

South Bay Labor Council

Represents unions in Santa Clara and San Benito Counties in Silicon Valley. The Council is headquartered in San Jose, a city of over 900,000. The region's population is over half people of color, many of them immigrants, and includes about one-quarter Asian and one quarter Latino.

The Council's 112 affiliates represent 110,000 members. The largest affiliates: SEIU, UFCW, HERE and AFSCME. Working Partnerships USA -- the 501(c)(3) policy research and advocacy arm of the council -- employs approximately 20 staff. The Council's staff is 8.

Real Victories

- Elected progressive, pro-labor majorities to the San Jose and Sunnyvale City Councils.
- Won tax abatement guidelines in Santa Clara County and a community benefits agreement in San Jose; now working for subsidy accountability legislation
- Won strong living wage ordinance in San Jose
- Helped win passage of Children's Health Initiative for Santa Clara County
- With community allies, created Community Blueprint to guide policy work
- Helped establish inclusionary zoning for 5,000 units of affordable housing in mid-Coyote Valley
- Secured community benefit agreement on a downtown San Jose retail/entertainment development project
- Staved off public transit driver layoffs and service cuts
- Successfully assisted affiliates with organizing, contract campaigns, and anti-privatization struggles.

Coalition-Building:

- Strategic and reciprocal alliances. Some are issue-based (especially those with long-standing organizations); some are more deeply relational (e.g. a formal agreement with ACORN to help each other grow)
- Fostering community allies. For example, the Council and Working Partnerships provided staff and in-kind support to develop the Interfaith Council on Race, Religion, Economic and Social Justice.
- Formation and advocacy of a broad-based regional policy agenda as the basis for alliances. A common vision helps develop long term relationships with community interests. For instance, the Council developed a working relationship with key environmental groups through its support for the "smart growth" agenda, and the Building Trades Council recently began to follow suit.

- Intentional relationship-building efforts include the Labor-Community Leadership Institute, the Community Blueprint process, and efforts by Working Partnerships USA.

Preparing for Governance:

- Rigorous policy research and analysis conducted by Working Partnerships help the Council identify opportunities for legislative action and provides friendly elected officials with valuable information not available from other sources.
- On-going public policy education sessions for office holders strengthen relationships and accountability.
- A strong candidate endorsement process holds elected officials accountable to a policy platform. Negotiated consensus among affiliates strengthens the power of Council endorsements.
- Candidates who support the platform are identified and nurtured.
- Capacity building for a successful grassroots political program relies on staff on paid leave from affiliates. Mobilization, voter registration, and GOTV are coordinated with affiliates and allies.

Shifting the Public Debate:

- The publication of policy reports on working family issues (income polarization, temporary jobs, affordable housing) has sparked public debate and positioned the Council as the key spokesperson for social and economic justice in the region.
- Working pragmatically with segments of the business community (e.g., the Silicon Valley Manufacturing Group, ethnic chambers of commerce and small businesses) on issues of mutual interest has heightened the legitimacy of the Council's initiatives on housing and redevelopment.

Leadership development

- The Labor-Community Leadership Institute brings labor, faith, and community activists together to learn more about the political workings of local government, to discuss policy changes, and to build relationships.

Organizing

- Political clout provides leverage in some affiliate organizing campaigns. Working Partnerships' research and policy work lend legitimacy to organizing efforts.

Research conducted by Barbara Byrd (University of Oregon) and Nari Rhee (University of California).

Los Angeles County Federation

L.A. county has over 10 million residents: 45 percent is Latino, 31 percent Anglo other than Latino, 12 percent Asian, and 10 percent Black. Changes in the labor environment have been dominated by the influx of foreign-born workers, currently measured at 36.2 percent of the Los Angeles population.

The Los Angeles County Federation of Labor has 345 affiliates representing over 800,000 members. Largest affiliates are two SEIU locals, the Los Angeles AFT affiliate, and 28,000 members in various IATSE locals in the film and television industry. The Federation has a staff of nearly 20.

Federation Transformation

- The County Federation traditionally played an insider role in local politics through its ability to fundraise. This brought political access and a place at the development table, but at the expense of a field mobilization capacity.
- In the mid-1990s, new leadership at several local unions -- including HERE, SEIU, and UNITE -- combined with leadership changes at the County Federation. With a background in the United Farm Workers, HERE, and as the Council's COPE director, Miguel Contreras was elected Council head following the death of Jim Wood in 1996.

Building Political Power

- Growing capacity and success: beginning in 1996, the County Federation began to build a powerful field mobilization capacity through repeat hirings of lost-time SEIU, HERE and UNITE members, alongside sophisticated voter targeting and mailing. The Federation has elected a growing number of union and community activists to state and local offices. In 1998 it helped defeat Proposition 226 aimed at gutting California labor's growing political power. The Fed's former political director, Fabian Núñez, holds the powerful position as Speaker of the Cal. Assembly.
- Immigrant-Labor Voting Block: Traditionally seen as not worth the effort, immigrant voters have proven key to electoral power. In the wake of the 1994 anti-immigrant Proposition 187, Labor has played the key role in turning out immigrants in key districts. To further focus this work, in 2000 the Federation, SEIU, and HERE founded the Organization of Los Angeles Workers (OLAW) to build a cadre of hundreds of loss-timers and community activists expert in walking precincts full time before elections to mobilize Latino voters. To build a more progressive electorate, OLAW has also worked successfully with the ethnic media.

- Racial Politics: The County Fed has had to negotiate tensions between a growing Latino population and a shifting African-American base. Some interests have attempted to pit Anglo and African American voters against Latinos as a way of gaining power. After the loss of labor's Latino mayoral candidate in 2001, labor and its allies have helped elect two strong African-American candidates who have championed black-white-Latino unity. These campaigns have developed loss-timers with skills in the black community similar to parallel efforts among Latinos.
- Leverage for Bargaining and Organizing: Growing political clout has allowed the Federation to provide leverage for organizing campaigns, such as among home and health care workers. Labor and the champions that the Federation helped place in office have directly supported strikes by janitors, longshoremen, transit workers, and grocery store workers.

Policy Debates

- Immigrant Rights: Labor spearheaded a rally of 100,000 against the anti-immigrant Prop 187 and 20,000 in support of a 2000 amnesty event. With several local unions winning impressive organizing gains among immigrant workers, the Federation and area unions successfully pushed the national AFL-CIO to change its policy on immigration.
- Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE): Founded by HERE Local 11 in 1993, LAANE provides a key 501(c)3 partner for County Federation power building work. With over 20 staff LAANE has used research, policy development, and coalition building to:
 - Spearhead campaigns to pass worker retention and living wage ordinances.
 - Develop with partners community benefit agreements at three major developments.
 - Incubate an interfaith worker support network called Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice.
 - Incubate the grassroots citizen organization Santa Monica's Allied for Responsible Tourism that fought for a living wage law and supported worker organizing and bargaining in the tourism industry.
 - With the County Fed, block Wal-Mart's entry into an inner city site.

Future Ambitions

- Establish a \$1 million fund to assist unions in organizing and contract campaigns.
- Launch public policy campaigns that promote labor's social change agenda on a larger scale. A current proposal would tax business to pay fees for the first year of community college.

Research conducted by Larry Frank and Kent Wong (University of California Los Angeles).

Denver Area Labor Federation

Metro area has just over 2 million people. City has had Democratic mayors for a few decades, but is located in a conservative state, where Republicans control the governorship and both houses of the legislature. A “modified right to work” state. In 2002, 35% of Denver County residents identified as Hispanic. (11% identified as black or African-American, and 3% as Asian).

Denver Area Labor Federation (DALF) has 51 DALF affiliates with a total of over 50,000 union members. The largest is the UFCW with 12,544 in the Denver area. Other large affiliates include the CWA, SEIU, the AFT, IAM, APWU and AFGE.

Council Transformation

- Within the past decade DALF has undergone striking changes. Current president is Leslie Moody, who was elected in 1998 (had been with Denver Jobs with Justice) by group of union leaders who wanted a more active labor council.
- Currently, the only paid leadership position is the president. There are 3 other paid positions: a part-time office manager/bookkeeper, a political director, and an organizing director that splits his time with the FRESC (discussed below).

Regional Power Building Work

- Living Wage campaign: citywide effort failed in 1996, traditional ordinance passed 1998.
- Electoral work: major efforts to reform DALF electoral strategy: Asked affiliates to participate in a “lost-time-program” for staff to work on campaigns under the direction and leadership of the DALF; focus on mobilization rather than monetary contributions; developed a candidate briefing program, asking candidates seeking labor’s endorsement to sit through an educational session on matters of interest and concern to labor such as organizing, apprenticeships, and local development projects. DALF has used this in statewide, city and school board races.
- 501(c)3: Created the Front Range Economic Strategy Center in 2002. Intended as a “coalition-building, research, and policy-development enterprise to build and sustain a long-term strategic partnership between area unions and the region’s policy, community, and accountable development organizations.” Launched with \$20,000 in seed money that DALF had saved for the purpose, along with donations from two national

unions, SEIU and the Laborers. Now is primarily grant funded. Office space and resources were provided by DALF.

- Community Benefits Agreements. One of the key projects started by FRESC is creation of the Campaign for Responsible Development –coalition with active participation from 9 to 5, ACORN, building trades, other DALF affiliates. Goal is to attach public standards to economic development projects in the city. Have been effective in winning no big box agreements, and a Community Benefits Agreement for a major \$1 billion redevelopment project (Gates Rubber Factory).
- Immigrant Worker Freedom Ride. DALF played a major role in coordinating the IWFR stop in Denver. Through this effort, new relations were built or strengthened with local immigrant rights organizations. Plans are underway for joint work on immigrant worker rights.

Prospects and Challenges

As infant projects in the making, DALF's power building efforts highlight the potential and challenges of such work.

- DALF has adopted a long-term vision of organizing and building regional power. This includes playing a role in shaping economic development (to win unionized, high wage jobs); active involvement in city elections; and influencing local politics to create a climate favorable to organizing.
- DALF work has yet to translate into large scale organizing victories on the part of affiliates. Laying the ground work for such gains takes time. However, a lack of affiliates who are investing in organizing is a factor.
- Observers agree that DALF and FRESC have made sustainable economic development issues visible in city politics. Also agree that DALF and FRESC presence at city council meetings is notable.
- The approach has held many challenges: internal cohesion within DALF; building trust with community partners; finding the resources to sustain and build the effort; working within a conservative state government; balancing the need to service affiliates while pursuing new programs.

Research conducted by Stephanie Luce and Mark Nelson (University of Massachusetts).

Harris County AFL-CIO

Houston ranks as the fourth largest city in the United States. The metropolitan area has over 4.5 million people. Over 1/3 of Houston residents claim Hispanic origin. An influx undocumented workers, at least 100,000 in Houston alone, has changed employment relations in the service, hospitality, light manufacturing and construction sectors. Texas is a "right-to-work" state. Collective bargaining in the public sector is prohibited.

Membership in local unions in Harris County totals over 70,000. Unions most active in the the council include: Machinists, Steelworkers, CWA, PACE, UFCW, Longshoremens, Sheetmetal Workers, Carpenters, IBEW, Plumbers, ILA, TWU, BLE and AFT. SEIU and AFSCME locals have had a more heated relationship with the HCC recently.

The Council supports four full-time positions: Secretary-Treasurer, electoral membership database manager, a community service person, and a project staff member working on Enron issues.

Power Building Around Immigrant Issues:

- Justice and Equality in the Workplace Partnership - a pioneering effort to extend individual employment protections to immigrant workers through the coordinated efforts of federal enforcement agencies (primarily DOL and EEOC) and foreign consulates. The partnership has made it possible for immigrant workers to redress discrimination and wage and hour violations by calling the Mexican consulate, which screens and refers complaints. The Labor Council helped found the partnership.
- Mayor's Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs. The Council worked with prominent immigrant advocates to support the establishment of this office which provides an effective referral and follow-up for a variety of workplace issues. The city sponsored day-labor sites, including the Oscar Romero Day Labor Center, have received direct support from the Council as well.
- Health and Safety. The Council is a founding member of a newly organized Committee for Occupational Safety and Health (COSH) group. The Houston group has begun to train immigrant workers in basic safety rights as part of an OSHA grant received by the National COSH Network.
- Immigrant Worker Freedom Rides. Houston sponsored two busses on the Immigrant Worker Freedom Ride and new dialogue between immigrant groups and labor is opening up as result.

- Worker Development Center: co-sponsored by the Union Community Fund, the proposed center would provide more comprehensive assistance to vulnerable workers
- Key allies in immigrant issues have included Associated Catholic Charities, The Metropolitan Organization (a grassroots interfaith group), the Dominican Sisters, and Maria Jimenez, a prominent advocate on immigrant issues. SEIU, in coordination with the Council, has also been bringing various national immigrant organizations together to promote immigrant family issues.

Other Power Building Elements

- The Justice Bus is a form of "street heat" that has participated in over fifty actions in the past six years to support worker organizing, contract bargaining, and issue campaigns.
- Electoral Action. A comprehensive membership database updated against voter registration records has greatly improved GOTV and labor-to-neighbor campaigns. Council leadership claims an increase in union members voting from 19% to 52%.
- Economic Development. Council leadership helped broker union-built public works projects including the new sports complex and the Houston Hilton America where a card-check agreement resulted in recognition of HERE.

Accomplishments and Challenges

- The Justice Bus and GOTV activities have raised the Council's visibility in key "union cities" areas.
- The Council took risks in building support for immigrant issues and gained the respect and support of many local labor leaders as a result. Institutional support and grassroots dialogue around these issues is just beginning to be productive.
- The Council needs to raise additional or consolidate existing financial resources to further develop its activities. Greater long-term strategic planning is needed to translate current individual successes into a sustained and self-conscious power building project.

Research conducted by Tom Karson (University of Arkansas).