

**The Five-Year Lookback:
Results from the
Collective of Results and Evidence-based (CORE) Investments
April 2023**

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

Executive Summary

The Collective of Results and Evidence-based (CORE) Investments funding process reflects ongoing improvements in a decades-long partnership among community-based organizations (CBOs), public agencies, and local funders in Santa Cruz County. This commitment to community began as a result of the 1970s Federal Revenue Sharing known as Community Programs. The most recent iteration began in 2016 as CORE Investments with a focus on evidence, results, and collective impact. The evolution of community funding in Santa Cruz has been decades in the making and in the last five years significant strides have been made.

The Board of Supervisors (Board) and Santa Cruz City Council (Council) recognized that the transition to a results-based, collective impact funding model would require an incremental, iterative process, with a commitment to continuous improvement over multiple funding cycles. The Board and Council also recognized the consistent challenge of deploying limited funds to address significant, persistent needs among Santa Cruz County residents. This report assesses progress and opportunities for continuous improvement during the five-year period between the 2018 - 2022 Fiscal Years (FY) while recognizing the disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic, the CZU fires, and other challenges.

Requests for Proposals: 2017 and 2022

The first Request for Proposals (RFP) for CORE investments, released in November 2016 and funded in 2017, focused on 18 result areas drawn from nine countywide strategic plans. This resulted in **44 agencies representing 74 programs receiving funding** for a three-year period, FY 2017-18 through FY 2019-20. *These contracts were extended twice:* in December 2018 to align with the County's new two-year budget cycle, and again in May 2020 to acknowledge the impact of COVID-19.

A second RFP was released in November 2021, **informed by a comprehensive stakeholder engagement process** and lessons learned during the first RFP. A total of 78 organizations submitted proposals for 128 programs, seeking over \$15 million in funding, this was approximately three times the funds available. Demonstrating advances in community interest, nearly half the applications (47%) were from new organizations that had not received CORE funding in the past.

Progress Made

Five Years of Discovery

- ✓ Strengthened the ability of CBOs to track data and outcomes
- ✓ Discovered how programs made a difference in the lives of individuals and families
- ✓ Faced challenges meeting and reporting on performance goals
- ✓ Implemented and learned more about EBPs to improve services
- ✓ Increased collaboration among CBOs to support the community, despite COVID and CZU Fires
- ✓ Identified how recruitment and retention of staff impacted programs
- ✓ Uncovered technical assistance needs by CBOs and offered trainings by the CORE Institute

Results-based, collective impact approaches rely on data to yield insights about whether anyone is better off and funding is making a difference. Between the initial funding cycle in FY 2017-18 and the most recent in FY 2021-22, the **most notable improvement was in reporting quality measures, which increased by 23 percentage points over the five-year period**. Despite a drop during FY 2020-21 attributed to COVID-19 effects including staff shortages and capacity constraints, the majority of funded organizations were able to measure whether or not they met their annual goals. Notably during FY 2021-22, **59% of funded programs had collaborated** with a fellow CORE program. By the end of the first CORE funding cycle programs served a total of **55,678 unduplicated participants** and 50,160 duplicated participants in FY 2021-22.

The Movement- CORE Institute for Innovation and Impact

On behalf of the County and City, HSD engaged consultants who worked with the community to develop a CORE Investments framework, the CORE Institute. The Institute has increased knowledge of collective impact and developed a vision, mission and values statements for CORE Investments. Importantly, convening partners to identify goals and results to serve as a “North Star” for different agencies and sectors has supported Santa Cruz County with advancing, centering, and operationalizing equity.

An important byproduct of developing tools and building capacity to measure outcomes and implement Evidence Based Practices with multiple partners has been an expansion of CORE

Investments beyond a funding model to a broader movement to achieve equitable health and well-being. This spurs greater alignment that amplifies individual agency efforts, examines and addresses the systems and structures that perpetuate inequitable opportunities and outcomes, and engages a broader community of partners in this collective work.

CORE Tools and Support

- ✓ CORE Conditions for Health & Well-being
- ✓ Results Menu of indicators
- ✓ Skill building training
- ✓ Training and Technical Assistance
- ✓ CORE Coffee Chats
- ✓ CORE Conversations
- ✓ Community forums and convenings for collective impact capacity building

Looking Ahead

This report demonstrates the journey from traditional funding practices towards an innovative, equity-driven approach that promotes collective impact in Santa Cruz County. Despite the process being impacted by global and local events, the foundation of collective impact has been firmly established and CBOs are demonstrating increased understanding and movement towards results driven practices. While room for improvement remains, agency partners have increased their capacity to design, measure, and report on their impact and outcomes. HSD will continue to work closely with funded organizations to collect data on performance measures, as well as strengthening capacity and partnership among all CORE Investments stakeholders. The continuous improvement approach will help Santa Cruz make steady progress towards our shared goal of creating opportunities for equitable health and well-being, across the lifespan, for everyone in Santa Cruz County.

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Looking Back	5
<i>The Origin of Community Programs</i>	5
A New Approach: The Collective of Results and Evidence-based (CORE) Investments	6
<i>The Model</i>	6
<i>2016 Request for Proposals (RFP)</i>	7
<i>Programs Funded Through CORE Investments</i>	7
Progress and Results of CORE-funded Programs from 2017 – 2022	8
<i>City and County Monitoring of Outcomes and Results</i>	9
<i>Assessment of Outcomes and Results</i>	10
<i>Continuous Improvements in Results Based Accountability</i>	17
A “Movement” to Achieve Equitable Health and Well-being	18
<i>Continuous Improvement of the CORE Investments Model</i>	18
<i>Capacity building through the CORE Institute for Innovation and Impact</i>	23
2022 CORE Investments Request for Proposals	25
<i>Applying Lessons Learned and Continuous Improvements To Date</i>	25
Looking Forward	28
<i>Continuing to Advance Equity and Collective Impact</i>	28

Introduction

Community-based organizations (CBOs), public agencies, and local funders in Santa Cruz County have a history of partnering to solve complex and interrelated issues that affect the well-being and quality of life of Santa Cruz County residents. The County of Santa Cruz (County) and City of Santa Cruz (City) are among the local funders that share a long-standing commitment to invest in programs and services that address pressing community needs. This commitment to investing in community well-being began as a funding approach called Community Programs and continues today through the **Collective of Results and Evidence-based (CORE) Investments**, a new approach adopted in 2016.

To understand the progress and results that have been achieved through CORE Investments from 2017–2022, it is important to understand why and how CORE Investments came to be. In turn, this “look back” on the past, paired with an understanding of how CORE Investments has continued to evolve in concept and practice, will inform future partnerships, investments, and continuous improvement efforts.

This 5-year report is organized by the following sections:

- 1. Looking Back**
 - The Origin of Community Programs
- 2. A New Approach: The Collective of Results and Evidence-based (CORE) Investments**
 - The model
 - 2016 CORE Investments Request for Proposals (RFP)
- 3. Progress and results of CORE-funded programs from 2017 – 2022**
 - Monitoring Outcomes and Results
 - Assessment Findings
 - Continuous Improvements in Results Based Accountability
- 4. A “Movement” to Achieve Equitable Health and Well-being**
 - Continuous improvement of the CORE Investments model
 - Capacity building through the CORE Institute for Innovation and Impact
- 5. 2022 CORE Investments RFP**
 - Applying lessons learned and continuous improvements to date
- 6. Looking Forward**
 - Continuing to Advance Equity and Collective Impact
- 7. Appendices**

Looking Back

The Origin of Community Programs

The County's partnership with CBOs dates back to the 1970s, when the County awarded Community Programs grants for various social and health services using federal revenue sharing funds. When this federal funding ended in the 1980s, the County and the four cities developed a joint strategy to fund Community Programs using their respective General Funds, and each jurisdiction administered their Community Programs grants independently.

CBOs provided valuable programs and services with Community Programs grants, which offered agencies more flexibility in spending and reporting than most State and Federal grants. At the same time, the Community Programs funding process largely **remained static for over three decades**, leaving little room for new programs or agencies to apply or for existing grantees to propose new or expanded services. Although the Community Programs application process was considered "open" because any program or agency could apply, in reality, the grantees and funding amounts remained largely the same from year to year.

This structural inequity in the funding model concerned and frustrated some CBOs and policymakers, while others expressed concern or hesitation over changing the model. In addition, inconsistent guidelines and approaches for measuring results of Community Programs grants led to a growing desire among jurisdictional funders/policymakers to answer the questions, "Is anyone better off as a result of our community investments?" and "How do we know whether the funding is making a difference?"

At multiple points over the last few decades, elected officials directed staff to conduct discussions, studies, and collaborative planning processes with the goal of improving the Community Programs funding processes and results. A summary of these historical efforts is included in Appendix A. In April 2015, the Board adopted a **phased-in approach** to transforming the County's Community Programs funding process into a results-based collective impact funding model, as recommended by the Human Services Department (HSD) in the report, *Effective Planning & Funding Models: Relationship to Community Programs Funding Process* (Appendix B). The Board directed HSD to lead a collaborative process to design the new funding model with other local funders and stakeholders to provide an interim report (Appendix C), which was presented and accepted by the Board in October 2015.

As noted in the interim report, funders and other stakeholders shared a strong interest in working together to solve the community's most pressing problems and increase capacity to implement evidence-based programs and practices (EBPs). They expressed support for implementing a new funding model built on two main themes:

1. **Invest in What Works:** Ensure that policies and interventions have the highest possible likelihood of success by selecting those that are backed by sound evidence, and
2. **Invest Together:** Collectively address community needs by focusing on shared goals and processes.

A New Approach: The Collective of Results and Evidence-based (CORE) Investments

The Model

In August 2016, the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors (Board) and Santa Cruz City Council (Council) adopted a new funding model, named the **Collective of Results and Evidence-based (CORE) Investments**, which was developed after extensive research and collaboration, as summarized in the **CORE Status Report and Recommendations** (Appendix D). CORE Investments was built on the principles of collective impact,¹ which at the time emphasized five conditions for success:

1. **A Common Agenda:** A shared vision for change that includes a common understanding of the “problem” or need and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions.
2. **Shared Measurement:** Agreement on the ways success will be measured and reported at both the community level and organizational level. This helps maintain alignment, create shared accountability, and use data to continuously learn and improve.
3. **Mutually Reinforcing Activities:** Each partner is committed to the specific activities that it excels at, in coordination with the actions of others.
4. **Continuous Communication:** Regular communication and meetings to build common language, trust, and agreements that are essential for collective action.
5. **Strong Backbone:** Support to keep partnerships and processes moving forward.

These principles were applied to the CORE Investments funding model, as well as these six critical actions that were common among effective collective impact funding models:

1. Collaborate for collective impact
2. Focus on community needs and results
3. Use evidence-based practices
4. Provide support on key concepts
5. Monitor outcomes and results
6. Use clear and effective review processes

The Board and Council authorized staff to operationalize the new CORE Investments funding model through the issuance of a joint Request for Proposals (RFP), described below. Both bodies recognized that their combined resources would not be enough to meet all community needs, and other funders and partners would need to share a commitment to the purpose and principles of CORE Investments in order to achieve collective impact.

In addition, the Board and Council acknowledged that transitioning away from Community Programs to a results-based, collective impact funding model would be an incremental and

¹ Kania, J., & Kramer, M. (2011). Collective Impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 9(1), 36–41.
<https://doi.org/10.48558/5900-KN19>

iterative process that would require support and continuous improvement over multiple funding cycles. As such, the Board directed HSD to seek foundation funding to support early implementation of CORE Investments, including training and technical assistance to build local capacity related to collective impact. This commitment to continuous improvement and capacity building laid the foundation for “the CORE movement”—the ongoing learning, collaboration, and integration of the CORE model into other collective impact efforts, regardless of whether they were funded by the County and City’s CORE contracts.

2016 Request for Proposals (RFP)

In the fall of 2016, the Board and Council authorized the issuance of an RFP to provide evidence-based safety net services that would collectively impact the well-being of community members facing the greatest needs. The RFP represented an approach to funding services that differed significantly from Community Programs. In particular:

- The RFP was the first time the County and City used this type of open, competitive application process. Applicants submitted proposals based on the criteria and questions contained in the RFP, and independent panels reviewed and scored proposals and made funding recommendations to County and City staff.
- Applicants were required to implement at least one Evidenced-Based Program or Practice (EBP) and measure program outcomes.
- The County and City allocated specific amounts of CORE funding to 18 result areas selected from nine strategic plans addressing two issues (Health, Homelessness) and two populations (Seniors, Children/Youth).

Additionally, on November 26, 2016, the Board directed staff to return with a plan to administer funding set aside from CORE Investments in the amount of \$150,000 for emerging needs, one-time only projects, or to meet other safety net needs. Staff released a solicitation for Letters of Interest (LOI) for the Set Aside funds on March 16, 2017. The solicitation provided a simple, short, and straightforward application process inviting proposals for \$1,000 to \$35,000 for services and materials to be provided during FY 2017-18.

To support agencies applying for CORE funding, HSD contracted with Optimal Solutions Consulting to provide training and individualized technical assistance to applicants on concepts and tools related to collective impact, EBPs, program planning, and measuring outcomes, as many of these concepts represented new or unfamiliar terrain for some CBOs. Funding for technical assistance during the RFP process was provided by The Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County (\$14,000) and the Monterey Peninsula Foundation (\$14,000).

Programs Funded Through CORE Investments

Fifty-one agencies submitted 95 proposals for CORE funding, requesting approximately \$10 million per year—two times the amount available. HSD convened four expert panels to review proposals: Children/Youth, Homelessness, Seniors, and Health. The review panels were composed of qualified researchers and practitioners with content expertise in the strategic plan area, strategic plan representatives, community leaders who were not applicants for CORE

funding, and County and City staff. After the conclusion of the expert panel process, City and County staff applied a community safety net lens to the panels' funding recommendations to assess: 1) geographic representation of services for people in poverty, 2) level of impact to programs that were the sole proposals focusing on particular safety net need areas, and 3) level of impact on agency and program budgets. Ultimately, 74 programs within 44 agencies were recommended for collective funding by the County and City. Of the 74 programs awarded funding, 74% were previously supported by the City or County Community Programs funding and 26% were new programs (15% within previously supported agencies and 11% were new programs in new agencies).

On May 16, 2017, the Board accepted the staff report on the CORE Investments funding process, approved the CORE funding recommendations, and approved the County Set Aside funding recommendations. That same day, the City Council also approved the staff report and funding recommendations. Although the funding decisions were made collaboratively, the County and the City established separate CORE contracts with funded agencies based on their respective procurement practices and legal counsel.

While the initial funding cycle was set for three years, FY 2017-18 through FY 2019-20, in December 2018, the Board approved the extension of the CORE Investment contracts through FY 2020-21 to align with the County's new two-year budget cycle. In November 2019, the Board approved aligning the Set Aside awards with the CORE RFP and extending the existing Set Aside agreements through the end of the current funding cycle. In May 2020, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Board approved the delay of the second CORE RFP for a year and extended the existing agreements for both CORE and Set Aside for a fifth year.

Progress and Results of CORE-funded Programs from 2017 – 2022

The CORE Investments RFP process resulted in a selection of programs aligned with existing countywide strategic plans and primed for collective impact. Agencies awarded CORE Investments committed to the following actions:

- Achieve measurable positive outcomes for the County and City's most vulnerable,
- Monitor outcomes and results, and
- Work collaboratively with HSD by reporting on outcomes, challenges, and technical assistance needs, as well as participate in capacity development opportunities.

HSD assumed lead responsibility for monitoring programs and reviewing their progress, identifying technical assistance needs, and coordinating technical assistance and training opportunities through the CORE Institute.

During this contract period, agencies served many in the community and strengthened their ability to track data and outcomes. While CORE and agencies made significant improvements, this review also shows that reporting on outcome data and the collective impact of CORE can be improved. The accomplishments of the first five years of CORE Investments are detailed in the following areas:

- City and County monitoring of outcomes and results
- Assessment of outcomes and results
- Continuous improvements in Results Based Accountability

City and County Monitoring of Outcomes and Results

Agencies funded through CORE were required to submit annual mid-year and year-end reports to HSD and the City of Santa Cruz (for agencies solely funded by them). Agencies reported on performance measures (implementation of contracted activities, populations served), quality measures, and outcomes, as well as program accomplishments, challenges, and other updates.

For the first three years of the CORE funding cycle, FY 2017-18 through FY 2019-20, HSD produced an annual assessment of agency progress reports to identify key themes and shared a summary of those findings with the Board and Council. For FY 2020-21, the annual report and assessment was suspended due to the need to dedicate HSD staff resources to the COVID-19 and CZU fire response. Additionally, the Board approved HSD's request to defer the annual FY 2021-22 report to allow HSD staff to dedicate resources to the development of the RFP process for the second CORE funding cycle and provide a final five-year report on the first cycle of CORE-funded agreements.

In addition to annual assessments for the first three fiscal years, HSD and an external evaluation consultant collected and summarized data across the full five-year CORE funding cycle. Data sources for this evaluation included:

- CORE funded programs' end-of-year progress reports,
- CORE event records, and
- HSD annual assessments for FYs 2017-18 thru 2019-20.

The team used a mixed-methods approach to analyze quantitative and qualitative data from these sources, relying on the following methods to identify themes across programs:

- Descriptive statistics to summarize program's reported outcomes and scope of work (SOW) performance measurement achievement
- Data review of programs' reported successes, challenges, EBP implementation, technical assistance needs, and views on CZU Lightning Complex Fire and COVID-19 impact.

For the annual assessments, evaluation focused primarily on qualitative data and percent of programs successfully reporting data in end-of-year reports. For the five-year analysis, whenever possible, past progress reports were revisited to note consistent themes as well as changes over the five-year contract cycle. An important limitation to this assessment is that annual report formats were adjusted over time to better meet the needs of HSD and agency partners. This adaptation, while representing growth for both HSD and the reporting system overall, limits the ability to compare data over time. Additionally, staffing limitations throughout the service delivery system impacts the quality and consistency of the data collected. Despite these limitations, the findings of annual and the five-year analyses are grounded in agency data.

Assessment of Outcomes and Results

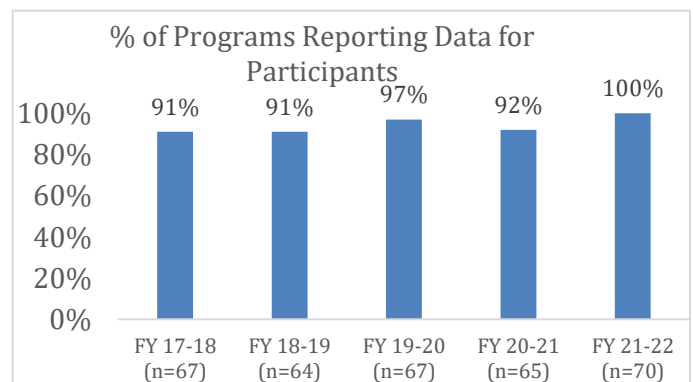
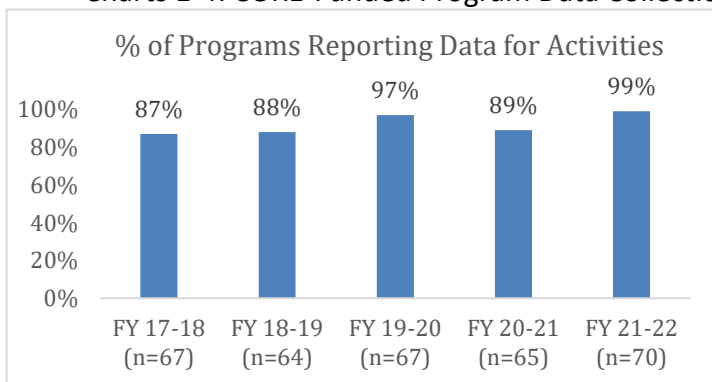
1. Agency partners demonstrated growth in their ability to collect data and to report on and monitor outcomes.

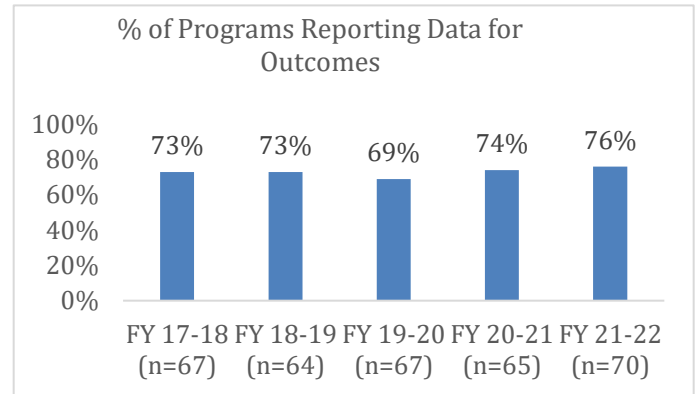
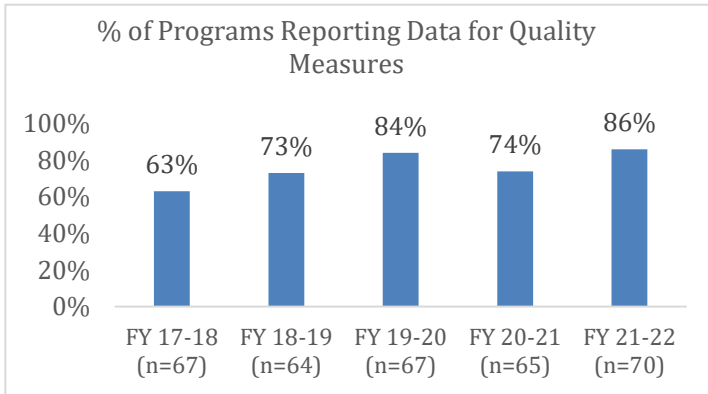
The County and City implemented more systematic reporting on activities and outcomes with CORE Investments. Through its administration of CORE Investments, HSD sought to strengthen the capacity of funded programs to monitor and report on program activities and outcomes. In parallel, HSD's own monitoring and evaluation procedures evolved over time. The ability of service providers to measure and report on outcomes is an essential part of the collective impact model. This capacity represents an important step forward in understanding how well programs are working. It positions service providers, HSD, and the City to achieve the dual goals of improving programs and outcomes in the communities served by CORE Investments funding.

Each CORE-funded program scope of work included targets for primary service activities, numbers and characteristics of participants served, programmatic quality measures (e.g., client satisfaction results, consistency of program delivery with curricula or evidence-based practice), and program outcomes (e.g., percentage of program participants reporting positive behavior change or attainment of learning objectives). Outcomes were agency- and program-specific. These data were a consistent part of agency reporting for the first five years of the CORE Investments model.

Data shows that agencies began with a relatively strong ability to report on process-related data such as the numbers of activities provided and participants served, but more agencies had difficulty reporting on quality and outcome measures. While this disparity persisted across the five years of reporting, all areas showed improvement. Importantly, programs reporting quality measures made the most notable improvement over the funding cycle, increasing by 23 percentage points between FY 2017-18 and FY 2021-22. This increase suggests an improved ability to understand how well programs are being delivered and therefore make informed decisions about how to improve the quality of service to the community. Improving the delivery of EBPs should increase the likelihood of attaining positive program outcomes. In the next funding cycle, HSD staff will monitor agency data collection and provide technical assistance to agencies that have difficulty collecting data.

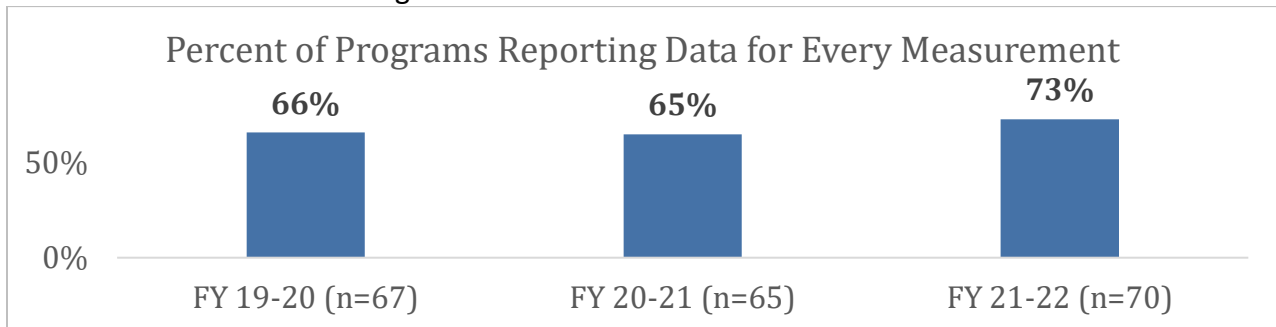
Charts 1-4: CORE-Funded Program Data Collection





As shown in Chart 5 below, in FY 2021-22, 73% of programs reported data for every performance measurement in their contract. Between FY 2019-20 and FY 2021-22, the rate of programs reporting data for every performance measurement increased by seven percentage points. Reasons for not reporting data included inability to collect data due to staffing shortages, COVID-19 impact, and changes in measurement tools.

Chart 5: CORE Investment Program Data Measurement



While early in the funding cycle, HSD and agencies did not track aggregate client counts and program outcomes, by the end of the cycle agencies reported data on who was being served and their outcomes by CORE Investment programs. During FY 2021-22, programs served a reported total of 55,678 unduplicated participants. In addition to this total, two programs reported that they only had the ability to collect data on duplicated program participants. One of these programs served 50,000 duplicated participants and the second of these programs served 160 duplicated participants. Lastly, one program reported serving seven programs as opposed to participants. Six in seven programs reported Improved Outcomes for the majority of their participants and described their evaluation activities (86%). Additionally, six percent of programs reported Improved Outcomes for the majority of their participants but did not adequately describe their evaluation process (6%).

- Agency partners made important differences in the lives of individuals and families, and the majority of programs achieved their performance goals; however, some agencies faced challenges achieving or reporting on their performance goals.**

In addition to the data described above, CORE-funded agencies’ annual progress reports included questions on program progress and accomplishments, challenges and next steps, personnel or other organizational changes, and other topics. Data were also analyzed to determine the extent to which programs achieved their intended performance goals.

Through the FY 2017-20 interim and annual progress reports, agencies shared stories about the kinds of impacts their programs had on community members. Although more anecdotal, these stories provide important insight into CORE program offerings and demonstrate the breadth and vital importance of CORE-funded programs to the community. Representative examples are included in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Examples of Impact of CORE-Funded Programming on Individuals and Families

Community Voices & Success Stories, FY2017-18
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A 24-year-old young adult was raised in a crowded home. He joined a gang, and he is currently on felony probation. During his stay at a group home, he became a father. While at Alcance, he has found a job, attained a copy of his birth certificate, mentored others and met the requirements of his probation. He’s doing this so that he can spend each weekend with his son and be the father he didn’t have. (Alcance Street Outreach Program, Community Action Board)</i> • <i>A frail 90-year-old woman had her daughter as a live-in caregiver. She had a joint bank account with her daughter who became emotionally abusive and removed her life savings. Senior Citizen Legal Services (SCLS) told the senior of possible legal claims of elder abuse, fraud, embezzlement, and theft. SCLS filed and she was granted an Elder Abuse Protective Order. The funds were returned within 5 days. Now, due to the efforts of SCLS on her behalf, she can peacefully live in her home and has begun to rebuild her finances. (Senior Citizen Legal Services)</i> • <i>“I’m calling to thank you because it feels good to be full.” (Meals on Wheels for Santa Cruz County, Community Bridges)</i>
Community Voices & Success Stories, FY2018-19
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“L” is an LGBTQ+ youth who joined our Watsonville Youth Group. When they first arrived in our Friday afternoon support group, they wouldn’t talk to anyone, and wouldn’t even introduce themselves to our Youth Program Coordinator. But after about two months, they began to grow comfortable, and their demeanor completely changed. In fact, at our Queer Prom later that year, they ended up doing a drag performance for the other attendees. They eventually told us that they had been suicidal before beginning the program and had now built such a support group that they were coming out at school. They are still not safe to come out at home, but they now feel they are able to cope with that dynamic and live fully outside. (Youth Program, The Diversity Center)</i> • <i>“I have felt so alone in my life and in my suffering. At points in my life, I would have rather not be living and contemplated suicide. This space, facilitator and group have given me a safe place where I am not alone. And maybe most importantly, my children have a mom</i>

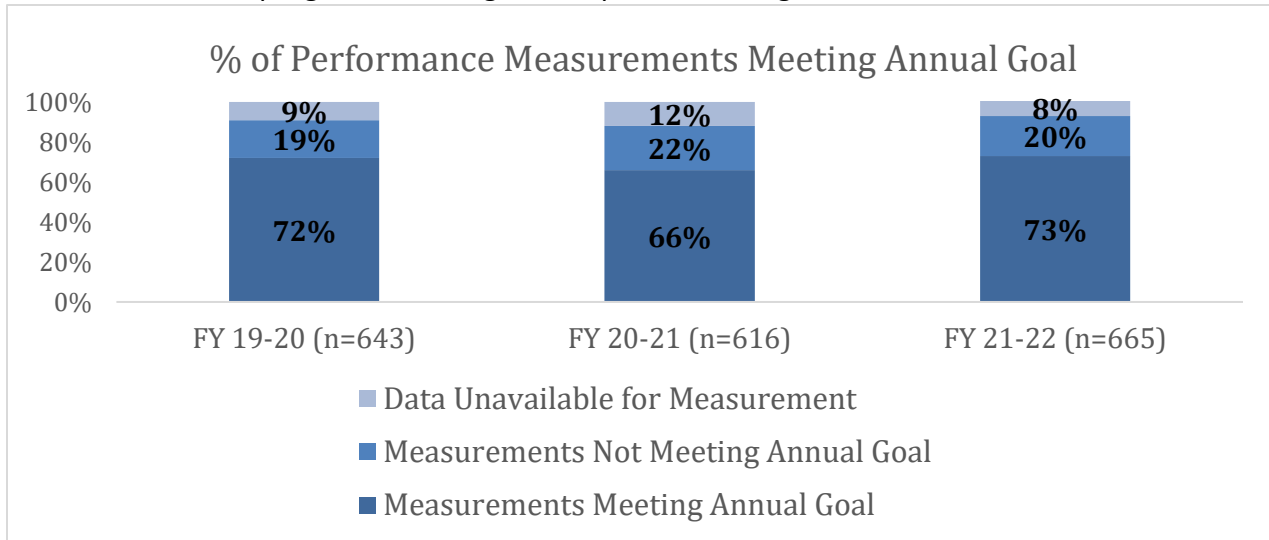
that has a safe place.” (Group Participant, Survivors Healing Center, Family Service Agency of the Central Coast)

Community Voices & Success Stories, FY2020-22

- *Donald came into Dientes because he was giving a friend a ride. Upon entering the clinic, our staff asked if we could help him with anything. He jokingly said, “No, you can’t help me because I don’t have any teeth.” Right there and then, we booked him an appointment. Donald had been living without teeth since 2013. He previously had a set of dentures, but they broke and were never fixed because of how expensive it was. Donald had been homeless and barely could afford to find a place to live, let alone pay for dentures. He spent most of his meals eating soft foods, like mashed potatoes and meatloaf. A little over a year ago he was able to find a new place to live and is getting back onto his feet. Now that he was able to get a new set of dentures, he is learning how to eat with them and wants to become socially connected. Donald said, “Dientes came to my rescue.” (Integrated Dental Care for Our Community, Dientes Community Dental Care)*
- *“No se que haria sin la ayuda de ustedes.” (“I don’t know what I would do without your help.”) – Participant, Watsonville, age 71 (Healthy Food Program, Grey Bears)*
- *California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc. (CRLA) helped a single mother with three children to preserve her Section 8 Housing Voucher. She had experienced domestic violence in her home, which jeopardized her voucher just as she went into the recertification process. CRLA helped her to address the issue head-on with the Housing Authority and, after advocating for her rights and protections, the Housing Authority advised that no further action would be taken, and her Voucher was recertified. The client and her three children were able to retain affordable housing and due to our advocate’s thorough approach to the matter, counseling services were also secured to support the client in combating further abuse. (Santa Cruz Housing Program. California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc.)*

From FY 2019-20 to 2021-22, HSD staff analyzed data on whether programs reported successfully meeting annual performance goals; chart 6. While the majority of programs met their goals, about 20% did not. Data were fairly static over the period of analysis, with a decline in performance in FY 2020-21 that some programs linked to COVID-19-related challenges. For example, due to COVID-19, the number of enrolled participants was often lower than expected or scheduled in-person events were canceled. It is possible the magnitude and complexity of the COVID-19 and CZU fire disaster and response adversely affected what might have been a more positive trajectory of improvement over time. Performance data will need to be closely monitored in coming years to determine if performance improves or if agencies need assistance in meeting their goals.

Chart 6: Percent of programs meeting annual performance goals



About 10% of programs each year did not have available data to assess success on this goal. Due to staffing shortages, in FY 2020-21, HSD was unable to complete individual follow up with the programs regarding missing data. This may have contributed to a higher rate of agencies reporting unavailable data and a lower rate of performance measurements meeting their annual goal.

3. Implementing evidence-based programs and practices provided learning opportunities for agencies and a path to improved services.

CORE-funded programming represented the first time many programs had implemented an EBP. These programs needed to put in place training, new processes, and new ways to measure outcomes. For some, this was challenging; however, many programs reported increased capacity to implement EBPs over the 5 years.

In mid-year and annual progress reports, agencies described ways they had learned from EBP-related processes and enhanced their services throughout the funding cycle. Agencies reported increased capacity to use data to inform program planning and service delivery. Agencies noted increased ability to adapt EBPs as necessary and/or improved fidelity to a model. For example, one agency described how a curriculum designed to prevent disease was being used with adults with severe mental illness and did not fully address the needs of this population. Program staff analyzed the issues and added additional curriculum to support their participants to succeed.

Many programs attributed positive outcomes and improved evaluation processes to their use of EBPs. One program noted that implementation of an EBP had “increased organizational cohesion, efficiency and improved services and activities.”

4. Although the COVID-19 pandemic and CZU wildfires affected agencies' ability to achieve outcomes, agencies demonstrated that they could collaborate and adapt services to continue to address local needs.

COVID-19 and the CZU wildfires presented significant and diverse challenges for individuals and organizations. Agencies reported the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically affected CORE programs and the participants they serve, as well as staff. In addition to participants contracting COVID-19 and requiring increased support to meet acute and basic needs, agencies noted that program participants experienced an increase in mental health and associated challenges. One agency summarized this impact, "The pandemic added increased anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges across all socio-economic communities, including our youth." Another pointed out the pandemic caused "isolation from support systems and added stress."

The pandemic also presented significant practical challenges for in-person service provision, fidelity to standard EBP delivery, and program monitoring and evaluation. For example, one program reported their EBP was based on a group modality, which was difficult to continue due to school closures and low virtual engagement rates. Another program described challenges with virtual service delivery since the EBP required providers focus on participant facial expressions and body language. Another program described needing to cancel plans to conduct focus groups on program successes and opportunities for growth.

Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, most agencies described key successes related to their rapid and collaborative response to COVID-19. Programs quickly responded to community needs and implemented new programs/services, such as those focused on helping residents purchase essential items like food. Agencies also reported adapting service delivery approaches. In FY 2019-20, the most frequently noted program adaptations (reported by 80% or more programs) were social distancing with clients/staff (94%), providing services via phone (90%), furnishing personal protective equipment (88%), and shifting to remote staffing models (85%). During the pandemic, many agencies also reported increased collaboration and greater awareness and engagement on issues of equity. In FY 2021-22, for example, 59% of funded programs reported collaboration with a fellow CORE program. Nearly all—94%—engaged staff on issues of equity.

Most agencies shifted to virtual services during the pandemic, and these modifications often led to unexpected improvements in service delivery and capacity. For example, several agencies noted that transitioning in-person offerings to online classes, presentations, and support groups made services more accessible to the community. For example, families and individuals without transportation were able to participate more easily in virtual programming. Another agency reported shifting staff professional development to all online resources, which led to success in professional growth and the ability for staff to focus on areas of interest. Additional reported successes included programs providing participants with assistance in finding permanent housing, employment, legal aid, education, and behavioral health services.

While online and phone outreach were successful for some programs, not all participants found those methods easy to access or preferable to in-person services. A few programs reported a decrease in participation rates due to changes in service delivery. Common challenges included participants' lack of technology devices (e.g., laptops, hot spots), challenges with internet connection, lack of digital literacy, and lack of private space for discussion. One program in FY 2021-22 explained, "While seniors were able to attend Zoom events who wouldn't have been able to find transportation to the Center, many seniors aren't as comfortable with technology even if they have a computer." Some programs connected with fellow nonprofit, government, and foundation partners to strengthen services and COVID-19 response. One program addressed technology challenges by providing participants with take-home activities and exploring the availability of equipment, such as hot spots, in collaboration with schools and other partners.

5. Staffing issues (recruitment and retention) led to difficulties in maintaining program service levels and staff adherence to EBPs.

Staffing issues were and remain a persistent challenge for agency partners. In FY 2017-18, a third of programs noted that staff turnover adversely impacted service provision. In FY 2021-22, programs most frequently reported employee recruitment as a challenge (49%), with a similarly high percentage of programs reporting employee retention challenges (48%). Programs noted that turnover requires additional training activities and disrupts existing rapport between staff and participants.

COVID-19 exacerbated staffing challenges. Specific challenges included difficulty finding qualified staff, high numbers of staff requiring family health leave (thus hindering the agencies' ability to provide the required level of programming and adherence to EBPs), and staff experiencing burnout and elevated levels of stress. Another program described taking steps to explore ways to address burnout: "We are participating in a national technical assistance collaborative group to learn how to better address burnout and staff health and wellness, and we are encouraging staff to use PTO (paid time off) to take more time off for self-care." Staff challenges persisted into FY 2021-22. As one program described, "COVID-19 continues to present challenges. The biggest challenge is staffing; we have had increased staff callouts due to exposures, symptoms, childcare needs, etc. We need healthy staff to provide care, and when we are short-staffed, we sometimes have to cancel patient appointments, limiting the number of people we reach."

6. Agencies identified capacity development needs related to program delivery and appreciated training and technical assistance to address those needs.

Annual progress reports identified areas where agency partners would benefit from additional training and technical assistance. Given the implementation of new data reporting requirements and EBPs, agency partners identified needs for technical assistance and training in areas such as data collection and measurement as well as EBP implementation. Common

issues included difficulties with designing or implementing new measurement tools, challenges using databases with other data collection systems, and limited capacity and time to conduct analysis of the information collected. Interest in training on how to develop program evaluation tools and measure impact continued throughout the funding cycle.

Other key operational issues noted by agency partners included challenges engaging participants or serving all the clients in need. For those where lack of engagement was cited, many programs identified a need to redesign outreach practices. In response to COVID-19, several agencies also requested training and technical assistance on using virtual modalities to assist and engage clients. In annual progress reports, programs shared their appreciation for the ongoing technical assistance and training provided through CORE. Many comments reflected enthusiasm for continuous improvement and recognized it is essential to ensure quality services. A theme of several comments from agencies was that CORE training promoted collaboration and movement towards collective impact. More details on CORE training and technical assistance are provided in the section below.

Continuous Improvements in Results Based Accountability

During the first 5-year CORE funding cycle (2017-2022), data collection and reporting improved, but the current system needs improvement to better measure the collective impacts of CORE-funded programs. Over this time, agencies were required to collect and report on their data on a semi-annual basis based on the Results Based Accountability (RBA) framework.

As noted earlier, agencies matured in their data collection capabilities and by the end of the five-year period, 73% of programs reported data for all their performance measurements. Because of the wide variety of program types and outcomes, it was difficult to aggregate and report on the outcomes of CORE programs regarding such items as unduplicated clients, demographics served, quality measures, or funding impact. These difficulties led to significant changes in the current CORE Contract Cycle from FY 2022 to 2025.

With CORE Investment moving into its second contract cycle, the County is now working with agencies to collect more data using the RBA framework that can be aggregated to better report on the collective and equity impact of programs. Agencies were again required to submit RBA measures based on how much the program accomplished, how well it was accomplished, and whether anyone is better off because of the program. In addition to these program outcomes, during this funding cycle, CORE-funded agencies are required to collect three pieces of information that will help illustrate CORE Investments' impact in the community:

1. The unique number of clients served by each program
2. The demographics of the unique clients served (ethnicity, gender, language, age, and geographical location)
3. A quality measure about each program- a survey asking participants about their satisfaction with the program

Along with these reporting requirements, the County is now resourced to conduct site visits of CORE-funded agencies to identify needs and provide technical assistance. In addition, the CORE Institute will continue to hold regular technical assistance sessions for funded and non-funded programs during the current funding cycle on topics such as collective impact, measuring program outcomes, RBA, grant writing, and equity.

The data collected from CORE funded providers will be used to better understand the collective and equity impact of CORE Investments in Santa Cruz County. Additionally, it will be used for ongoing quality improvement efforts in line with the County's commitment to continuous process improvement. All of the information gathered will be used to create reports to the community, Supervisors, and Council.

A “Movement” to Achieve Equitable Health and Well-being

Throughout the transition from Community Programs and the implementation of CORE Investments over the last five years, the County and City of Santa Cruz have recognized that collective impact initiatives require a commitment to continuous improvement. The shifts in capacity, data, and program outcomes described in this report do not occur quickly—nor do the desired community-level (or collective) impacts. However, the opportunity to review five years of results shows that steady, incremental changes do lead to progress toward equity and collective impact.

This section of the report describes:

- Continuous Improvement of the CORE Investments Model
- Capacity building through the CORE Institute for Innovation and Impact

Continuous Improvement of the CORE Investments Model

In November 2017, the Board directed HSD to establish a contract for a consultant to design and implement a process to continuously improve CORE Investments, including capacity building and technical assistance to increase collective impact utilizing grant funding HSD secured from the Monterey Peninsula Foundation (MPF). Following a competitive RFP process a consulting team (Nicole Young, Optimal Solutions Consulting, and Nicole Lezin, Cole Communications, Inc.) was selected to facilitate a collaborative planning and capacity-building process designed to result in:

- Increased knowledge of collective impact
- Vision, mission, and values statements for CORE Investments
- Goals and results to serve as a “North Star” for different agencies and sectors, as well as a methodology to align CORE Investments results across current and future countywide strategic plans
- Increased capacity to implement evidence-based programs (EBPs) and measure program outcomes, including certification options
- A plan to develop the necessary infrastructure to sustain the CORE Investments model, including oversight, funding, leadership, and backbone functions and roles

The work began immediately after the Board approved the consultant contract in [February 2018](#). In addition to achieving the desired results the process also addressed the findings from the evaluation of the 2016 RFP and was grounded in **eight principles** that reflected the evolution and evaluation of collective impact efforts across the country.

Key activities and results are summarized below, and multiple progress reports were provided to the Board, Council, and community over the years.

1. Established a CORE Steering Committee to provide strategic guidance.

The Steering Committee consisted of 19 members representing organizations of varying sectors, sizes, roles, geographic focus, and areas of expertise on specific issues (e.g., health, housing, education) and/or populations (e.g., children, youth, older adults, and Black, Latino and other communities of color). The role of the Committee was to provide strategic guidance as CORE Investments continued to evolve, serve as a sounding board for the consulting team, and support and share the CORE vision, mission, and values within and across their respective organizations and networks. The Steering Committee did not have any formal decision-making authority by design since several members were awarded CORE contracts and/or were likely to be applicants in the next CORE funding cycle. Membership of the Steering Committee remained consistent over time, with occasional changes. Please see Appendix F for a list of members.

2. Convened multiple community conversations (CORE Conversations) to increase knowledge about collective impact and engage a broad array of public and non-profit partners in co-designing the CORE Investments strategic framework.

Elements of the equity-centered CORE Investments framework included:

- **CORE Vision:** Santa Cruz County is an equitable, thriving, resilient community where everyone shares responsibility for ensuring the health and well-being of all people, at every stage of life.
- **CORE Mission:** To inspire and ignite collective action to ensure Santa Cruz County is a safe, healthy community with equitable opportunities for all to thrive.
- **CORE Values:** Equity, Compassion, Voice, Inclusion, Collaboration, Transparency, Accountability, and Innovation.
- **CORE Conditions for Health & Well-being:** An organizing structure and visual representation of the interconnected community-level impacts CORE Investments aspires to achieve. The CORE Conditions were intentionally designed to align with existing countywide strategic plans, including the County’s strategic plan, and provide a common language and

8 Principles of Collective Impact

1. *Place a priority on equity.*
2. *Include community members.*
3. *Co-create with cross-sector partners.*
4. *Use data to continuously learn, adapt, and improve.*
5. *Cultivate leaders with unique system leadership skills.*
6. *Focus on program and system strategies.*
7. *Build a culture that fosters relationships, trust, and respect.*
8. *Customize for local context.*

CORE Conditions for Health & Well-being



framework to increase alignment in future strategic plans, funding processes, and collective impact efforts—including and beyond County-led efforts.

3. Centered and operationalized equity across CORE Investments activities and materials.

Examples of how CORE Investments operationalized equity with partners include:

- Facilitated assessments and dialogues with Steering Committee members and colleagues from their organizations on how equity could be operationalized within their own agencies and systems;
- Convened CORE Institute events to explore progress and challenges and promote peer learning about equity among nonprofit agencies and county departments;
- Modeled language access through bilingual offerings of training, TA, and materials, as well as training and TA in best practices for interpretation and translation; and
- Joined DataShare Santa Cruz County’s efforts to make more disaggregated data that highlights equity dimensions in local data available to the public. Also, collaborated on training sessions that explored equity considerations about missing data, stories, and the CORE Conditions.

4. Engaged partners in refining the “Results and Evidence-based” frameworks, definitions, and tools used for CORE Investments.

Tools developed or updated through a collaborative process included the CORE Results Menu, Strategies and Program Outcomes menu, CORE Continuum of Results and Evidence, and Promising Practices (“library” of EBPs)—collectively referred to as the **CORE tools**.

The CORE Conditions provided the structure for defining multiple dimensions of well-being and linking them to community-level impacts, measurable community indicators, and local data in a

tool that is now known as the **Results Menu**. The Results Menu is a comprehensive yet flexible and “living” tool that is housed and updated on [DataShare Santa Cruz County](#), an online platform for community-level data that is jointly managed by five Administrative Partners: the County of Santa Cruz (County Administrator’s Office, Health Services Agency (HAS), and HSD), Santa Cruz County Office of Education, United Way of Santa Cruz County, Community Health Trust of Pájaro Valley, and CORE Investments (represented by the CORE consultants).

A related [Strategies and Program Outcomes](#) tool (also housed on DataShare) was developed to accompany the CORE Results Menu and help connect broader strategies and approaches (e.g., where efforts are focused) to more specific short- and intermediate-term program-level outcomes (i.e., whether anyone is better off as a result).

The EBP framework used in the first CORE RFP (which some applicants viewed as cumbersome and limiting) was also updated through a collaborative and iterative process and is now known as the [CORE Continuum of Results and Evidence](#) (CORE Continuum). This tool, available in English and Spanish, is designed to broaden the definition of what constitutes “evidence” and increase capacity to implement EBPs and measure program outcomes.

In 2021, in preparation for the release of the second CORE RFP, the CORE Continuum was updated to more closely align with the terminology and rating criteria used in [Promising Practices](#), another searchable database housed on DataShare Santa Cruz County.

All of the CORE tools were referenced in the second CORE RFP and were featured in a series of training and TA sessions during the fall of 2021 and in early 2022 to assist applicants applying for funding through the CORE RFP process.

5. Increased capacity to apply the CORE Investments Strategic Framework as both a funding model and a broader movement to achieve equitable health and well-being.

Collective impact, as a type of collaboration that brings people together in a structured way to achieve social change, has been a helpful way to describe both CORE’s vision for change and greater impact as well as how to organize, structure, and align current work towards that vision. CORE Investments serves as the vehicle for *collective* and connected efforts that are more likely to yield lasting *impacts* that affect populations and generations.

This movement-building approach is reflected in the current description of CORE Investments as both a funding model and a movement to achieve equitable health and well-being in Santa Cruz County, using a results-based, collective impact approach.

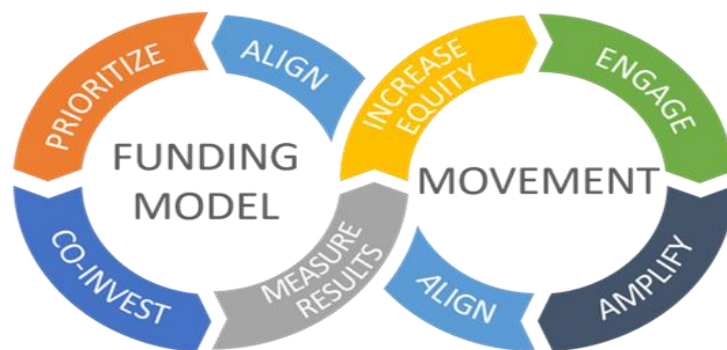
As a funding model, the CORE Investments strategic framework, CORE tools, and training and TA provide common language, approaches, and structures to:

- **Align** funders’ strategic priorities and investments with communitywide goals and long-term impacts,

- **Co-invest** resources in a portfolio of effective programs, practices, partnerships, and policies that contribute to achieving community wide goals and long-term impacts,
- **Develop** and implement funding and procurement processes that reflect results-based, collective impact, equity-centered principles and practices,
- **Measure** program-level outcomes and demonstrate the cumulative effect on long-term, community-level impacts, and
- **Attract** additional, sustainable social impact investments.

As a movement, the CORE Investments strategic framework, CORE tools, and training and TA provide common language, approaches, and structures to:

- **Align and amplify** efforts and impacts of multiple systems, collaboratives, and collective impact initiatives in Santa Cruz County that often work in close proximity—and yet still compete for resources— with one another,
- **Examine and address** organizational, systemic and individual practices and structures that perpetuate inequitable opportunities and outcomes, and
- **Engage** new, diverse formal and informal leaders, influencers, and co-investors in examining and addressing disparities and achieving equitable health and well-being.



While the County’s and City of Santa Cruz’s joint RFP and CORE contracts are the primary example of applying CORE Investments as a funding model, several other organizations and collaboratives have demonstrated their interest in and commitment to aligning with CORE Investments—outside of any funding relationship or specific funding process—as evidenced by these examples:

- The countywide **Thrive by 5** initiative (formerly known as Thrive by Three; co-led by HSD, HSA, and First 5) uses the CORE Conditions as a framework for identifying priorities, assessing community and systems-level strengths and gaps, recruiting Advisory Committee members from different sectors (CORE Conditions), and articulating an equity-centered theory of change.

- The **City of Santa Cruz** uses the CORE Conditions and selected community-level indicators from the CORE Results Menu as the organizing framework for its **Health In All Policies [Community Well-being Outcome Indicator Metrics](#)**.
- The Santa Cruz County ACEs Network of Care aligned its purpose and priorities with the CORE Conditions of Health & Well-being.

Through the CORE Steering Committee and other partnerships, the aim is to engage multiple partners and organizations across sectors to feel shared responsibility, ownership, and commitment to CORE Investments' evolution as both a collective impact funding model and movement.

Capacity building through the CORE Institute for Innovation and Impact

The County and City of Santa Cruz have recognized the importance of continuous improvement and capacity building ever since the launch of the CORE Investments model. In addition to the initial grants provided by the Monterey Peninsula Foundation and the Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County during the 2016 CORE RFP process, other public and private partners (HSD, HSA, David and Lucille Packard Foundation, First 5 Santa Cruz County, City of Santa Cruz) have co-funded the technical assistance and capacity building provided by the consultants.

Over the last five years (2017-2022), the consulting team facilitated or coordinated 172 trainings and TA events to approximately 1,785 unduplicated participants to build local capacity to apply the CORE framework and tools described above. The early successes of the training and TA led HSD, the Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County, the consulting team, and other partners to initiate discussions about how to collaborate to provide ongoing opportunities for learning and applying the results-based, collective impact tools and approaches customized for Santa Cruz County. The CORE Institute was borne out of these discussions and envisioned as a public-private partnership that serves as:

- A learning hub for building shared knowledge, skills, and capacity to apply the CORE framework across public, private, non-profit, and community-based groups and organizations in Santa Cruz County, including CBOs that do not receive CORE funding, and
- A learning lab for testing, evaluating, and spreading innovative, results-based approaches to achieve equitable health and well-being in Santa Cruz County.

Initially focused on helping local partners using the CORE tools described above, the CORE Institute offerings now take many forms, including:

- **Skill-building trainings** on topics such as developing theories of change/logic models, measuring program outcomes, implementing EBPs, visual storytelling with data, finding and making meaning of local data in DataShare Santa Cruz County, how to use Zoom effectively, and virtual facilitation;
- **Training and TA** to assist CBOs with preparing applications for the CORE RFP (the second RFP lessons learned process evaluation documents the training and TA specifically linked to the CORE RFP);

- **CORE Coffee Chats** that feature local guest speakers on topics such as how to apply for COVID-19 relief loans, [Targeted Universalism](#) (setting universal goals pursued by targeted processes to achieve those goals), Collective Impact, and understanding the CORE Conditions for Health & Well-being;
- **CORE Conversation** forums to discuss collective impact, racial equity, and antiracism;
- **Other forums, town halls, and convenings** co-hosted by CORE Investments.

Nearly all CORE Institute events have been offered bilingually (English and Spanish) since September 2020. Sessions generally are conducted in English with Spanish interpretation and recorded in both languages, then shared via the [CORE Investments website](#) and [YouTube channel](#). This expands the audience beyond those who are able to attend live events.

The CORE Institute continues to gain recognition as an accessible, inclusive, and responsive “container” or catalyst for change that supports systemwide application of the CORE Investments framework with an equity lens. CORE Institute events provide multiple, ongoing opportunities for people in nonprofits, public agencies, grassroots groups, private philanthropy, and the business community to build knowledge, skills, and collaboration across local organizations and sectors. A variety of topics are covered in areas such as:

- **Programs and Practices** (e.g., local resources, community engagement, program planning, evidence-based programs);
- **Data and Evaluation** (e.g., theory of change, logic models, outcome evaluation, data visualization);
- **Infrastructure and Sustainability** (e.g., leadership, change management, leveraging resources, organizational policies and practices);
- **Policy and Systems Changes** (e.g., advocacy, evidence-based policymaking, social impact investing, collective impact approaches, [Health in All Policies](#)—a collaborative approach that integrates and articulates health considerations into policymaking across sectors to improve the health of all communities and people); and
- **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Antiracism** (e.g., understanding key concepts, using data with an equity lens; operationalizing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility strategies in strategic plans; funding/procurement processes; hiring practices, etc.).

The CORE Institute has been supported by various grants and local funders over the years, and continues to gain recognition as an accessible, inclusive, and responsive “container” or catalyst for change that supports systemwide application of the CORE Investments framework with an equity lens. CORE Institute events provide multiple, ongoing opportunities for people in nonprofits, public agencies, grassroots groups, private philanthropy, and the business community to build knowledge, skills, and collaboration across local organizations and sectors.

The growing interest and participation in the CORE Institute has led to innovative and collaborative partnerships. Other entities expressed interest in collaborating with the CORE

Institute as a way to share information; engage partners and community members; align efforts; and reach a wider, cross-sector, county wide audience. Examples include:

- **#LIVE Pájaro Valley Initiative**— Convened two community forums in Watsonville and used the CORE Conditions to illustrate the connections among different aspects of health and well-being and the social and structural determinants of health.
- **Health in All Policies (HiAP)**— Two CORE Institute events were hosted with the **City of Santa Cruz** in FY 2020-21 to introduce the City’s Health in All Policies (HiAP) approach to improve the well-being of all people by incorporating health, sustainability, and equity considerations into decision-making across sectors and policy areas.
- **Housing for a Healthy Santa Cruz: A Strategic Framework for Addressing Homelessness in Santa Cruz County— Focus Strategies** utilized the CORE Institute to ensure alignment between their technical assistance on the County’s homelessness system assessment and improvement plan, the CORE Conditions, and the CORE Results Menu.

2022 CORE Investments Request for Proposals

Applying Lessons Learned and Continuous Improvements to Date

In the fall of 2017, HSD conducted a [process evaluation](#) of the 2016 RFP process, shortly after the new contracts were established (Appendix E). Key findings presented to the Board included:

Funding Process

- Funders and strategic plan representatives appreciated the changes in the local process for funding safety net services and felt the planning and RFP process was inclusive and transparent.
- The RFP was perceived as open to everyone, and applicants (and funders) appreciated that all agencies now had an opportunity to participate in the process.
- Some applicants encountered challenges completing the application itself, such as:
 - Difficulty aligning their existing programs with the 18 result areas selected from the strategic plans,
 - Difficulty finding EBPs in online clearinghouses (criteria for Model EBPs, as defined in the RFP) and/or difficulty aligning existing programs with the criteria for Promising or Innovative EBPs as defined in the RFP,
 - Lack of clarity about the RFP and application form, and
 - Concerns about the length of time required to complete the application relative to the amount of funding available.
- Several applicants and review panelists wanted greater clarity about how the panelists’ scores and recommendations related to final award amounts.
- The perceived transparency of recommended funding decisions varied by role. Strategic plan representatives and funders felt the portfolio of funded programs represented what they expected, while some applicants did not feel it was transparent.
- Stakeholders wanted more community conversations, clarity, and specificity regarding the funding allocation methodology (by strategic plan results).

Training and Technical Assistance

- Many applicants found the trainings and technical assistance helpful, with the individualized TA rated as being the most helpful form of support.
- Some applicants also wished for more direct communication with County staff during the application process to get timely responses to technical questions about the RFP and application.
- Several applicants requested more TA in various formats, both in person and recorded webinars, to ensure that all staff had an opportunity to receive the information even if they could not attend a one-time in-person meeting.
- Applicants also expressed a desire for ongoing TA, not just at the time of an RFP.

Collective Impact

- Funders, strategic plan representatives, and service providers were generally interested in continuing to work toward achieving collective impact.
- Ongoing communication and updates to countywide strategic plans would be needed to realize the full potential of CORE as a results-based collective impact funding model.

These lessons learned set the stage for continuous improvement of the CORE Investments model (described above) and the 2022 CORE Investments RFP process (summarized below and described in further detail in the accompanying Lessons Learned report).

On February 23, 2021, HSD and Nicole Young of Optimal Solutions Consulting conducted a study session for the Board and presented the timeline and process to build the second CORE Investments RFP. The Board directed HSD to engage with other funders, including jurisdictional partners, to pursue alignment of funding for safety net services and to return with an update on engagement efforts and the proposed framework for the RFP.

HSD, the City of Santa Cruz, and the CORE consultants conducted a series of engagement sessions with community partners and funders to gather input on how to apply the CORE framework and operationalize equity in the CORE procurement process. While there were varying ideas and input from stakeholders, there was also an appreciation for the complexity of operationalizing the CORE framework into the RFP process.

On September 28, 2021, HSD presented to the Board and Council on the RFP framework and stakeholder engagement process and the feedback received. Some common themes regarding the application included keeping the application simple and streamlined and having a different process for small versus large funding requests. Feedback regarding data and evidence acknowledged their importance while also wanting to allow space for innovation. Some of the key feedback on equity included making equity part of the scoring criteria and recognizing that operationalizing equity is an ongoing process, with agencies in different stages of learning and implementing program and organizational changes.

Based on the review of the lessons learned process evaluation from the first RFP and feedback from stakeholders, HSD developed a set of recommendations that were adopted by both the Board and Council. These recommendations included:

- Contract Term- 3-year contract term
- Base Funding- An increase to the CORE base funding of \$500,000; folding the \$150,000 Set Aside allocation into the base allocation; removing \$131,000 from the CORE base allocation that will be provided as the local match to the Seniors Council of Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties for administrative support to the Area Agency on Aging (AAA).
- Tiered Funding- A tiered approach to funding, where application requirements increase with the size of the funding request.
 - Small: \$5,000 - \$25,000
 - Medium: \$25,001 - \$150,000
 - Large: \$150,001 - \$450,000
- Hybrid Allocation Approach- A hybrid funding approach that is primarily broad but would include one deeper investment (Targeted Impact). A portion of the funds available for award (\$750,000) would be targeted towards this collective impact approach to contribute to equitable health and well-being, in one or more of the eight interconnected CORE Conditions.

On November 9, 2021, the Board and City Council approved the release of the CORE RFP that included application parameters that were informed and influenced by the feedback gathered from stakeholder engagement.

For the first time, the CORE Investments RFP explicitly incorporated equity, with applicants in the Small, Medium, and Large tiers selecting an equity dimension of their work to highlight, and those in the Targeted Impact tier asked to address racial equity explicitly, with the option to address additional equity dimensions if they chose. This, in turn, led to discussions about equity within and across programs, among reviewers, and in training and technical assistance sessions.

As with the first RFP, the CORE consultants provided training and technical assistance. A regularly updated Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) document was also provided to support agencies throughout the application process.

As the application deadline for the RFP approached, the COVID-19 Omicron surge was impacting the community, including service providers applying for CORE Investments funding. In response to requests from community service providers, HSD requested, and the board approved a month extension to the RFP due date, pushing it to March 4, 2022. As a result of the new deadline, HSD was not able to return to the Board as originally planned to provide an update on the applications received and obtain any additional direction from the Board prior to recommending awards.

- A total of 128 applications representing 78 organizations were received across all four funding tiers, with a total of \$15,179,382 worth of requests. Forty-seven percent (47%) of applications were from new organizations, representing 42% of total applications.

- HSD, in partnership with the City of Santa Cruz, strived to create diverse, representative panels in line with the goals of the RFP. The design of the recruitment efforts and panel process was informed by the stakeholder engagement process that occurred before the RFP was published. Recruitment efforts targeted community partners, county departments, local cities, educators, regional partners and community groups, current and former community leaders and researchers from across the county and region. A process was established to ensure panel members did not have a conflict of interest with the applications they reviewed. Review panels were organized by funding tier and CORE condition.
- A careful and deliberative panel review process was followed to ensure that the process was executed in an objective, informed, and fair manner. The average panelist score for each proposal was used to rank applications within each tier.

The CORE RFP was a very competitive process, and the applications represented a broad array of existing and new programs. Funding recommendations were based on the score and rank of proposals within each tier and the dollar amounts available. A total of 41 agencies representing 57 programs were funded in the current CORE funding cycle. Two programs serving seniors had their funding “carved out” from the RFP process: Seniors Council AAA- received \$131,000 and the AAA Senior Meals provider selected in their RFP (Community Bridges- received \$436,500).

As part of continuous improvement efforts to streamline the administrative process for vendors, HSD and the City of Santa Cruz agreed that HSD would administer the CORE Contracts for the new funding cycle.

Looking Forward

Continuing to Advance Equity and Collective Impact

As noted in the introduction to this report, the current version of CORE Investments reflects the most recent point in a longer arc of improvement and movement towards more results-based approaches, as directed by the Board and Council. In comparison to the Community Programs funding of the past, the current process is more open and inclusive, centering equity and its many dimensions in Santa Cruz County with more clarity and emphasis than in the past. Even in comparison with the prior CORE Investments funding cycle, the most recent 2022 funding cycle builds on a framework and tools for alignment that were not available five years ago. It considers evidence-based programs, practices, and policies more broadly, inviting organizations to place themselves on a continuum in ways that meet their needs for understanding where they are and where they might want to go next. Aligning with DataShare Santa Cruz County and other local and regional partnerships, CORE Investments makes it easier to see and act in ways that connect the dots across formerly separate efforts.

These alignments and connections are expanding in Santa Cruz County, but they also are underway in many other places, including at the national level (such as the federal plan for Equitable Long-Term Recovery and Resilience, based on the vital conditions for health and well-being on which the CORE Conditions are based). Shifts towards results-based frameworks are ambitious and challenging, seeking transformational changes across systems and sectors. Because they lead to resources being distributed in different ways and often to different groups, they elicit resistance, especially in the short term.

From the perspective of transformational change, the story unfolding in this report is still in its early chapters. Plenty of room for improvement remains, but the interplay of the CORE Investments funding model and movement already have increased the focus on equity and results, opened the process to many new partners, and created many new opportunities for alignment. They indicate that as both a funding model and a movement, CORE Investments is moving in the direction the Board envisioned, towards a greater emphasis on results and, ultimately, on impact.

Next steps include maintaining the CORE training and TA events offered through the CORE Institute to build capacity as well as connection for CORE-funded grantees and the broader community; launching the CORE website for easier access to the portfolio of tools described in this report and to the library of past training/TA events; continuing to work with DataShare Santa Cruz County to extend the relevance and comprehensiveness of local data; and responding to requests to use the CORE Investments framework to share information, engage individuals and organizations, and align local initiatives to continue making progress towards our shared goal of creating opportunities for equitable health and well-being, across the lifespan, for everyone in Santa Cruz County.

APPENDICES

- A. History of Community Programs
- B. Report on Effective Planning & Funding Models
- C. Report Back on Results Based Collective Impact Funding Model for Community Programs
- D. CORE Funding Model Report
- E. CORE Process Evaluation
- F. CORE Steering Committee 2018-2022
- G. CORE Related Websites

Appendix A: History of Community Programs

1990 – 1999

- The Board demonstrated its commitment to equity by establishing the Latino Equity Initiative and allocating additional funds to a variety of Community Programs that provided services to the Latino community, which was significantly under-served.
- Subsequently, the Board adopted Standards of Accessibility for Latino Services in 1992 (revised in 1994) and eligibility criteria and minimum qualifications to apply for Latino Equity funds (1997). The history, purpose, and Latino Equity fund allocations are described further in the [Latino Equity Report](#) to the Board.
- As the amount of the County's discretionary funding became increasingly scarce, other State and Federal funds were channeled through the County to local CBOs and enabled the County to leverage scarce local resources and maintain or even grow its partnerships with health and social service programs through contracts established outside of the Community Programs funding process.

2000 – 2009

- The Board held a [Community Programs Study Session](#) in November 2001 and directed the Human Resource Agency (HRA) — now known as the Human Services Department (HSD) — to annually collect information on how Community Programs services were addressing community-wide goals and strategies; amend the standard Community Programs contract to incorporate cultural competency standards; and develop suggestions for strengthening the Community Programs funding process and return at a later point with a report and proposal.
- Between 2003-09, the County and the four cities collaborated with local CBOs and other funders to establish the cross-jurisdictional **Contract Management Center** (CMC) with a common online application and standardized reporting system. Planning began in 2003 at the direction of the Board, and the CMC launched in FY 2008-09.
- In May 2009, the Board directed HSD to [convene a Community Programs Funding Task Force](#) to establish a set of priorities that could be used to guide subsequent funding decisions related to Community Programs.

2010 – 2015

- The Board accepted the [Final Report of the Community Programs Funding Task Force](#) in February 2010 and adopted a statement about the Board's **investments in the social safety net**, as well as the **Funding Principles for Community Programs** outlined in the report. Additionally, the Board directed HSD to lead a **community-driven process to strengthen the Community Programs funding model** and invite the four cities to participate in the process.
- Between 2010 and 2014, the Board provided direction and approved reports prepared by HSD that summarized ongoing community-driven processes, analyses of local data, and recommended approaches and timelines for improving the Community Programs funding process ([November 2010](#), [April 2011](#), [November 2011](#), [August 2013](#), [December 2013](#), [November 2014](#)).

- During that same period (of 2010 – 2014), the **City of Santa Cruz’s Community Programs Committee** (CPC) began to explore improvements to the City’s Community Programs grant allocation process.
 - The full Council approved a Strategic Allocation Framework in [November 2010](#).
 - In 2014, the City of Santa Cruz hired the consulting team of Nicole Lezin (Cole Communications) and Nicole Young (Optimal Solutions Consulting) to **review its Community Programs grants process and make recommendations** for improvements. A [summary report](#) provided three options for the Council to consider, ranging from maintaining the *status quo* to charting an entirely new course using a collective impact approach, with a middle ground that offered a phased-in plan. In [January 2015](#), the Council accepted the report and agreed to schedule a City Council study session to discuss long-term modifications to the Community Programs grant process in the overall context of City support for safety net and human services.

Appendix B: Report on Effective Planning & Funding Models for Community Programs Funding Process

https://sccounty01.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/BDS/Govstream2/Bdsvdata/non_legacy_2.0/Minutes/2015/20150421-655/PDF/047.pdf

Appendix C: Report Back on Results Based Collective Impact Funding Model for Community Programs

Include Oct 2015 interim report?

https://sccounty01.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/BDS/Govstream2/Bdsvdata/non_legacy_2.0/agendas/2015/20151027-672/PDF/032.pdf

Appendix D: Implementing a New Community Programs Funding Model

<http://santacruzcountyca.ig2.com/Citizens/FileOpen.aspx?Type=4&ID=10757&highlightTerms=Collective%20of%20Results>

Include HSD's report on the proposed CORE Investments model?

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fvq4kv5ZiT8-7yDx9p02zq5jg1wb_2r5/view?usp=sharing

Appendix E: CORE Process Evaluation

<http://santacruzcountyca.ig2.com/Citizens/FileOpen.aspx?Type=4&ID=13451>

Appendix F: CORE Steering Committee

CORE Steering Committee: 2018 – 2022

The CORE Steering Committee was established in February 2018. Most members have remained on the Steering Committee, with occasional additions or changes, primarily due to leadership and staff changes within organizations. The Steering Committee did not meet while the 2022 RFP process was active to prevent possible conflicts of interest.

Composition

Up to 20 individuals representing funders, service providers, public agencies, nonprofit agencies, geographic areas of county, CORE Conditions, and populations (e.g., children, youth, older adults, etc.).

Role

- Provide strategic guidance as CORE Investments continuously improves and evolves
- Be a “sounding board” for the CORE consulting team
- Support the CORE vision, mission, and values
- Engage other staff, partners, and networks in CORE
- Maintain a spirit of partnership, even when disagreeing or offering alternate points of view

Members

- **David Brody**, First 5 Santa Cruz County
- **Keisha Browder**, United Way of Santa Cruz County
- **Caitlin Brune**, formerly of Community Health Trust of Pájaro Valley; Community Member
- **Jim Brown**, Arts Council of Santa Cruz County (*joined 2019*)
- **Maria Cadenas**, Santa Cruz Community Ventures
- **Raymon Cancino**, Community Bridges
- **MariaElena De La Garza**, Community Action Board
- **Willy Elliott-McCrea**, Second Harvest Food Bank
- **Leslie Goodfriend**, Human Services Department
- **Mimi Hall**, Health Services Agency
- **DeAndré James**, Community Health Trust of Pájaro Valley
- **Clay Kempf**, Seniors Council & Area Agency on Aging
- **Julie Macecevic**, Human Care Alliance and Walnut Ave. Family and Women’s Center
- **Laura Marcus**, Dientes Community Dental
- **Rayne Pérez**, County Administrative Office; HSD – Housing for Health
- **Monica Martinez**, Encompass Community Services
- **Susie O’Hara; Tiffany Wise-West**, City of Santa Cruz
- **Elisa Orona**, Health Improvement Partnership
- **Greg Pepping**, Coastal Watershed Council
- **Dr. Faris Sabbah**, Santa Cruz County Office of Education
- **Susan True**, Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County
- **Betsy Wilson**, Mid-Pen Housing (*joined 2019*)

Appendix G: CORE Related Websites

Websites/Documents Related to CORE Investments

DataShare Santa Cruz County

Home - <https://www.datasharescc.org/>

CORE Results Menu - <https://www.datasharescc.org/tiles/index/display?alias=CORE>

Strategies and Program Outcomes -

<https://www.datasharescc.org/tiles/index/display?id=210411274189905155>

Promising Practices -

<https://www.datasharescc.org/index.php?controller=index&module=PromisePractice&action=index>

CORE Investments

<https://www.corescc.org/>

Resources - <https://www.corescc.org/resources>

CORE Continuum - <https://www.corescc.org/resources/core-continuum-of-results-and-evidence>

YouTube Channel - https://www.youtube.com/@coreinvestments_scc

Thrive by 5

Thrive by 5 - <https://www.first5scc.org/thrive-by-5>

Theory of Change -

https://www.first5scc.org/files/ugd/e000f0_9b6c3869997346de83cd8e8a3528b298.pdf

City of Santa Cruz Health in all Policies

Community Well-Being Outcome Indicator Metrics -

<https://www.cityofsantacruz.com/home/showpublisheddocument/91445/638053897717830000>

Health in All Policies - <https://www.cdc.gov/policy/hiap/index.html>

Targeted Universalism

<https://belonging.berkeley.edu/targeted-universalism>