



Fresno
**Economic
Opportunities
Commission**

2023-2026 STRATEGIC PLAN

LETTER FROM THE CEO & BOARD CHAIR

Nearly 60 years ago, President Lyndon B. Johnson introduced Community Action as a bold idea to center the community in the fight against poverty. The concept of “maximum feasible participation” was controversial at the time because it challenged power structures by placing decision-making and control in the hands of the community.

Over the following decades, the landscape of poverty has changed, and Fresno EOC’s commitment to centering the community in the fight against poverty has never wavered.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been and continues to be an unprecedented moment in time. It was devastating to all, yet had a disproportionate impact on the lives of low-income people. Individuals who were already struggling and will likely continue to ripple through their social, health, and economic lives.

While the context is distinct, the challenges remain the same. Poverty will continue to endure if we do not respond strategically and significantly to the needs of our community.

With these needs in mind, we present Fresno EOC’s Strategic Plan 2023-2026. The Plan outlines Fresno EOC’s vision, ambitions, and critical interventions for achieving them. The community entirely informs the investments detailed in the Plan. The strategy is the outcome of a months-long co-creation process between our staff, leadership, and Board as we look to address the root causes of poverty and how Fresno EOC provides pathways out of poverty.



Emilia Reyes
CEO

Linda R. Hayes
Board Chair



BACKGROUND & HISTORY

Fresno EOC is considered one of the largest Community Action Agencies in the country. We employ over 1,000 full and part-time staff members committed to transforming lives. With over 35 programs to serve the community, we bridge gaps with almost every aspect of the underserved population.

When Congress passed the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, the goal was to obtain equality of opportunity in education, employment, health, and living conditions for every American in our country. To realize this goal, nearly 900 locally based Community Action Agencies were established nationwide; Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission, known as Fresno EOC, is one of these agencies.

Founded in 1965, Fresno EOC has spent over five decades investing in people, helping them become self-sufficient. The scope of service provided by our Agency consists of almost all facets of human services and economic development.

They range from preschool education to vocational training; youth recreation to senior citizen hot meal services; energy conservation education to crisis intervention; preventive health care to prenatal nutrition education; and vocational counseling to job placement services.

As one of the most effective poverty-fighting organizations in the country, Fresno EOC operates over 35 human service programs designed to reduce poverty, increase self-sufficiency, and build stronger communities. The agency budget is approximately \$100 million annually, with funding from private, local, regional, state, and federal sources. Those resources allow Fresno EOC to serve over 100,000 Fresno County residents each year through programs that make a real, measurable difference—giving families the immediate help they need to weather day-to-day crises and the long-term support that allows them to build better lives.



35+
Programs

1000+
Staff

Serve
100,000+
Fresno
residents
each year



OUR MISSION

We fight to end poverty.



OUR VISION

A strong Fresno County where people have resources to shape their future free from poverty.

OUR VALUES

Working together to
accelerate change.

Centering our work around
equity and inclusion.

Trustworthiness and
transparency.



The community's
voice and direction.

Empathy, compassion, and
the human connection.



POVERTY IN FRESNO COUNTY

Fresno County is the top agriculture-producing county in the United States, with almost \$8 billion in total value for crops and livestock. Despite disruptions caused by the pandemic and wildfires in 2020, Fresno County broke its record for agricultural and livestock production that year.

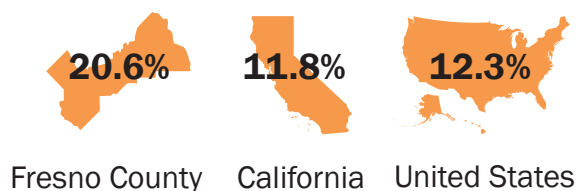
While agriculture creates prosperity, it is not shared or accessed equitably. Fresno's concentrated poverty rate is the highest in California. A third of all children are in poverty in Fresno, with half of all Black children in poverty.

There are 999,101 residents in Fresno County. 20.6% of the residents experience poverty, more than 1.5 times the rate in California (11.8%) and the United States (12.3%). More than half of Black (55.6%) and Latinx (58.7%) households are in relative poverty—where they don't have the minimum income needed to maintain the average standard of living in Fresno County.

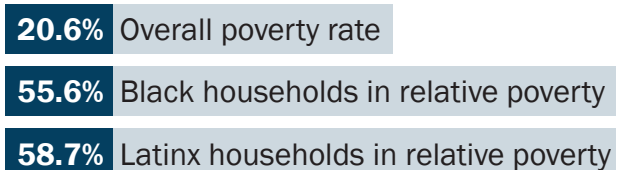
The COVID-19 deepened pre-existing inequalities, including wage gaps, access to quality education, housing, and healthcare. This crisis's

structural and multidimensional nature disproportionately affects and continues to affect people in poverty. As a result, these communities are more likely to experience negative social determinants of health such as lower socioeconomic status, poorer working conditions, and lack of access to health care. In addition, these communities will experience worsening living conditions, including housing and the built environment, all of which contribute to higher rates of underlying medical conditions and increased risk of contracting the virus, being hospitalized, and dying from COVID-19.

COMPARATIVE POVERTY RATES

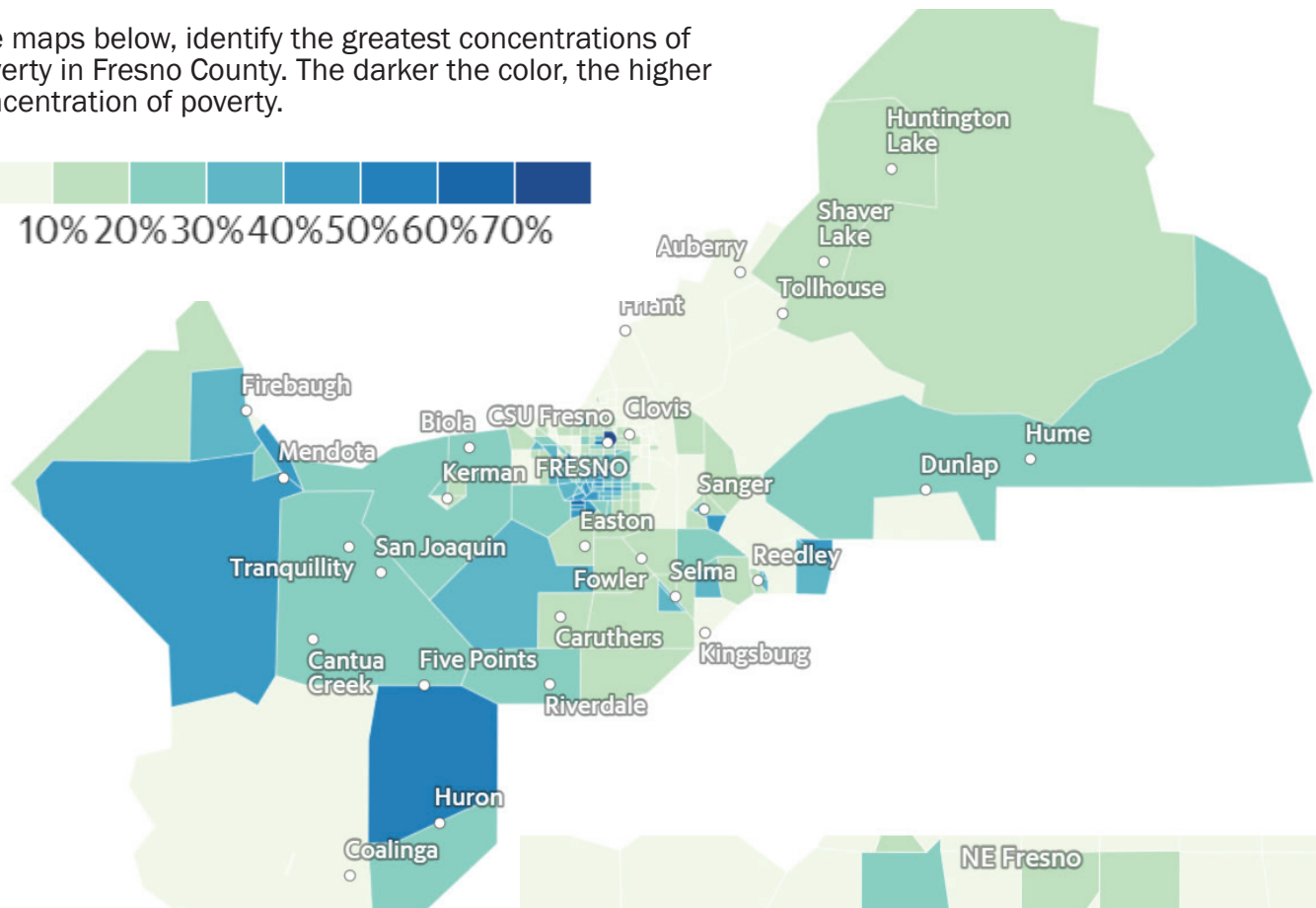
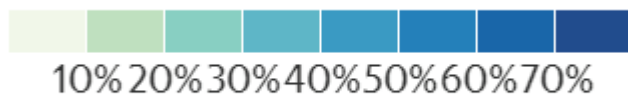


POVERTY IN FRESNO COUNTY



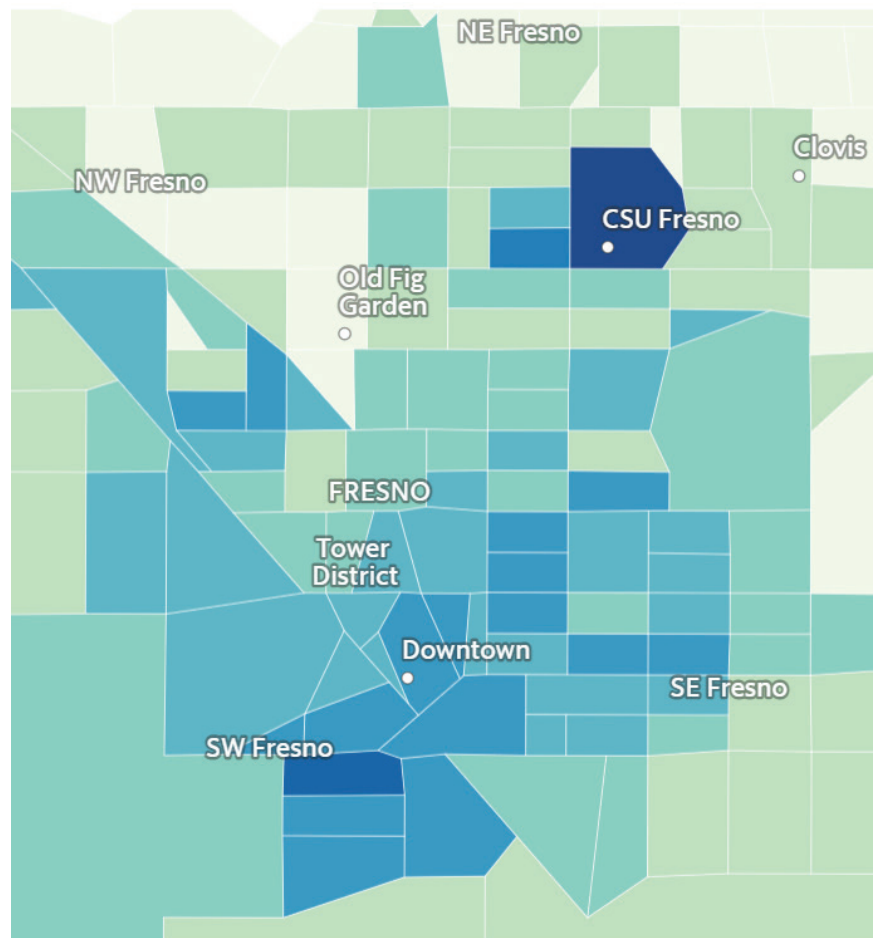
CONCENTRATIONS OF POVERTY IN FRESNO COUNTY

The maps below, identify the greatest concentrations of poverty in Fresno County. The darker the color, the higher concentration of poverty.



Map courtesy of the Fresno Bee

Systemically, specific demographics are more likely to experience poverty, and the locations where poverty exists include urban, suburban, and rural communities. By identifying each community most impacted by poverty and allocating resources directly to them, we can effectively fight to end poverty.



Timeline of Race, Growth, and Poverty in Fresno County

Fresno ranks #2 in the nation for cities with the highest rates of extreme poverty. Fresno's concentrated poverty rate is the highest in all of California. But Fresno itself is not a struggling city. Fresno County is the richest agricultural county in the nation with \$7.7 billion in annual ag production.

In North Fresno, schools, life expectancy, and wealth ranks the highest in the nation. Residents in North Fresno have a life expectancy of 90 years. Six miles south is a different story—residents in South and Southwest Fresno live on average only 69 years. Embedded in the very roots of its history, Fresno's discriminatory practices and policies disadvantage people of color. Today, poverty rates are among the highest in the nation here—with very few children able to escape the cycle of poverty they were born into.

1856

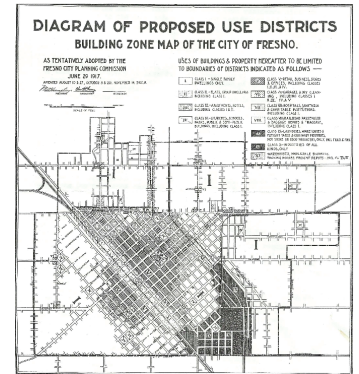
Fresno County was created. The first county seat was the foothill community of Millerton. Fresno grew rapidly, but still remained in many ways a typical frontier town.



1918

The first land use plan in 1918, firmly established a residential pattern that would grow the city away from the west side—pushing development northward and east towards Clovis. The plan encoded the existing conditions of the segregated city and protect land values by zoning industrial and polluting activities to the west side.

The plan also noted the lack of urban amenities in the southern parts of the city: "The existing park system is hardly effective or fair – at present there are no parks on South side of city where congested industrial populations reside. These are the people who most need a good park for breathing, recreation and relief from more sordid labor and surroundings."



1915

The genocide of the Armenian peoples drove many of them from their homeland to the Central Valley.

1900s

Punjabi settlements began in farming lands in the Sacramento Valley, San Joaquin Valley and established permanent homes.



1880-1890

West Fresno localizes an area that quartered off Asians, immigrants, and other people of "ill repute."

1913

The California Alien Land Law of 1913, revised in 1920, prevented immigrants from owning and leasing their own land, making it a difficult struggle for those who made their living as farmers.

1880s

Boosters promoted the Central Valley as a place of opportunity for Blacks wanted to get away from the never-ending debt in which they were trapped as part of the long-standing sharecropping system that replaced slavery after the collapse of reconstruction. Black laborers replaced Chinese laborers, often paid at half the rate.



1885

A massive flood in 1884 finally convinced residents that a centralized city government was necessary. On Oct. 12, 1885, Fresno was incorporated.

1860s

When Fresno's original settlers located along a new railroad line in the 1860s, many of them were Chinese, expert brick makers who began building a city. Soon, however, they were relocated to the west side of the tracks.

1930s-1950s

The largest inward migration of African Americans into the valley occurred between 1930 and 1950 driven by the Dust Bowl, wartime manufacturing (and the subsequent loss of those jobs at war's end), and an increase in production of San Joaquin cotton.

1937

Zoning and deed restrictions to preserve property values and exclude people of color and the poor was institutionalized in the HOLC redlined maps.

1947

The maps from this time do not fully capture the extent to which Southwest Fresno and later Southeast were imagined as dumping grounds for the city's undesirable land uses.

"I think the area should be cleaned up a little bit and made a respectable portion of Fresno. The question is whether you want to turn it into a dirty back yard of Fresno or clean it up and make it a suitable outskirts of Fresno." Minutes from the County Planning Commission Hearing, June 18th, 1947

1940s-1950s

In the 1940s and 1950s, the United States government implemented a Bracero program that allowed valley farmers to hire seasonal guest labor from Mexico. Their arrival was lobbied for by Midwest farmers who wanted cheaper labor. They sought foreign workers in place of available black workers who have been repeatedly denied similar jobs for a fair wage.

1960s

Restrictive covenants, racial violence, and discriminatory real estate practices maintained the racial and ethnic mix of Southwest Fresno. In part due to the rapid suburbanization and white flight, the population in Central and Southern Fresno became increasingly poor during the 1960s and 1970s.

Today

For 60 years, leapfrog development has been driving wealth to the outer edges of the city, building single-family homes on the very farmland that is meant to power our economy. What feels to some like growth and progress is "white flight" that is undermining our economy and destroying the stability of our neighborhoods. – Former Mayor Ashley Swearengin

1980s

Fresno was the fastest-growing big city in the United States, with a growth rate of 61.3 percent.

1975-1990

Hmong refugees came to America and settled in the Central Valley. Today, Fresno is home to the second largest Hmong population in the US.

1977

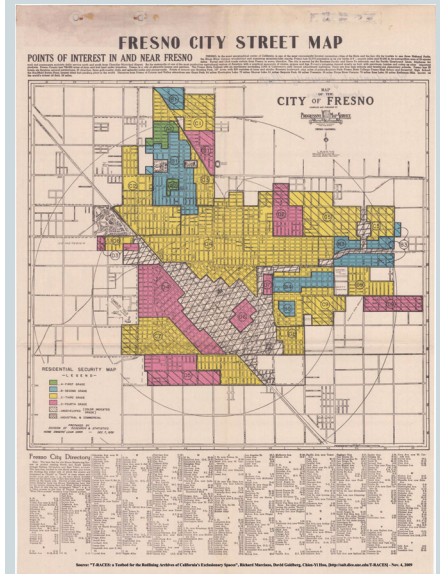
Fresno City Council approved a community plan for West Fresno. The plan noted that the neighborhood "has always been a unique community with a rich heritage," but warned that "the social and economic viability which once existed has been damaged by forces which threaten to transform racial segregation into economic segregation."

1968

Following the passage of the Fair Housing Act of 1968, many White ethnic groups began to flee the Southwest, converting what were once racially integrated neighborhoods into majority Black or mixed minority.

1965

Developers pressured city hall to permit the construction of more shopping malls in the growing suburbs. The City Council sanctioned the sprawl away from the center of Fresno. This triggered a series of institutions to abandon Downtown Fresno: Fresno State College, retailers, and St. Agnes Hospital.



1937 Fresno Redline Map

"We've done a very good job at sectioning off the poor. We do that better than almost any other place in the country. And it's not by accident."

— Matthew Jendian,
Chair of Fresno State's
sociology department



ROOT CAUSE OF POVERTY: STRUCTURAL RACISM

RACE AND POVERTY ARE STRONGLY LINKED IN AMERICA—THIS IS OVERWHELMINGLY TRUE FOR FRESNO COUNTY.

- A person of color is 2-3 times as likely to be in poverty than a white person in Fresno County. For children, the gap is even wider. Nearly a third of the children are in poverty for every race group except white. Almost half of all Black children in Fresno County are in poverty.
- People of color are overrepresented in the poorest and most disadvantaged neighborhoods. In addition, a neighborhood largely made up of people of color is more likely to be poor than a predominantly white neighborhood.
- There are persistent disparities between people of color and white Americans in almost every quality of life measure—the most basic being income, education, and health. The correlation between race and well-being in America remains powerful.



RACIAL INEQUITY IS SYSTEMIC

- Let's look at our society as a complex system of organizations, institutions, individuals, processes, and policies. Then, we can see how many factors interact to create and perpetuate poverty for people of color.
- Housing, education, and health care are just a few examples of how advantages and disadvantages are often distributed along racial lines.

STRUCTURAL RACISM PERPETUATES POVERTY IN FRESNO.

Poverty in Fresno is reinforced and sustained through structural racism. Structural racism refers to a system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms perpetuate racial group inequity.

- The Urban Institute's 2018 research on economic mobility in California's largest cities revealed that Fresno ranks 59th out of 59 for economic and racial disparity.
- Brookings Institute affirmed this by finding that Fresno is included in 84 out of 100 metro areas.



A STRUCTURAL VIEW OF RACISM ENABLES US TO SEE THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SEEMINGLY INDEPENDENT OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES.

- Opportunity structures include:
 - ↓ High-performing schools.
 - ↓ Affordable housing.
 - ↓ Sustainable employment.
 - ↓ Safety from crime.
 - ↓ Environmentally safe neighborhoods.
 - ↓ Home equity and wealth.
 - ↓ Access to affordable health care.

Together, these structures form a system — a “web of opportunity”— and a person’s location within this web significantly influences that individual’s chances of escaping poverty.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES ARE “CUMULATIVE CAUSATION” OR “CUMULATIVE DISADVANTAGE.”

- Cumulative causation is the result of historical racist policies: redlining, criminal justice, economic exclusion—even anti-poverty policies.
- Cumulative disadvantages result from structural racism in education, health, the built environment, and economy.
 - ↓ Living in a highly segregated and isolated neighborhood is associated with poor-performing schools.
 - ↓ Poor performing schools are associated with high drop-out rates.
 - ↓ High dropout rates are associated with low-paying jobs.
 - ↓ Low-paying jobs are associated with living in high poverty concentrated neighborhoods.

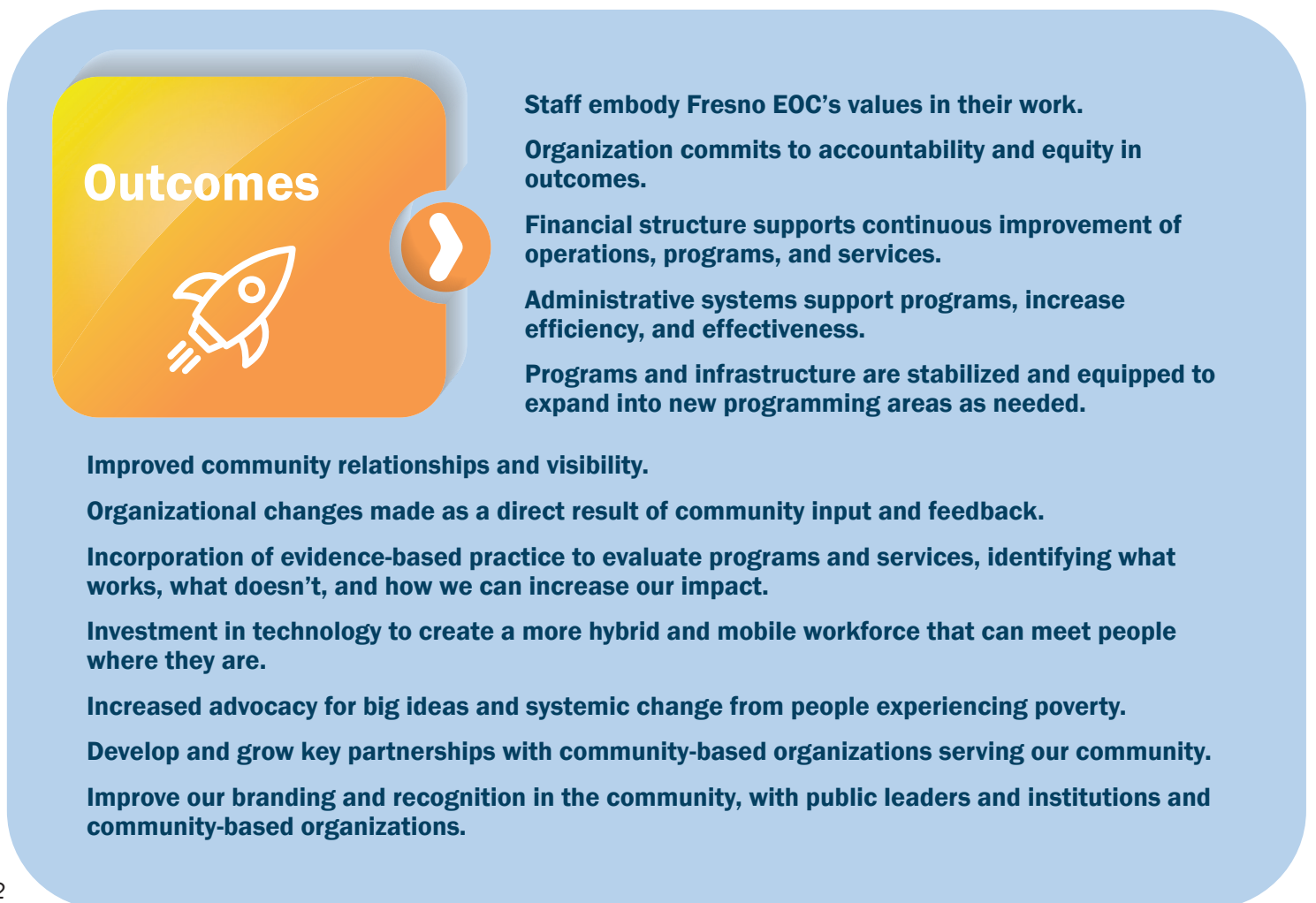
AS A COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCY

As a Community Action Agency, the programs and services we provide are a direct result of listening to our community. Our strategic planning process is a three-tier process which includes a Community Needs Assessment, Community Action Plan, and the Strategic Plan. The beginning of this process is the Community Needs Assessment (CNA). As a recipient of the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), through the CSBG Act, we complete the CNA every two years to ensure our services are in alignment with the low-income community’s priorities. From the CNA, the Community Action Plan (CAP) is created. The CAP directs our programming: identifies specific, measurable goals, specifies what the CNA results are and how we can adjust our programming to meet the community’s needs. The Community Action Plan progress is reviewed annually by the Board of Commissioners to ensure the organization is on track to meet its strategic goals.

Finally, the Strategic Plan encompasses goals and objectives for the agency’s internal structure developed from the CNA and CAP to direct how the agency supports its programs and implements the strategic goals agency-wide. The Strategic Plan is in alignment with the agency’s vision.



Fresno EOC is a community responsive agency that removes barriers and addresses root causes of poverty through effective programs and services.



Strategic Goals

Equity-Based Practices

Directing services intentionally to meet the needs of those most impacted by the poverty conditions we seek to address.

Advocacy

Amplifying community voice - particularly communities experiencing poverty – leading to poverty changes that disrupt systemic poverty.

Holistic Support

Providing for the whole person, understanding that poverty impacts the community in multiple ways.

Community-Directed Programs and Services

Create programs and services that are able to respond to changing community priorities, providing support for immediate need and the infrastructure for wealth generation.



Target Areas of Poverty Intervention

Food Insecurity

Target programs: Food Distributions, Food Services Home Delivery, Summer Meals for Kids, Women Infants and Children (WIC)

More than one-fifth (22%) of children in Fresno experience food insecurity, equivalent to 61,680 children.

61,680
Children

Health and Wellness

Target programs: Adolescent Family Life Program, CA Prep, Community Health Center, Tobacco Education, African American Coalition

Fresno ranks 2nd in the nation for most year-round particle pollution; the average Fresno resident has more exposure to air pollution than 98% of census tracts in California and nearly 70% of census tracts in the United States.

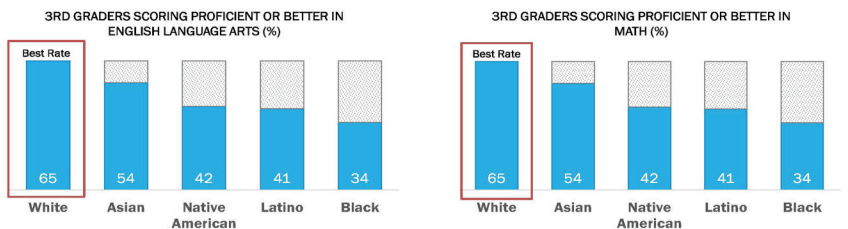
Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people between the ages of 10-24; LGBTQ+ youth are more than four times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers.

Educational Achievement

Target programs: Head Start 0-5, School of Unlimited Learning, Youthbuild Charter High School

Students that attend the Fresno Unified School district have a poverty rate of 46%. Inequities in diverse and effective teachers can impact parent engagement, student motivation, ability, and overall success of a school; teachers of race per 100 students are lowest for Latinx students (2.1) and Black students (2.6). In addition, the lowest rates of English and math proficiency in the 3rd grade are Black (34% in English and Math) and Latinx (41% in English and Math). These numbers mean that systemically we are failing to effectively educate over 60% of Black and Latinx students in our education systems.

English and Math proficiency is an important measure to determine the quality of instruction of the public education system, and can help to determine the student's achievement in the long term.
Early on, people of color start at a disadvantage.



Data Source: California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (2018-2019)

19

Community Safety:

Target programs: Advance Peace, Central Valley Against Human Trafficking (CVAHT), Foster Grandparent Program, Recycling, LGBTQ+ Resource Center

Incarceration rates have a devastating impact on neighborhoods and families and create economic instability in the household, elevating social and emotional stress for family members. Black men made up more than one-quarter (28%) of men incarcerated by the state – nearly five times higher than their share (5.8%) of all men in California. In addition, Black and Native American residents have the highest rates of injury in law enforcement incidents; predominately, Black and Latinx communities have the lowest rates of adults who feel safe in their neighborhood (Black 71.8% and Latinx 79.5%). In 2020, 1,150 people were identified as victims of human trafficking, with almost 80% of those being sex trafficking, 14% labor trafficking, and 4% both. These numbers include 331 minors. In addition, these victims were 91.7% female-identifying. Fresno/Central Valley is at particular risk due to the significance of farm labor and access to immigrant populations.

Employment Opportunities

Target programs: Local Conservation Corps (LCC), Summer Internship Program, Valley Apprenticeship Connections (VAC), Workforce Connection Young Adult Program, Training and Employment Services

More than 40% of Black-owned businesses in the Fresno metro area have closed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; 38% of Fresno's small businesses are minority-owned; the unemployment rate for Black residents (19.4%) is 2.5x higher than that of White residents (7.8%), and the Latinx rate is 1.3x higher (10%). In addition, the median household income is lowest for Black and Latinx residents, at \$38,000/yr and \$46,000/year, respectively.

Housing Stability

Target programs: Safe Place, Sanctuary Drop-In Center, Sanctuary Transitional Shelter, Sanctuary Housing Programs

Homeownership is the single largest source of wealth accumulation. Black and Latinx residents have the lowest rate of homeownership – 27.1% and 43.6%, respectively. Black and Native American residents have the highest rates for denied mortgage applications (15.4% and 18.8%, respectively); 28% of LGBTQ+ youth reported experiencing homelessness or housing instability at some point in their lives – and those who did had two to four times the odds of reporting depression, anxiety, self-harm, considering suicide, and attempting suicide compared to those with stable housing; during the pandemic, these zip codes had the highest eviction rates per 1,000 people in the Central Valley: 93701 (19.6), 93726 (10.5), 93704 (9.9), 93705 (9.3), 93721 (9.1), and 93728 (9.0).



Nearly 70% of all communities in Fresno are highest need communities, meaning barriers to long-term health and socioeconomic recovery impact residents throughout Fresno County.



Out of 58 counties, Fresno County is 53rd in terms of racial disparities in wealth, health and education; it also ranks 5th lowest for performance on how well people in the county are doing based on the economy and environment.



58 of the 120 census tracts in Fresno have poverty rates of at least 25%; all but three of those are south of Shaw Avenue; 66 have at least 25% of households receiving CalFresh/ SNAP benefits for food assistance, all but five are south of Shaw; 73 of the 120 tracts have a median household income that is less than the citywide median on \$48,000 – 65 of those are south of Shaw.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1

Effective Programs and Services

Drive high quality programs that prove effective in removing barriers and addressing root causes of poverty.

Defining how we create effective programs and services.

- Hire and train: equip staff to live out Fresno EOC's values and advance our mission.
- Identify measures to evaluate the impact/outcomes of our programs, not simply output.
- Invest in financial systems/supports that continuously improve operations, functions, programs, and services.
- Ensure stabilization of current programs and administrative structure (staffing, alignment, evaluation plan, salaries, benefits, etc.)

Defining how do we measure the effectiveness of our programs and services.

- Results Based Accountability/ROMA
- Quality assurance and evaluation of all programs
- Analysis of participant diversity and program usage
- Analysis of resources spent in most impacted communities

Activities.

For Staff

- Create and implement a learning and performance management system that assesses training and learning needs.
- Provide education on core competencies of organizational leadership.
- Invest through a consistent, equitable, and competitive compensation system.
- Provide support and tools to manage workload and improve morale and organizational culture.
- Provide training in critical areas of finance and technology.

Activities.

For Agency & Programs

- Create and implement a program evaluation system.
- Build internal mechanisms to ensure efficient service delivery.
- Significantly increase unrestricted funding.
- Create a funding evaluation tool to determine the cost-benefit of available funding opportunities.
- Create integrated delivery and referral system across programs.
- Prioritize full staffing of all program and administrative support services.
- Supplement financial gaps with flexible funding.
- Provide infrastructure stabilization for current programs so that they are equipped to expand into new programming areas as needed.

Expected outcomes - How will we know the results of our efforts?

- The staff embodies Fresno EOC's values in their work.
- The organization commits to accountability and equity in outcomes.
- Financial structure supports the continuous improvement of operations, programs, and services.
- Administrative systems support programs and increase efficiency and effectiveness.
- Programs and infrastructure are stabilized and equipped to expand into new programming areas.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2

Community Responsive Agency
Build a community responsive agency guided by community priorities.

Defining how are we directed and accountable to our community.

- Create community spaces to engage the people we serve consistently.
- Participate in collaborative initiatives with community partners.

Defining how we will increase our ability to hear and respond to community voices.

- Increase direct outreach.
- Improve technology.
- Share program communication and information.

Activities

- Create consistent communication channels for community members to share their experiences and ideas.
- Implement an organizational data collection and analysis system.
- Identify multiple platforms (newsletters, social media, etc.) to share learnings from programs and community engagement creatively.
- Invest in technology that allows staff to reach community members where they are.
- Increase programs' bandwidth to meet the hardware and services needed to continue the business.
- Invest in software systems to allow program collaboration for multiple locations.
- Invest in environmental efforts to create a positive impact.

Expected Outcomes - How will we know the results of our efforts?

- Improvements in community relationships and visibility.
- Organizational changes made as a direct result of community input and feedback.
- Incorporation of evidence-based practice to evaluate programs and services, identifying what works and doesn't, and how we can increase our impact.
- Investment in technology to create a more hybrid and mobile workforce that can meet people where they are.
- Lessen our environmental footprint and move into energy efficient operations.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3

Advocacy for Poverty Reductive Policy
Use our platform as the largest nonprofit in the Central Valley to challenge systems that keep people in poverty.

Defining our policy platform and how this informs our advocacy.

- "Poverty is not a partisan issue."

Defining how we increase our visibility and influence to advocate for anti-poverty policies and legislation.

- Presence at city council meetings, and community events (state of the city, etc.).
- Increase awareness of the scope and breadth of EOC programs and services.
- Create/sponsored events (Equity Conference, Fresno EOC Gala).
- Utilize communication tools (newsletters, podcasts, other platforms).
- Increase funding (private and unrestricted).
- Provide supportive services for community partner agencies.

Activities

- Identify and advance community-driven ideas and priorities to enact policy change.
- Build and reinforce partnerships with elected officials and community agencies.
- Form coalitions with mission-aligned organizations to influence and advocate for policy.
- Support staff in seeking opportunities to expand networks and agency partnerships.
- Build a Community Relationship Management system that indexes external partners and stakeholders.
- Increase visibility with community through resource fairs and community activities.
- Develop a consistent, agency-wide approach to capturing and sharing positive change, increasing our ability to share compelling success stories.

Expected outcomes - How will we know the results of our efforts?

- Increased advocacy for big ideas and systemic change from people experiencing poverty.
- Growth and development of key partnerships with community-based organizations serving our community.
- Branding recognition improved in the community with public leaders and institutions, and community-based organizations.



LOOKING AHEAD

The Community Action Promise guides the work we do at Fresno EOC. **Community Action changes people's lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities, and makes America a better place to live.** We care about the community as a whole and are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other.



Fresno EOC's commitment to serving those in poverty has not wavered in its 57-year history. This work is complex, and the landscape is constantly shifting and changing. More than ever, we see disparities increase—making it harder for those in poverty to escape it. However, Fresno EOC is rising to meet these challenges through bold, innovative solutions. It is reaffirming its commitment to community action, driving transformative change, and leading the way towards a strong Fresno County where people have resources to shape their future free from poverty.



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