



CALIFORNIA ASSET BUILDING COALITION

Valuing Who We Are at Work

Research Brief | JUNE 2022

Preliminary Findings

“Valuing the Contributions of Lived Experience in Asset Building Work”

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[Valuing Who We Are at Work](#) is a CABC research project exploring how personal experiences shape the way asset building professionals engage in the work. This research reveals the value of leadership centered in lived experience and how to better support individuals and organizations advocating in this way.

The findings presented in these briefs reflect the experiences of 51 CABC members and allies that were shared through in-depth interviews.

“Lived experience” describes the knowledge and perspectives that can only be gained through direct experience, such as growing up in recognized types of places, being part of distinct demographics, or belonging to communities that are systematically targeted or impacted by economic and social policies and practices.

Lived experience has become a hot commodity in the asset building movement as more people recognize the invaluable ways that people with first-hand knowledge of marginalization can shape asset building program design and policy advocacy. Many interviewees shared experiences of being solicited by funders, program directors, and other institutional leaders to translate their lived experiences into key organizational strategies, such as community outreach or other program design. Unfortunately, the talent, cultivated skills, and

creative labor necessary to do this work remain largely invisible, rarely properly credited, or actively nurtured.

The good news is that there are many examples of organizations that are properly crediting and supporting those who draw on their lived experience to develop powerful economic justice programs and advocacy strategies. A select few that may serve as models of course correction and best practice include:

- ★ **MyPath** co-designs youth financial capability and inclusion policy with youth and young adults. With youth leading the process, they developed a [Youth Economic Bill of RYTS](#) (Real Youth Troubles and Solutions) that is guiding lobbying efforts for local, state, and federal policies that help youth transition into financial stability
- ★ **Salud Para La Gente** developed Co-Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion positions that advise on program implementation models for the delivery of health services at their anti-racist health clinic. The roles are occupied by staff that share lived experiences with the primarily low-income Latinx farmworker community served by the clinic
- ★ **CA Association of Food Banks** fought for and secured the inclusion of stipends in the state budget to pay the citizen testers that helped them redesign the [BenefitsCal](#) website, a portal for Californians to access and manage CalFresh, CalWORKs, and other public benefits
- ★ **Fresno Metro Black Chamber of Commerce** developed a program that connects formerly justice-involved citizens to each other and to educational, employment, and entrepreneurship resources in response to feedback from a previously justice-involved staff member who expressed a need for a sense of community with others that shared his experiences

Stay tuned for future briefs and the full report (expected Fall 2022).

Take [CABC's Community Census](#) to document your experiences as part of California's asset building community. **[Be counted!](#)**