



California Center for Civic Participation

Stakeholder Interview & Survey Summary

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CALIFORNIA
C E N T E R
FOR CIVIC PARTICIPATION

In March 2019, the consulting team of Shiree Teng and Melissa Mendes Campos conducted phone interviews with 10 key stakeholders representing CA Center program participants, instructors/staff, allied partners, and funders/sponsors (see Appendix A for a list of interviewees). We also reviewed results of the online survey administered in January/March to 338 individuals, receiving 54 responses.

Survey Review

As detailed in the survey report (provided separately), the majority of respondents were Program Participants or Instructors, and over half of all respondents had only a transient relationship with CA Center of one year or less. Nevertheless, the impact of this interaction has been lasting.

Respondents agree that CA Center is best known for providing youth with hands-on, experiential learning that leaves them with a better understanding of how to engage in the political process and why it is so important. Program Participants came away from their experiences with increased communication skills and greater confidence and motivation to ensure their voice—and the voices of others—are heard. Advice for CA Center's future included encouragement to continue to do more of the same, to expand beyond the Sacramento area to reach more underserved youth in other communities, and to boost the visibility of its good work through branding and marketing.



Interview Summary

What does CA Center do?

It is known for giving young people the opportunity to engage in a practical, meaningful way, with the politics and policy that shape their world. It is an important complement to what youth get in the classroom because it brings the concepts to life; it also humanizes and demystifies the process. This empowers youth to be participants in that process.

“It gives young people the opportunity to learn and engage in real-life policy issues and talk to real-life policymakers in way that inspires and develops leaders.”

“...it gives them a chance to see public officials in a setting that you’re not used to, a more comfortable setting, and it allows them to feel more a part of that government is doing so they know how they can actually interact with it.”

“I’d say that without CA Center, I wouldn’t be as driven to make change and being as strong an advocate for what I believe...and speaking to and educating others. Because they might be waiting for YOU to help open their eyes.”

How does it do it?

The way CA Center engages youth is described as “ahead of its time,” well-designed and -organized, and—most importantly for youth—fun.

“It was very interactive, organized. There was an agenda and assignments, we’d group up and discuss the topics. We did topical presentations, we met with legislators and environmental policy workers. ...we were walking around downtown Sacramento, even meeting with restaurant managers who had sustainability programs, so you’re talking to people who are actually doing the work. I want to be meeting these people, not being lectured about these people.”

“They had student interns make a cap and trade game, so creative! Also had youth interns create a card game about the Sacramento Kings Arena LEED and how that got put together. Fascinating they were getting so in depth on complex policy items and making a game out of it.”

“It’s really fun! Like they’d give us \$10 for lunch, and we’d get to walk around in Sacramento—I think that’s a big deal and appealing for any high school student.”

“Loved it! Anything you do at that age sticks with you. Fun, access to officials, touring Old Sacramento, a deeper dive into what we’d been learning from textbooks in government class.”

What makes it different?

CA Center excels in its ability to engage youth in an authentic way. The fact that it does so through programs that are topical but not limited to one field or area of interest sets it apart from some other programs. It has also proven its ability to create sound programs as well as to provide intermediary support for other programs. Their quality and longevity makes them a trusted partner in the field. Apart from their educational programming, the Roast is also part of the reputation CA Center “owns.”

“...they’ve always had a youth touch in terms of how they go about the work.”

“I remember us all going out to dinner together. They knew all our names. That connection, not all programs take the time to learn about people outside of the actual program...and you really stay close. From that program you don’t just walk away, you maintain a relationship between the Center and you.”

“Youth work is hard because it never stops, it’s not a traditional 9-5. So when I see them making themselves available after/all hours I see their commitment. Their heart is with their work.”

“CA Center has a process, regardless of what issue the youth is interested in, to engage them in an authentic way. Others work on specific issues, but CA Center has a framework for getting them involved and leads to sustainable change.”

“The Center’s more recently done work as intermediaries for TCE and others, but Jim and others were so inventive over the years....created programs that were interesting and engaging and had never been done before, at least in CA.”

“They’ve been doing it so long, they have that history. Not a fly by night. A lot of funding requests come through my door and everybody says they’ll revolutionize how kids learn and they’ve been around for like a minute. So that history is a benefit and differentiator for the Center.”

“The Roast is kind of a niche thing that’s very identifiable on its own—it’s become a Sacramento thing where everyone expects to go very year. Everyone enjoys it, it’s funny, bipartisan...very specific to us, to the Capitol community.”

CA Center is a capable partner to other programs, funders, sponsors.

Its experienced leadership and other stellar staff have made it easy to work with. This is not always easy in a competitive funding environment!

“Very easy to work with. I like that I don’t feel harassed by them. We’ll get emails, here’s what we’re doing, where’s what we need, and I say here’s what I need/want, and we do it and we’re done. We have a process of working together where it’s fast, not burdensome. They know what they’re doing, it’s pretty locked and loaded. So often you’re working with new people (turnover) and you have certain expectations and you tend to be the one to train that new person (here’s what we like to do), and it gets FRUSTRATING. With them I don’t even have to think bout it. A few emails and it’s done. Simple.”

“I’ve had great experiences working with Jim and the team/staff over the years.... Never a ‘this is our lane stay in yours’ thing, always very collaborative. At the time youth space wasn’t quite how it was now...a good partner in exploring all that. We often hear other grantees say ‘get out of our way, we have our own thing.’ CA Center has never done that, so that has been a unique partnership: willing to facilitate, making sure young people are engaged, that’s their niche.”

“The CA Center for Civic Participation was an instrumental partner...they were extremely efficient in providing services, and demonstrated keen awareness and sensitivity to youth’s needs as they filled out forms and made travel plans. I appreciated their cultural competency and their sensitivity to the experiences of low-income youth.”

“It was good... at the start we were very engaged and very much a team effort. I appreciated that; we were very much “in it.” Once I found out the details of how much they were getting out of the grant...it felt like we (as an organization of color) were getting an unequal share. It didn’t have anything to do with them, really, but...just the nature of philanthropy and class dynamics.”

“I can depend on them, they will get the job done, I trust them. They will find the people needed to fulfill what we need to get done. We need (the field needs) more of that. A certain grit. They get it done, they don’t gloat.”

Appendix A: List of Interviewees

We are grateful to the following individuals for sharing with us your insights, wisdom and perspectives:

1. Antonio Aguilar, Program Participant
2. Melissa Guajardo, Instructor/Staff
3. Natalie Hernandez, Instructor/Staff
4. Arnell Hinkle, Allied Partner
5. Jamie Huff, Allied Partner
6. Kim Knestrick, Instructor/Staff
7. Chloe Lynn, Program Participant
8. Albert Maldonado, Funder/Sponsor
9. Lloyd Nadal, Allied Partner
10. Zakiyyah Willis, Program Participant
11. An Nguyen, Funder/Sponsor