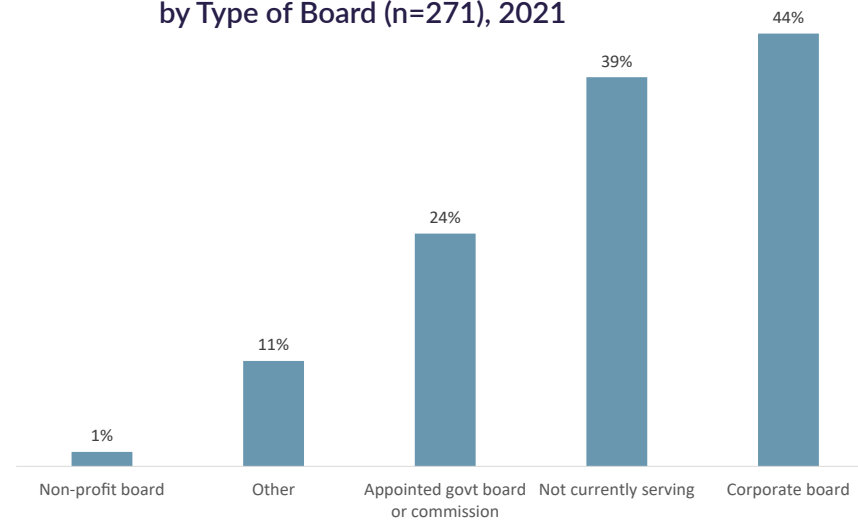
## APPENDIX

Figure 9. Counties in California that Respondents Currently Work in or Have Worked in (n=271), 2021



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute's HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=271) represents all respondents to the question, "What California county(-ies) do you work in currently or have in the past?"

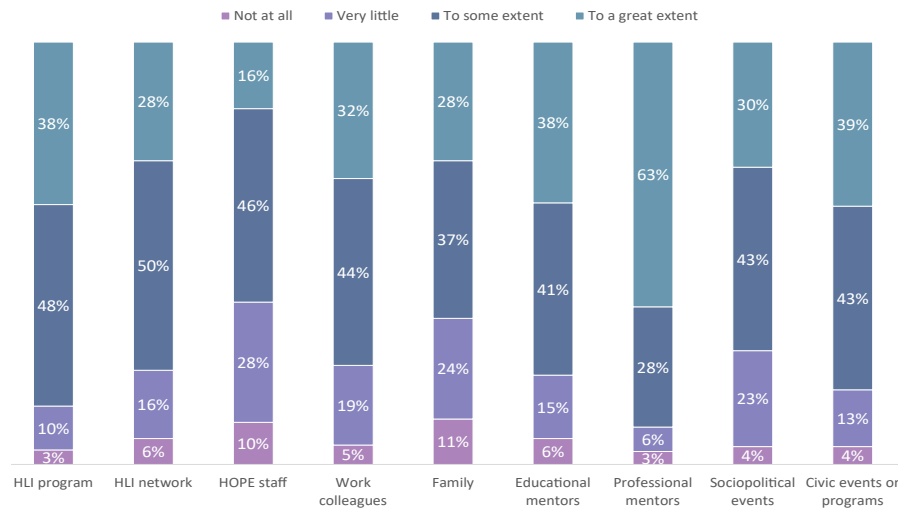
Figure 10. Response to Currently Serving on Boards And Commissions in California by Type of Board (n=271), 2021



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute's HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=271) represents all respondents to the question, "Are you currently serving on any of the following boards or commissions in California? (select all that apply)."

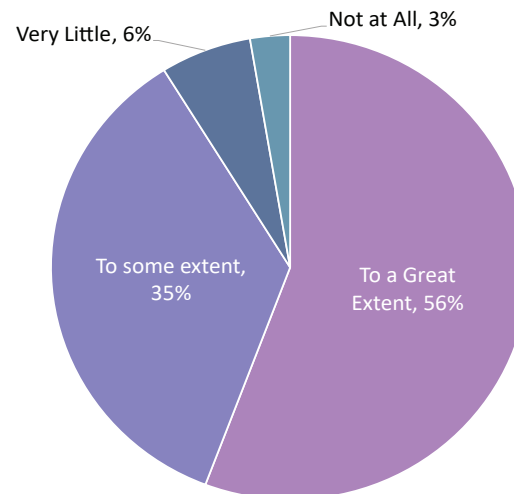
## APPENDIX

**Figure 11. Response to What Extent Have the Following Variables Influenced Your Professional Goals and Trajectory? (n=260), 2021**



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute's HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=260) represents all respondents to the question, "Are you currently serving on any of the following boards or commissions in California? (select all that apply)."

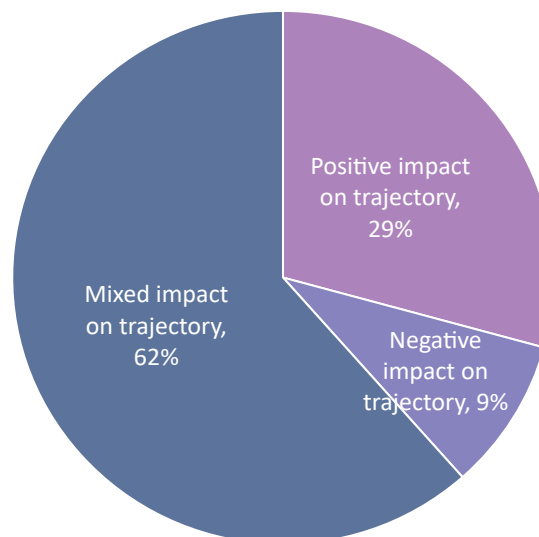
**Figure 12. Response to What Extent Gender Identity Has Impacted Professional Trajectory (n=260), 2021**



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute's HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=260) represents all respondents to the question, "To what extent has your gender identity played a role in your professional trajectory? This could be either positively or negatively (select one)."

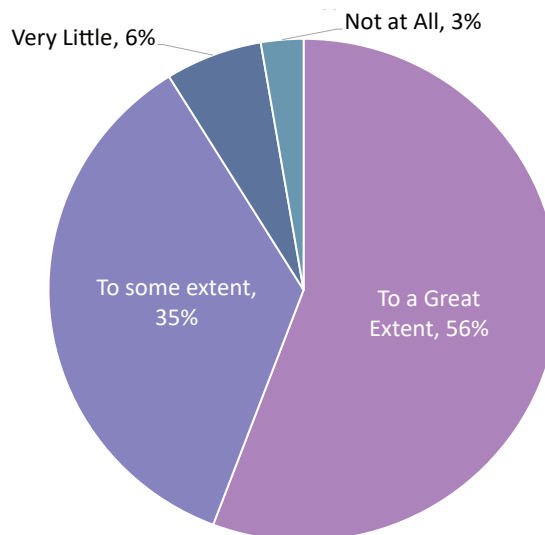
## APPENDIX

Figure 13. Type of Gender Identity Impact on Professional Trajectory (n=260), 2021



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute's HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=260) represents all respondents to the question, "To what extent has your gender identity played a role in your professional trajectory? This could be either positively or negatively (select one)."

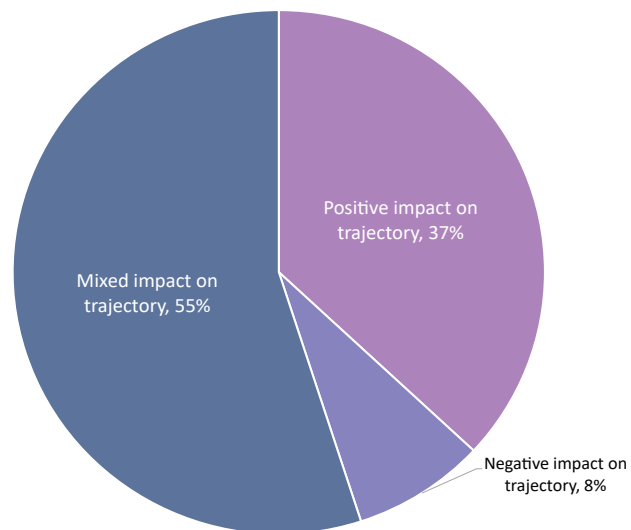
Figure 14. Impact of Race and Ethnicity on Professional Trajectory (n=260), 2021



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute's HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=260) represents all respondents to the question, "To what extent has your race and ethnicity played a role in your professional trajectory? This could be positively or negatively (select one)."

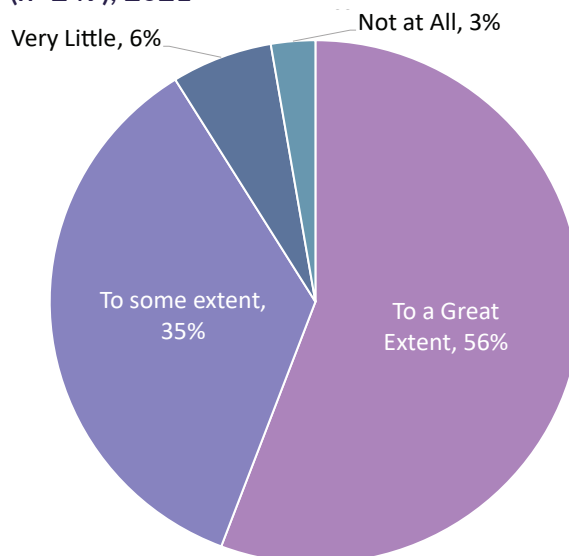
## APPENDIX

Figure 15. Type of Race and Ethnicity Impact on Professional Trajectory (n=260), 2021



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute's HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=260) represents all respondents to the question, "How has your race and ethnicity identity impacted your professional trajectory? (select one)."

Figure 16. Does Respondent Currently Participate in Any Volunteer, Pro-Bono, or In-Kind Work? (n=249), 2021

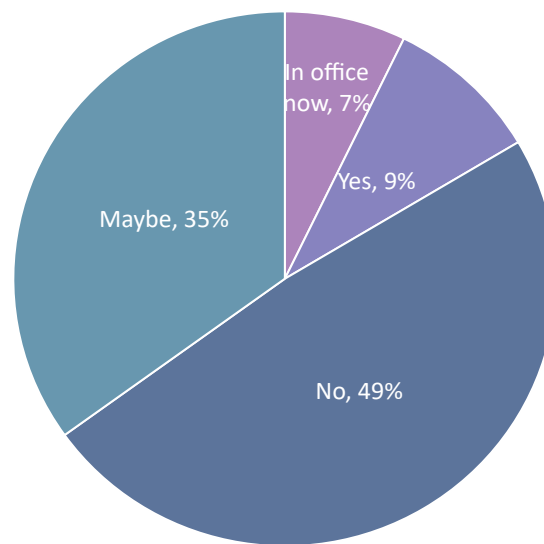


Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute's HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=249) represents all respondents to the question, "Do you currently participate in any volunteer, pro-bono, or in-kind work with the aim of achieving greater equity for Californians? (select one)."



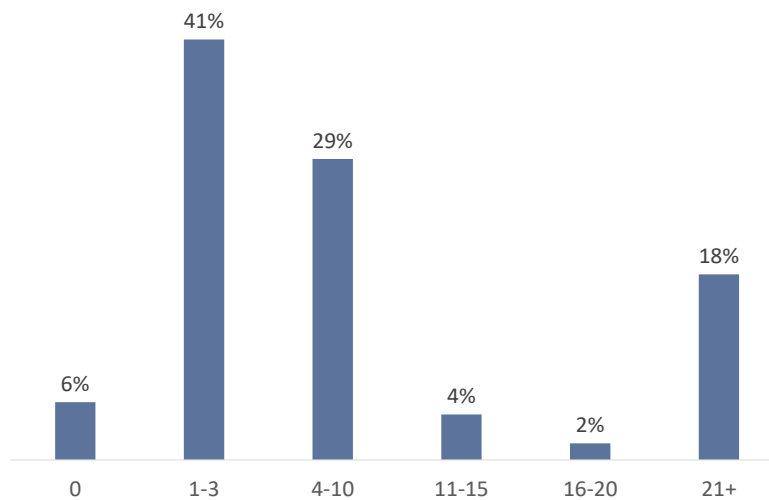
## APPENDIX

**Figure 17. In the Years to Come, Does Respondent Expect to Run For Any Type of Elected Office? (n=249), 2021**



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute's HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=249) represents all respondents to the question, "In the years to come, do you expect you will run for any type of elected office? (select one)."

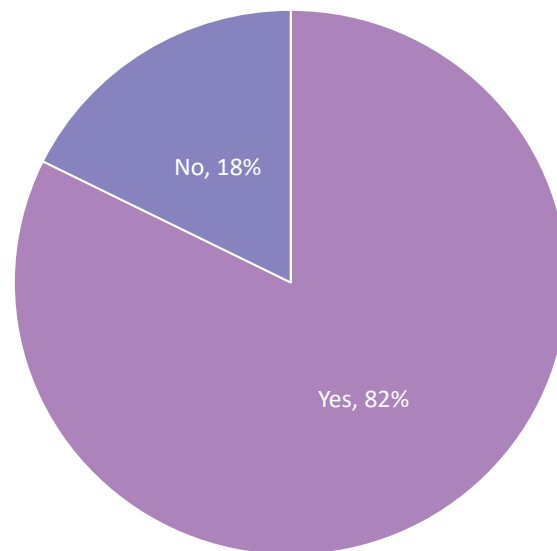
**Figure 18. Percentage Breakdown of Number of People Respondents Mentor or Sponsor (n=249), 2021**



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute's HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=249) represents all respondents to the question, "How many people do you sponsor or mentor (i.e. providing personal or professional guidance or support and advice to someone else)? (select one)."

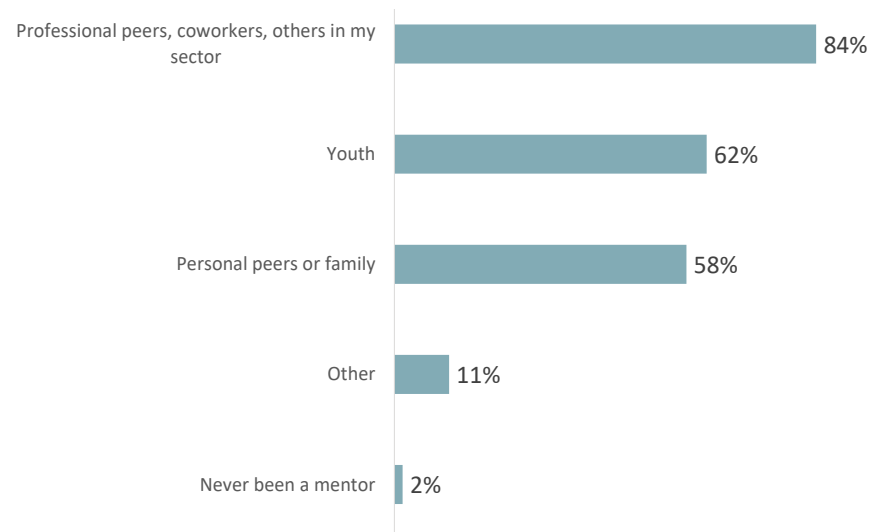
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**Figure 19. Response to Having Ever Had a Mentor, Formal or Informally (n=249), 2021 .**



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute's HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=249) represents all respondents to the question, "Have you ever had a mentor, formal or informally?"

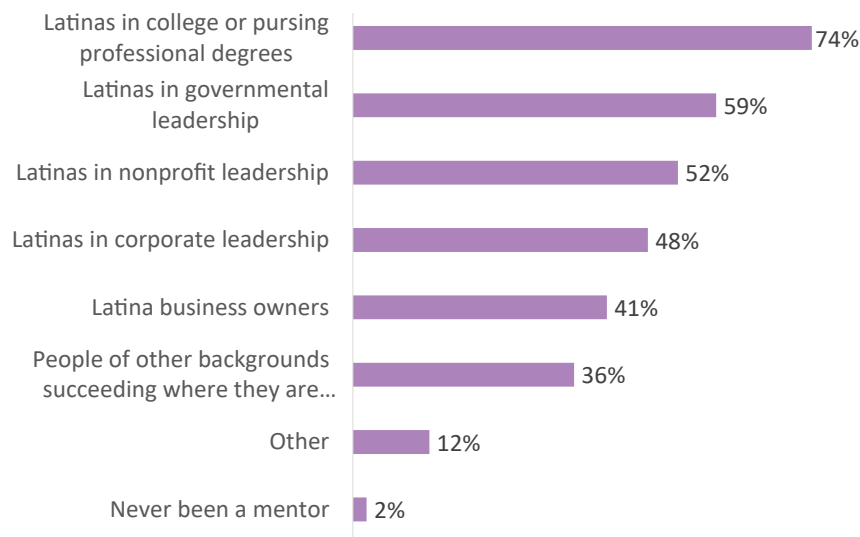
**Figure 20. What are the Types of Mentees Respondents Currently Mentor or Have Mentored in the Past (n=249), 2021**



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute's HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=249) represents all respondents to the question, "If you are currently mentoring or if you have in the past, who are your mentees? (select all that apply)."

## APPENDIX

**Figure 21. Impact Respondent Would Like to See Emerge From Mentoring Others (n=227), 2021**



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute's HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=227) represents all respondents to the question, "If you are currently mentoring or if you have in the past, what result do you want to see emerge from it? (select all that apply)."

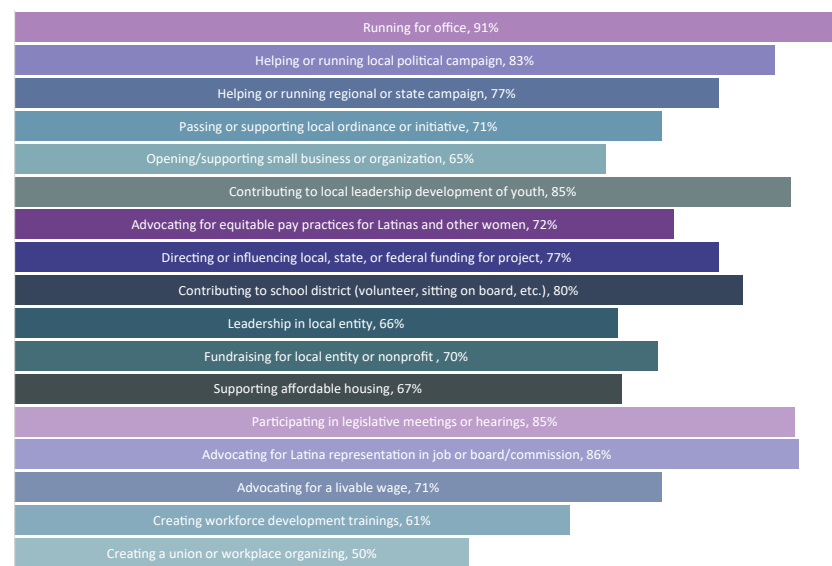
**Figure 22. Respondent's Community Impact Since Graduating HLI (n=227), 2021**



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute's HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=271) represents all respondents to the question, "Have you been able to impact your community since your participation in HOPE programming in any of the following ways? (select all that apply)."

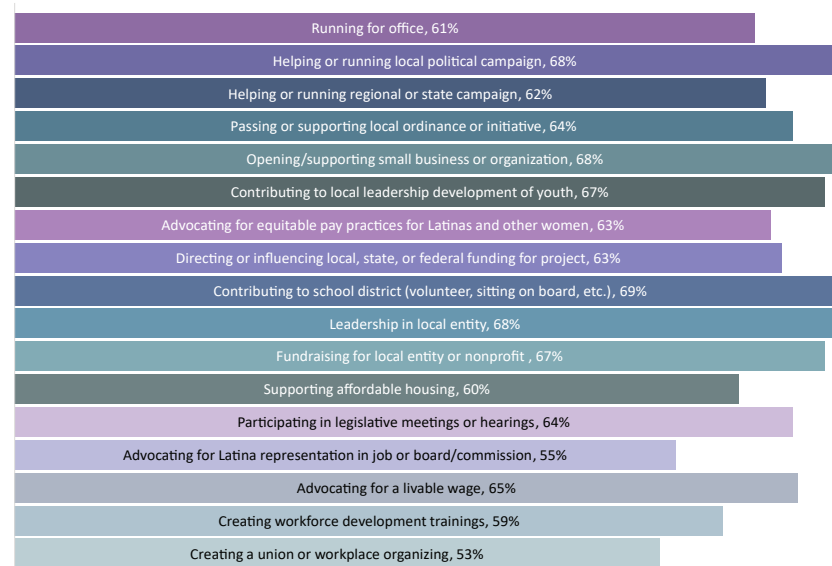
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Figure 23. Respondent's Perception of HLI Alumni Impact (n=227), 2021



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute's HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=227) represents all respondents to the question, "What impact do you see other Latinas—both HOPE alumni and non-alumni—making in your sector or your region of California? (select all that apply from HLI alumni, non-HLI alumni, or no for each impact)."

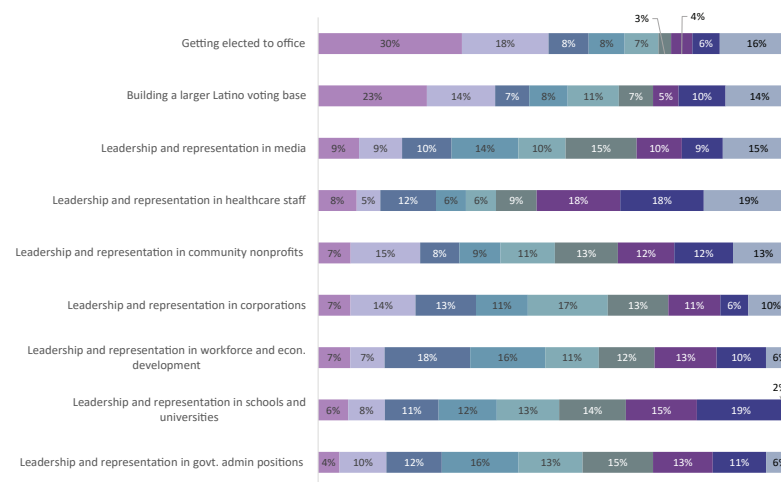
Figure 24. Respondent's Perception of Non-HLI Latina Impact (n=227), 2021



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute's HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=227) represents all respondents to the question, "What impact do you see other Latinas—both HOPE alumni and non-alumni—making in your sector or your region of California? (select all that apply from HLI alumni, non-HLI alumni, or no for each impact)."

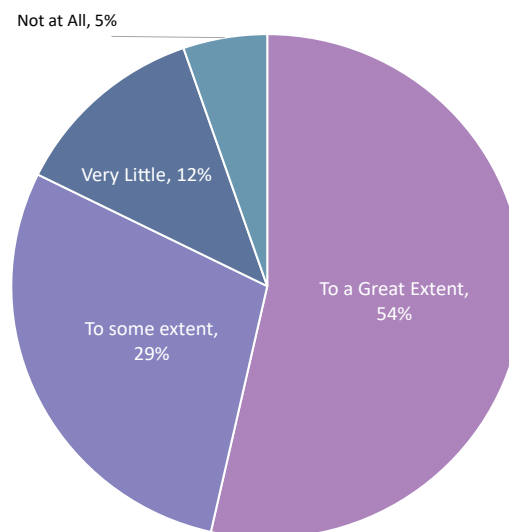
## APPENDIX

**Figure 25. Ranking Actions Perceived to Have Largest Impact on Achieving Equity for Latinos (n=227), 2021**



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute's HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=227) represents all respondents to the question, "Which actions on behalf of Latinas and HOPE alumni do you think will have the biggest impact on achieving equity for Latinos and other marginalized communities in California? Please rank the following actions from 1 to 9, with 1 as the action with largest perceived impact."

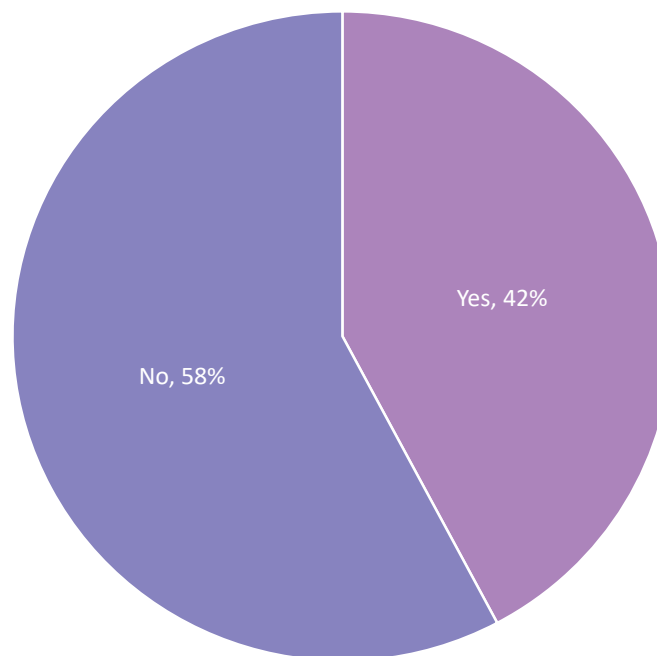
**Figure 26. To What Extent Did the Pandemic Create Disturbances in Your Work/Professional Life? (n=226), 2021**



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute's HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=226) represents all respondents to the question, "Emerging data shows that the multiple consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic impacted women, in particular. To what extent did the pandemic create disturbances in your work/professional life? (select one)."

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Figure 27. Impact of Participation in HLI on Respondents' Decisions About Allocating Resources (n=45), 2021



Source: Data and analysis from USC Equity Research Institute's HOPE HLI Latina Impact Survey, 2021. The universe (n=45) represents all respondents to the question, "Did your participation in HLI prepare you to make decisions about allocating resources? (select one) - Selected Choice."



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