

Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment: Organizing for Housing Justice During A Pandemic

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I. Introduction

Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE) Action is a membership-led, grassroots housing justice organization fighting to mobilize tenants and homeowners from the neighborhood level up to a statewide scale. Founded in Los Angeles in 2009, ACCE was born out of necessity following the 2008 housing crash that displaced thousands of Californians from their homes.

Over a decade later in 2020, ACCE's work has never been so critical. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced California's already worsening housing crisis to a new level, with hundreds of thousands of families and individuals at risk of eviction due to inability to make payments on rent and mortgage in COVID impacted industries (UCLA Luskin, 2020).

ACCE does similar political advocacy work to other housing justice organizations in California, such as mounting statewide campaigns and mobilizing members to place calls into their local state elected official's office to lobby for progressive housing bills. Their utilization of direct action as a tactic to demand housing justice rather than negotiate for it, however, sets them apart from many non-profits who favor a far less radical approach.

II. Methods

As an intern for ACCE through the Occidental College UEP and UEPI Affordable Housing Summer Internship Program, I spent ten weeks working with ACCE's Los Angeles-based team of community organizers. In my capacity as an intern working remotely, I was able to help assist on a variety of tasks; from drafting call scripts for members to lobby the LA City Council for the passage of a People's Budget, to attending dozens of organizing calls weekly with ACCE members and activists in other local coalitions. Throughout my internship, I collected research on corporate developers in South Los Angeles and presented my report to community members who could utilize my research to hold those developers accountable for their legal and illegal actions.

III. Results

Though the success of legislative political organizing is delineated clearly by passage or failure, ACCE's most important work to "shift power relations by changing the systems that create oppression rather than just addressing the symptoms of oppression" is less easily measured. With the state legislature still in recess, the fate of ACCE backed legislation like eviction protection Assembly Bill 1436 is still unclear, but ACCE's most grassroots organizing work on the membership level has made great strides. Most notably in South Los Angeles, where racial justice and housing justice organizers have recognized their interconnected struggle and stood in solidarity to defund the police, challenge corporate development, and equitably reinvest in historically disinvested communities.

"They told us that staying home was the best way to stop the spread of COVID 19. So why is California on the brink of evicting millions of renters?" ACCE Action

Figure 1 – Photos from ACCE "Defund The Rich, Invest In Our Communities" protest, June 2020.



Photos by Brooke Anderson, *Stills of Our Stories and Struggles*, 2020.

Figure 2 – Photo from ACCE "Recovery For All" protest, July 2020.



Photo by Brooke Anderson, *Stills of Our Stories and Struggles*, 2020

IV. Conclusions

ACCE plays a unique and significant role in California's organizing scene, neither eschewing political advocacy nor shying away from direct action. In a historic moment where different areas of organizing has converged in solidarity with each other, I find that ACCE's greatest successes in the past two months organizing during the pandemic have been working in coalitions to help the public reimagine what communities could look like without police, without extreme wealth inequality, and without the commodification of housing.

In organizing a 15,000-person membership base to lobby for the passage of tenants rights protections and show up outside of state senate offices and the homes of wealthy corporate landlords, ACCE is both an organization and a feature of the greater housing movement of activists taking to the streets to keep families safe in their homes during a pandemic.

