ACCE INSTITUTE IN 2021

ANNUAL REPORT 2021
ACCE is a family of power-building community organizations that fights for economic, racial and social justice. ACCE Institute is a 501(c)3 public charity founded in 2010. Our mission is to foster transformative community change across California by engaging with low-income residents of all races through ground-up organizing in largely Black and Brown communities. Through leadership development, political education, and strategic issue campaigning, ACCE works to build an equitable and anti-racist society.

Our members are youth and elders, Native Californians, immigrants and citizens from other states and countries, people with disabilities, those who identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community, tenants and homeowners, workers and small business owners, dreamers and fierce freedom fighters.

We reject the myth of scarcity—that there is not enough wealth in this state to provide everyone here with basic necessities and more—and we reject systems that inflict physical or policy violence upon us.

We believe in the collective power of people to dismantle oppressive systems and to build equitable ones in their place. We believe in robust civic engagement in the streets as well as in the halls of power. We believe in the utility of direct action to demonstrate and experience our power together, and to bring light to our issues and our solutions. We believe essential needs should be freely provided to everyone with no exceptions. We believe that together we can build the world we deserve.
Core to ACCE’s organizing model is a reliance on the leadership of our members. Given the fundamental role leaders play in our work, ACCE dedicates significant time and energy into our staff and member trainings. Our training programs seek to develop the organizing skills and social & political analysis of our members for the purposes of informing their strategies and campaigns to change the systems that impact their daily lives. **Over the course of 2021, ACCE held 5 training programs, with a total of 200 ACCE members participating in them.** Those trainings included skill building like media training and how to tell your personal story, issue trainings like what is dignified housing or social housing, and trainings on current events like what was the governor’s recall election all about.

**TRAINING & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

A year into the covid pandemic, transmission rates continued to soar, making it unsafe for our members to show their power in the streets, and thereby limiting our ability to wage strong public campaigns. To adapt, we decided to lean into digital campaigning. However, because of the historically racist and classist digital divide, many of our members lacked access to basic technology like home computers and reliable wifi. We realized that if we wanted our members to meaningfully engage in our campaigning, we needed to invest significantly in closing the digital divide. That is why we worked hard to provide tools (such as internet hotspots and a tablet lending library), and digital organizing training. In our 4-part training series, held in the spring and fall, we trained our members on how to use zoom, facebook, and twitter as tools for campaigning - to help to build our base, tell our stories, amplify our demands, and pressure key decision makers.
As a multi-issue organization, ACCE looks for and works on issues that have a high level of community demand. Over the years we have worked in the areas of affordable housing and displacement prevention, increasing the minimum wage, immigration reform and immigrant inclusion, health care access, education, policing & incarceration, budgeting, and transit access. In 2021 we worked most notably in the areas of housing, education, and budget advocacy - particularly in the fight to decrease funding going to policing and incarceration and increasing funding for community needs such as housing, health care, and public education.
Since we opened our doors in 2010, Housing has been a priority issue area for ACCE members. In years past our work has primarily focused on protecting tenants and homeowners from the worst outcomes of a market based, largely privately owned housing system. However, in the spring of 2021, ACCE members from across the state met to define what our “North Star” outcome is and map out how to reach it. In the end members centered on the following premise - housing is a fundamental human right, and it is the state’s obligation to guarantee that everyone has access to a stable, quality & affordable home. Everyone should have access to housing that is either no cost, or costs less than 30% of their income, regardless of their race, immigration status, age, or physical/mental abilities, or gender/gender identity.

To get there we know we need to fight for housing that is “de-commodified” and for housing that is in public or “community control”. With that guiding premise and those long term goals in mind, our organizing, resource creation/dissemination, and policy work on housing is all in service of reaching that north star.

**LOCKOUT PROTECTION:** While it is entirely illegal, and wildly aggressive for a landlord to change the locks on a tenant’s home while they are out in order to bar them from getting into their own home rather than going through a legal eviction process, over the course of the year, the use of illegal lockouts increased statewide. In the city of LA alone, ACCE saw over 180 illegal lockouts during the month of October in 2021, indicating that far more are happening beyond the scope of ACCE’s reach. In cities across the state, ACCE built up Rapid Response Teams of members ready to show up at a moment’s notice to defend fellow renters. In dozens of cases, this served to stop the illegal action and get the tenant back in their home, as ACCE brought not only members, but press, and elected officials to the scene.

**BUILDING TENANT UNIONS:** Across the state ACCE has formed building-wide tenant unions within the ACCE family to fight rent increases, unfair evictions, harassment and for safe, healthy housing. Notably, **In 2021, we formed a Blackstone tenants union in San Diego County after the private equity giant purchased nearly 6K affordable housing units** - making them the 3rd largest landlord in the area overnight. Those tenants join members of the people’s tenants union in Oakland who have been organizing against corporate landlord mistreatment since 2020.
HOUSING JUSTICE LEAGUE: California’s housing unaffordability crisis has severely deepened throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and in response ACCE launched an ambitious mass outreach and organizing program designed to bring tens of thousands of struggling tenants, from all parts of California, into the Housing Justice League. ACCE has created the infrastructure to do large-scale outreach through social media, radio ads and mass texting, and to move people into on-going Defend Your Home workshops, legal support, policy advocacy and organizing! **Through these efforts, over 35,000 renters joined the housing justice league in 2021.**

LITIGATION: ACCE’s legal team is the newest addition to the ACCE family. In addition to providing direct legal services to ACCE members, and providing training and education on policy, our team of lawyers engage in strategic impact litigation against entities that profit off from violating the rights of tenants. In 2021, the legal team filed our first set of lawsuits on behalf of ACCE Institute, including a class action lawsuit against one of the largest corporate landlords in the state of California for violating tenant protection laws.

RESOURCES FOR TENANTS AND ORGANIZATIONS

EMERGENCY RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (ERAP) IMPLEMENTATION: After helping secure one of the most robust COVID emergency eviction protection and rent/utility assistance programs in the country, ACCE has worked on implementation and enforcement of the program. The organization held outreach events, ran mass intakes and helped hundreds of tenants fill out their applications, as well as appeal denials of assistance. Through this work, ACCE has been able to identify problems with the program, raise them with senior administrators, and very often get the problems resolved.
NO ONE LEAVES ACTION CENTER - As a service to tenants across the state, ACCE held weekly tenant clinics that served 10,000 renters throughout the year. In the Fall of 2021, once the statewide eviction moratorium ended, we realized many more tenants were going to need access to information and assistance. That is why ACCE launched the No One Leaves Action Center - in order to provide up-to-date information, assistance and tools to renters and organizations that don’t focus on housing. Because it has become increasingly difficult to track and understand COVID-era rules and programs for renters, ACCE is stepping up to meet this need for labor unions, community groups, and renters who need help.

POLICIES

Over the course of 2021, ACCE members helped to develop and advocate for crucial housing justice policies both statewide as well as in several local jurisdictions. In cities across the state, ACCE and allies have been able to expand the boundaries of tenant protections against evictions, harassment, and access to legal counsel. ACCE’s legal department also created template local policies that have been legally researched and drawn from the best practices and strongest ordinances across the state for other groups and elected officials to use. These include: Tenant Anti-Harassment Ordinance; Just Cause for Eviction Supplements for cities that rely only on AB1482; Covid-19 Eviction Moratoriums; Rent Control; Relocation Fees; Tenant Habitability Plans, and Buy Out Ordinances.

CANCELING RENT: After over a year of grassroots organizing to #CancelRent, on Monday, June 28th, 2021, the California legislature passed AB 832, effectively allowing rent debt for most tenants and landlords to be paid off by the state. All of it. The year previous, this was unimaginable. In 2020, we were deep in the throws of a pandemic with no end in sight for an economic or public health recovery. At that time, the call to cancel rent was laughed at - or even scoffed at - by many, but our members and staff were not discouraged. They continued to organize on the ground and work to shift the political will - and once again we saw that organizing works. We still have work to do to implement the program well, but the decision to pay for the full forgiveness of rent debt signals a huge victory for renters that have been waiting in fear of being hit with crushing rent debt!

"ACCE has helped me grow my knowledge of my rights under housing laws, to know that I’m not alone, and the opportunity to talk with key political figures that can help us win the policies we need. Being with like minded people who fight for the rights of people whom otherwise would be ignored is incredibly rewarding. I’m very proud to be a part of ACCE - to stand up for my rights, and all people’s rights - because housing is a human right!"

- Jackie Lowery, ACCE Member Contra Costa
ANTI-HARASSMENT: In both Los Angeles and Richmond, ACCE Organized and successfully won Tenant Anti-Harassment Ordinances. Over the course of 2020 organizers and members kept hearing a common thread in the stories of new tenant members. That thread was landlord harassment. In LA organizers, through stories shared during tenant clinics and on the doors, saw harassment increase by nearly 300%. ACCE leaders in LA and Richmond decided to direct their resources towards prioritizing the passage of strong Tenant Anti-Harassment Ordinances. Through a series of campaign strategy meetings, public and digital actions, meetings with elected officials, and testifying at hearings, ACCE members fought for AND WON a strong Tenant Anti-Harassment policy in both cities!

STOPPING UNJUST EVICTIONS: In multiple jurisdictions across the state, including County of Alameda, and the cities of San Diego, Chula Vista, Imperial Beach, National City, Downey, Antioch, and San Pablo, ACCE fought for and won stronger just cause eviction protections for tenants. These wins were won through a strong organizing combined with the policy expertise and support of our new legal team. Our organizers built the tenant base, identified the policy need, and developed leaders to share their stories and push for community solutions to end evictions. Meanwhile, ACCE’s legal team worked to write strong policies, train local movement allies on the key elements of the proposals, and educate various elected officials and government staff both on what the policy would do and how best to implement it.

CREATING A NEW HOUSING SYSTEM

SOCIAL HOUSING: The private for-profit housing market has failed Californians. The majority of CA renters are rent-burdened, homeownership is entirely out of reach for most families, and the most recent count from before the pandemic counted at least 150,000 Californians homeless. Only a structural shift in the way we see the role of housing in society will solve the crisis we’re in. ACCE launched a campaign that seeks to get billions invested in preserving and producing housing that is permanently affordable and publicly owned or owned by non-profits, land trusts or the residents themselves. Many call this “social housing.” ACCE has played a critical leadership role in building the movement for social housing across California in 2021, co-leading a statewide coalition that is both advancing statewide policies and supporting local campaigns.
LAND TRUST ACQUISITIONS: ACCE successfully put several homes into community land trusts in 2021. In Oakland, ACCE won $4.1 million from the City of Oakland for Land Trust Acquisitions. After 4 families living in a quadplex in East Oakland received a rent increase for over $1000 from a new landlord that threatened to displace them, they began organizing with ACCE to put their home into the Oakland Community Land Trust. After 4 years of persistent organizing, the tenants at 34th Ave successfully made their home permanently affordable and in community control in June with the purchase into OakCLT. Additionally, in December of 2021 after one of the longest rent strikes in Oakland history, and a rigorous multi-year campaign led by a majority of immigrant tenants living in a 14 unit building, ACCE leaders were able to pressure their landlord to sign a letter of intent to sell the property to the Oakland Community Land Trust which was finalized in early 2022. In Richmond, after facing a foreclosure and subsequent eviction attempt, ACCE Richmond worked hand in hand with Richmond LAND to prevent both the eviction of several families living in a triplex together and to successfully move them land trust ownership.
Ms. Dixon began participating in legal clinics, ACCE organizing trainings, and other activities through which she learned about her rights and met other people who, like her, were ready to act on their own. In the midst of the pandemic, she realized that she was not the only one going through these problems. She was not alone!

One day in April, Ms. Dixon pushed past her fears and decided to take action. She led her first protest against her landlord. That day, Ms. Dixon was NOT alone, ACCE members accompanied her in person, invited the press, and together denounced the abuses suffered by the tenants of Los Angeles. But they took it a step further - ACCE members demanded that the Los Angeles City Council provide protections for all tenants who suffer through landlord harassment.

Ms. Dixon became unstoppable. She joined many other tenants and organizations in demanding that the City of Los Angeles enact a tenant anti-harassment ordinance. And their organizing worked! On August 6, 2021, a new ordinance protecting Los Angeles tenants against landlord harassment, went into effect.

The three MAIN points of the ordinance are:

1) Harassment of tenants is illegal
2) Tenants can sue their landlords for harassment in court
3) If the tenant wins in court, the court will order the landlord to stop the harassment and pay the tenant for damages. The court may also order the landlord to pay the tenant’s attorney’s fees.

Los Angeles City Councilwoman Nithya Raman thanked the many individuals and organizations such as ACCE, SAJE, and the Eviction Defense Network-Los Angeles, who mobilized to pressure the Los Angeles City Council to protect tenants. The councilwoman even thanked Ms. Dixon individually for her tireless efforts.

Ms. Dixon, by joining ACCE, learned that there is power in numbers and that direct action works! Ms. Dixon has found a community of people like her who have come together to improve their lives. And even though she won her fight, she has stayed in ACCE to keep fighting for others.

For more information on ACCE, you can visit www.acceaction.org. This material was developed with the purpose of informing and educating our members and the general public about the importance of organizing and promoting our rights.

"When we lose our fear, they lose their power." - Patricia Mendoza
In 2021, the re-opening of schools was a topic at the top of the minds of students, parents, and educators alike. With heated debates raging about whether to prioritize the educational needs of students or the public health needs of our communities, our education organizers worked to create space for the voices of low income parents and students, and carry out campaigns that focused on bringing their demands to fruition.

In Los Angeles, ACCE, together with LAANE, UTLA and Students Deserve, anchor an education justice coalition called Reclaim our Schools LA (ROSLA). One major effort in our education work is the proliferation of community schools. A community school is a school site that is designed to both meet the needs of the students as well as the community the school serves, acting as a central institution in the neighborhood that provides wrap-around services such as library and computer lab access, English language classes, health clinic, etc. In 2021, ROSLA won funding for an additional 40 Community Schools. In addition, ROSLA supported the police free schools effort that got a $25 million cut in the school police budget and get a $95 million investment in the Black Student Achievement Plan, a significant increase in funding for social, emotional and academic supports, as well as a resolution for a nurse in every school. ACCE developed dozens of new parent leaders in South LA schools and worked directly with three schools to develop their Community School program and plans.

In Pittsburg, through our participation in the Lift Up Contra Costa coalition, ACCE has brought in parent leaders to meet monthly with our allied School Board Member Taylor Simms. We’ve worked with her to address concerns about the schools response to the COVID pandemic, and are supporting the ACLU in a lawsuit they are filing against the school district over racial discrimination in their practices.
In 2020, the call to defund the police rang in the streets and the nation’s largest social protest shown a light on the deadly consequences of a policing system born of slave catching and raised in structurally racist capitalist system. Like many, our members were called to dig deeper in our efforts to protect our people and ensure that our tax dollars are going toward systems that affirm our existence. In 2021 much of that work happened at ACCE through concerted budget advocacy organizing projects that aimed to invest in our communities while divesting from the police.

**In Richmond.** ACCE members participated in the Lift Up Richmond coalition and supported a set of recommendations to Reimagining Public Safety. As a result ACCE members won $6.5 million in funding for community programs like a paid youth jobs program, a non-police response program for mental health emergencies and a violence prevention program.

**At the county level in Contra Costa.** ACCE pushed the County Board of Supervisors to invest in health care for the undocumented, housing and a non-police response program for mental health emergencies and to reduce the budget for the Sheriff’s department and close juvenile hall. As a result of our work ACCE members won allocation of funding from Measure X - a county bond won in the previous year, for Contra Costa CARES, an East County Youth Center and for a non-police response program for mental health emergencies. We were also able to stop the Supervisors from spending $6 million on Sheriff parols.

**In Oakland.** ACCE led the Community-Labor Coalition “Refund Oakland” in the fight for a Just Recovery Budget. Alongside the Refund Oakland coalition, Oakland ACCE ran a budget campaign that successfully moved about $50M into funding critical community services - including funding workforce development in flatland neighborhoods, investing in city services from litter abatement and park clean up, strengthening violence prevention programs, bolstering non-police mental health support programs, and increasing support for Meals on Wheels service for seniors.
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Policymaking is happening all of the time, with or without community input, and as the old saying goes, “if you are not at the table, you’re probably on the menu”. That reality is why civic engagement has become a key element of our strategy for building community power at ACCE. Through voter activation, GOTV efforts, and organizing elected officials, ACCE works to create space for marginalized community members to build and flex their power at the ballot and through the legislative process.

LOBBY VISITS: In 2021 ACCE held over 50 meetings with legislative offices, including 24 meetings with the legislator themselves. Along the way, we formed an “A-Team” lobby visit pros. This A Team was made up of tenants from across the state who became experts at telling their stories and advocating for their communities.

PATCH-THROUGH PHONE BANK CAMPAIGN: Thanks to the voter outreach we have conducted over the last 12 years, we developed the infrastructure that allows us to activate voters during our issue campaign work. In 2021, through our issue campaigning, ACCE’s phonebank team reached out to 11,900 voters across the state, urging them to take action to cancel rent and protect tenants. Through our efforts, we got 9,100 supportive voters connected to the office of their state elected leader to voice their support and share their personal stories.

NEWSOM RECALL: ACCE held a series of three political debriefs called “ACCE & The Newsom Recall: A Convo About Our Political Strategy” with ACCE members in March + May 2021 that helped to inform the members’ analysis about what was at stake in the recall election. Through our non-partisan voter engagement efforts of ACCE phone bankers and door-knockers we contacted 13,600 voters to inform them about the election and identified 3,500 potential member-leaders!

SALGAMOS A VOTAR! In addition to our voter outreach via phone and field, we focused our efforts on the Spanish speaking voters across California through a messaging effort called “Salgamos a Votar” (Let’s go out and vote!) The campaign included the production of seven audio messages that were run on various Spanish language radio stations across the state. We also commissioned the production of a song and music video that ran on a popular Spanish language pop culture show the week leading to the election.
"ACCE is about the business of building an undeniable force for progressive change. We seek out and empower impacted people, because we know people power is the only power that has ever changed the world for the better."

CHRISTINA LIVINGSTON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR