Louisiana Case Study: Voices for Health Justice 2.0

In September 2025, I showed up at Cafe Reconcile, a cafe and non-profit youth workforce training program, in Central City, New Orleans, to participate in a mock legislative simulation, hosted by the Voices for Health Justice (Voices) Louisiana project partners, Invest in Louisiana (Invest), the Louisiana Community Health Outreach Network (LACHON), and Southwest Louisiana Area Health Education Center (SWLAHEC). I had been working with the Voices project staff as part of the evaluation process since 2021, as they had agreed to participate as a case study state in both Voices 1.0 and Voices 2.0, but this was my first time meeting them all in person. More than that, this was my chance to spend time with local community health workers (CHWs), a group that the LA Voices team had been working to empower and advance for years, supported by the Voices program.

The day's session was designed to help introduce CHWs to the legislative process by assigning participants a role and having them act out the process of trying to pass a bill. The session was tailored to Louisiana; an actual proposed bill, a state child tax credit (CTC), was on the table and we were asked to embody real people to argue for and against it - media figures, pro- and anti-CTC advocates, and legislators on the house committee that would oversee the proposed bill. My group worked together over the course of about four hours, broken up by an excellent lunch of fried catfish, mac and cheese, and bread pudding prepared by youth in Cafe Reconcile's training program. We discussed what our strategies would be, depending on our role (I was a pro-CTC advocate), spoke to mock legislators who might be sympathetic, and watched legislators engage in backroom conversions with each other, before stepping on to the "legislative floor" to argue and vote on the bill.

There were about 30 participants in the room, and I watched Chiara, from SWLAHEC, draw on her own experience to encourage the other pro-CTC advocates to think through how to craft talking points, and what approaches might be more or less effective with different audiences. The CHWs in our group, initially more hesitant, grew more confident as they realized they do know a lot about how health policies like this impact communities. One spoke up about how she wants to call out structural racism, but she knows that won't always work, and another got us talking about how to use stories from the community to have an impact.



Image 1: LA's mock legislative session at Café Reconcile.

Across the room, the "Republican representatives" were enthusiastically embodying their characters, shouting out all the conservative talking points they heard and usually advocated against. Someone portraying an anti-CTC advocate told me that throughout their conversations, they would all say something negative about the communities the bill would serve, pause, and then note that they didn't really believe the terrible things they were saying, and were instead expressing what they believed to be the opinions of the Republicans they were acting as. Interestingly, most people in the room had the conservative talking points at the front of their minds, knowing exactly what to say, while effective progressive responses were harder to come up with.



Image 2: LA's mock legislative session at Café Reconcile.

The final part of the day was the "vote," where advocates and representatives had a chance to speak to the bill. The mock bill failed (as did the real bill when it made its way through the legislature), reflecting the real challenges of progressive policy work considering the current Republican control of Louisiana's state government. However, the real value of the day was demonstrated by the group's reflections about what they had learned. CHWs in the room talked about how much they realize they know about the reality for people on the ground, and how even small policy changes could really help. There were some resigned reflections, noting that this work is not as easy as it looks and there are some strong forces arrayed against those working for progressive policy. But others commented about being inspired to keep fighting, the value of telling the kinds of stories that they hear regularly, and how much they learned from this opportunity to practice advocacy. The organizers started and ended the day with encouragement, talking about the value of working together, thinking strategically, and continuing to push policymakers. Catherine, from LACHON, strongly argued that CHWs are deeply knowledgeable about the reality in Louisiana, and well positioned to argue for progressive health change, a message that seemed to resonate with some of the people I spoke with, who made the effort to come out, often on their own time, to participate in the day's activity.

The Louisiana Voices Project

These mock legislative simulations are one key way that the LA Voices partners have advanced their goal to build up and support CHWs as a profession, expanding their capacity to advocate for themselves and the communities they serve. The Louisiana Voices 2.0 project continued their work from 1.0, focusing on supporting the Louisiana community health workers to build their political power and advocacy skills, raise awareness of the role they play, and try to make the

profession more sustainable. The three LA organizational partners each play an active role in the state team, though they divide the Voices funding in alignment with expectations for level of engagement. LACHON is a statewide grassroots organization and professional association of CHWs. Their work with CHWs focuses on providing support, training, and engagement in advocacy. Invest is a budget and policy focused organization and they have shared their public policy research with partners and stakeholders and participated in advocacy training for CHWs. SWLAHEC is a public health nonprofit, and their focus for the Voices project is engaging CHWs and advancing public health initiatives in Southwest Louisiana. LACHON receives the largest percentage of the funding, roughly 45 percent; Invest receives around 38 percent; and SWLAHEC receives about 17 percent. The same three organizations, and the same three organizational representatives, have worked together continuously since Voices 1.0 to advance their work, refining their approaches in response to new learnings and the changing situation on the ground.

The story of the Louisiana Voices project is one about the work that goes into trying to make progressive healthcare advancements in an extremely challenging political situation. In the current political moment, Louisiana has faced numerous cuts to program funding, including to healthcare navigators such as those employed by SWLAHEC, and policy shifts that make it harder to provide effective services, like not being allowed to target HIV education program at LGBTQ+ individuals. There have been a number of off-cycle votes and special legislative sessions designed to push through policies that would be harmful to the health of the communities CHWs most often work with. These factors have meant that the LA team has had to pivot to defensive advocacy work against Republican-led legislative policy actions or state amendments, to protect funding streams essential to ensuring the access and affordability of healthcare. The Voices team did not have major policy victories in 2.0 in terms of advancing a progressive agenda, but there were defensive wins, which helped keep negative policies from being enacted.

Despite the political headwinds, the LA Voices team continued to support and train CHWs for advocacy throughout Voices 2.0 and kept CHWs informed about policy impacts on the communities they serve, moving the work forward step by step. They have continued their engagement with CHWs, helping them build capacity for advocacy. And they have continued to support the implementation of policy wins they contributed to in Voices 1.0, such as the establishment of a CHW board and a Medicaid amendment to include reimbursement for some CHW work. LACHON has offered advocacy trainings for CHWs with information about the legislative process and how to talk with state representatives. Stacey, from Invest, regularly attends CHW meetings to provide information about public policy and its impact on CHWs and the communities they serve. Additionally, they successfully planned and implemented three mock legislative simulations, described above, in cities across Louisiana, giving CHWs and other community partners a chance to practice legislative advocacy and connect with others to think about what it means to be an advocate. While Voices 2.0 was a continuation 1.0, one of the partners shared that 1.0 "*was just getting to know each other. Then 2.0 was…'let's see what we can do.*'" The partners took their shared vision and understanding of the landscape and began

operationalizing it, at what one called "*a new level of not needing to build as much, and having much [more] of a sense of 'this is how we do the work.'*"

In reflecting on their big picture goals, the LA partners have shared that their goal is to empower CHWs, with a focus on first, helping them learn to identify as a CHW, second, recognizing that this role carries an opportunity and a responsibility to act as an advocate, and third, grow their capacities to do that work. The project is rooted in the relationships that LACHON, as the CHW membership organization, has with members, who attend monthly meetings, advocacy trainings, and other events that LACHON hosts, like their annual conference and the mock legislative simulations described earlier. CHWs know they can reach out to Catherine and other LACHON staff with questions, and she'll be responsive to their needs and concerns. During LACHON's meetings, Catherine shared that they have been "*talking a lot [about] advocacy because we've been talking about what's happening now. And the fact that we need to be on the ground pushing*." According to Catherine, each mock legislative session has been more successful than the previous one, and she noted "*I think as we do them, they get better,"* as they've learned how to help CHWs understand "*how legislators think and how they work*." She also shared that she would love to have a campaign they can go out to fight for, but right now, they're still focused on coalescing CHWs as an empowered group invested in advocacy. Consistent engagement of CHWs through LACHON's monthly membership meetings and regular offerings of trainings and webinars on healthcare issues in Louisiana, updates on state policy, and support for developing advocacy skills have led to increased interest and more awareness among CHWs of how they can be involved in advocacy.

> ***[We've been] talking a lot [about] advocacy because we've been talking about what's happening now. And the fact that we need to be on the ground pushing. -Grantee***

However, this type of work moves slowly, with the LA team sharing that many of the CHWs they engage with may not necessarily think they can act outside the scope of their jobs. Being a CHW is a full time job and engaging in advocacy is something CHWs have to do on top of their regular responsibilities. Additionally, depending on their employer, they may be forbidden from taking certain actions or representing themselves in certain ways. Part of the Voices work is pushing CHWs to recognize all the good that they can do, and try to get them to a place where they're willing to go beyond their jobs, or figure out how to work around employer strictures. Particularly in light of state and executive orders related to DEI and the fact that many CHWs are employed by the Louisiana Department of Public Health, some CHWs are not allowed to talk about health policy and impacts in certain ways. However, Stacey highlighted that the "*profession is not a monolith*," and there is variation in what people are allowed to do as advocates. Learning about how these factors impact their work led the Voices team to adapt and be flexible in figuring out how to make progress. Both Invest and LACHON, as organizations not receiving federal funding, are able to speak up on behalf of CHWs and the communities that

they work with, moving the work forward in a way that does not get them in any trouble. Invest is able to be more outspoken, with Stacey saying, "*we try to be very professional about [saying politically sensitive things], but we'll call stuff out. The current governor is not a big fan [of us].*"

LACHON has been able to use their ties to SWLAHEC and Invest, created through Voices, to, in turn, deepen ties between those organizations and CHWs. In particular, LACHON has created opportunities for the partners to provide information, training and connections to CHWs as needs are identified. A key strategy of the LA Voices project is to support progressive health work by sharing knowledge. Stacey shared that policies are going into effect and impacting people, and communities don't know what is happening. She added that "*there is not enough good information getting out there*." LACHON, with its ties to CHWs and, through them, communities, hears about what issues are impacting communities and passes that information on to Invest. Invest uses that to guide their work designing information campaigns and feel the partnership with LACHON "*helps [Invest] explain [proposed policy action] better and more persuasively*." The partnership between a policy-focused organization like Invest and organizations closer to the ground like SWLAHEC and LACHON is critical, because it has created pathways for information sharing between people closer to community and policy-focused non-profits.

> ***There is not enough good information getting out there. -Grantee***

Structure of the Voices state team

LACHON is the Louisiana project lead for Voices 2.0, because they are positioned to identify key ways to improve the CHW profession and support their growth, but all three organizations are deeply involved in the work. The Voices project is structured around the unique areas of expertise that each partner has, with one state partner noting that the organizations fit really well together and bring those areas of expertise both to the Voices project and to support their partners in areas beyond the grant. According to Stacey, Invest brings a lot of information, knowledge and facts about how the state government works and what policies may impact the community, and Catherine and Chiara have the ties to the community and get people into the room to learn together. Catherine noted that Stacey has a depth of knowledge about how to do fundraising and speak to funders, and she plays a role by encouraging Catherine to "*package [the work] in the way that funders need things packaged*." The partners consistently show up for each other, finding areas to collaborate, but also showing up at each others' conferences or to support each other at the Capitol.

The LA Voices team members have done extensive work to build their collaborative relationships with each other, an investment that laid the groundwork for an infrastructure that the project can build on. As Stacey said, "*it really comes back to that partnership strategy that we can't live without*." Throughout the case study, it was clear that the partners had a strong shared sense of their program strategy and how each partner's work was aligned with that strategy. We also saw many indications of the respect they have for each other and what each partner brought to the table, as they planned how to disseminate policy news among communities or discussed putting

together a training based on CHW needs. Catherine shared that they "*don't have tension. I think honestly, we grew to be friends and I think that's important*." They don't always agree, but they discuss and come to a consensus. "*We have the same agenda as far as this is concerned*." The partners also noted that project planning, not just implementation, is better because of these relationships. One state partner noted that it's been "*a really special thing about this project*" that they've been able to "*go beyond a transactional relationship into a space where we can be candid and straightforward with each other and really start building*."

> ***[We have been able to] go beyond a transactional relationship into a space where we can be candid and straightforward with each other and really start building. -Grantee***

We asked partners about the sustainability of the work, considering how important their individual contributions to the project are. They talked about how integrated they are in how they structure their work. SWLAHEC has CHWs in their organization, who have ties to LACHON as the CHW membership organization. And, according to Catherine, the LACHON members "*love when Stacey comes to bring them [information] and keep them updated*." Stacey sees their relationships as not just individual but also "*organizational*." Multiple staff from Invest have presented at LACHON events, and leadership at all the organizations are committed to the project. But she also highlighted that this kind of work is very person-based, "*so it was critical that the three of us created strong enough trust that we were willing to bring in [our teams]*."

The Voices team itself is racially diverse, as Stacey of Invest is white, and both Catherine and Chiara are Black. Stacey shared that she feels the partners' ability to openly discuss the impact of racial dynamics has improved, and credits Catherine with being comfortable bringing up those important conversations. "*I do feel like the ability to really talk about the impact of race and race as a part of the work has really grown over time. And I really appreciate that I feel like Catherine and I have -- I know I have that trust in her and I had felt over time that her comfort in talking about and putting those things forward [has increased].*" In reflecting on the challenges of being a Black woman in often white-dominated spaces, Catherine credits Stacey for her willingness to be a guide when Catherine doesn't know how to do something, helping her "*step into a different role*" and take over as project lead in Voices 2.0.

Building out networks beyond the state team organizations has happened as a part of the LA Voices project, though it has not been a major focus of effort. Catherine said she is open to working with any organization, but her focus is on CHWs and she is not necessarily focused on building connections to other organizations through Invest or SWLAHEC. However, LACHON and SWLAHEC have partnered on new grants, which does create capacity for building new ties. Stacey shared that she has seen an increase in new organizations reaching out to her for information about what is happening in healthcare spaces, particularly organizations who employ CHWs who she connected to through her work with LACHON. She also feels there has been an upsurge since the passage of H.R. 1, known as the "Big, Beautiful Bill" which includes

extensive healthcare cuts, leaving many organizations looking for answers, and she can play a role "*making the invisible visible and making it clear*."

Louisiana and the Voices for Health Justice Program

The Voices for Health Justice program was critical in allowing the Louisiana state partners to move this project forward. While LACHON has consistently been focused on the empowerment of CHWs, these three partners were able to collaborate on this project as a result of Voices support. As Stacey put it, "*I can tell you things in Louisiana are different because of [the Voices program]*." Reflecting on what the Voices program made possible in Louisiana, state partners had a variety of reflections on what it takes to do this kind of work and what kind of support, and particularly funding, is necessary to make it possible.

> ***I can tell you things in Louisiana are different because of [the Voices program]. -Grantee***

Capacity building

While program funding can go to many uses, the most significant one is creating staff capacity. The LA state project was thoughtful about tailoring their Voices goals to the capacity that this project's funding would create. Invest was the project lead for Voices 1.0, and Stacey shared that, when the project was being put together, she made a point to SWLAHEC and LACHON to look at the breakdown of the money and really "*feel like you could say what you can and can't do*." She especially didn't want LACHON to feel overburdened by trying to do more than the funds actually supported, as a smaller organization that had not previously received support of this size. As Stacey describes it, "*I feel like when you get into the non-profit space, the limiting factor is always personnel capacity. So, this grant bought a share of my capacity*." LACHON also used funding to bring on part-time staff, greatly expanding their organization staffing.

A key learning was the importance of having capacity to plan and consider how to approach the work, rather than being focused on just taking actions. When the LA state partners came together, they invested time in both big picture and implementation planning, as well as coordination and all the other elements that went into making their major actions possible, such as their conferences and mock legislative simulations. Stacey said, for work like this, "*it was kind of the iceberg effect of there is a lot happening under the surface to make*" events like the CHW training happen.

The LA team prioritized investing their capacity in their Voices project, and there were other opportunities they did not have the capacity to follow up on. Catherine described sitting in on meetings with another organization and thinking "*Is there something that I can pull from that to do more of? I don't know. It probably is. But with myself and my staff, how can we do that?*" She also talked about meeting other Voices grantees at Community Catalyst's convening in North Carolina, and having some great conversations, but no one ever had the time to follow up on those conversations. "*We've met. Are we keeping up with them? No, because all of us have so much*." She joined one organization's mailing list, but shared "*that's not the same as saying 'Hey, how can we do this together? How can we bring the two states together in order to do this?' or 'Hey, can we bring out [mock legislative] simulation to you? So that you can pull people together and see how it's done there?*"

> ***We've met. Are we keeping up with them? No, because all of us have so much. -Grantee***

Intended outcomes

As part of our evaluation, we focused on trying to understand each case study state's progress in certain areas that the overall Voices program was intended to impact. One intended outcome of the Voices program was for partners to build community power. Interestingly, Louisiana partners generally did not talk about their work as building community power, though many of their actions to empower CHWs could be considered power building. The TA providers from Voices, on the other hand, did identify some of the work of the Voices team as power building, and shared in an interview with ICH that it was interesting that "power building" isn't the vocabulary the state partners, particularly LACHON, would use. One provider shared "*I still believe this work is very foundationally power building, but [the team lead from LACHON] didn't see it that way*," and the other speculated that LACHON is focused on all the day-to-day things they're busy with and less likely to use bigger picture terms like power building. The TA providers say they feel work with CHWs is about power building among that population, as they provide a rich avenue for "*workforce development, of leadership development, of community engagement*."

Another power building outcome came in the form of power building for the partner organizations. Over the course of Voices, LACHON greatly grew their capacity for advocacy and capacity for training and supporting CHWs in their advocacy efforts. They also grew in their ability to lead a program of this type. This growth was supported by the guidance of Invest, but LACHON also figured out how to do new things they wanted to do. Catherine said that over the course of the Voices program, LACHON as an organization has learned more about advocacy: both how to do it but also that they *could* do it. "*The longer we stay involved [in advocacy work], the more we get from it*." She pointed out that, at this point, she has even been to Washington, DC to advocate.

Another important outcome was the infrastructure for this kind of work that was built. In Louisiana's case, this was grounded in the organizational relationships, described above. The strength of the relationships among the Louisiana Voices partners led to them establishing systems to share information and facilitate collaboration. The team has standing meetings, including but not limited to TA calls, and are able to hold each other accountable on things they are collaborating on. Invest, as the policy expert, produces webinars and presentations on key topics. The webinars are then shared with LACHON and SWLAHEC and, through them, other organizations working on healthcare topics in Louisiana.

The Voices program was intended to support work that would transform the healthcare system, and the Louisiana state team partners do feel that their work has been making progress towards that goal. They see CHWs as being uniquely positioned to support a healthcare system that is better suited to community needs, and potentially able to effectively advocate for those needs, and making step-by-step progress to empower them is a movement towards that bigger goal. However, Stacey notes that it was important to keep their goals in line with the amount and duration of funding they received. If programs want to ensure grantees have the ability to have the largest possible impact, taking advantage of opportunities like the networking one Catherine describing, they need to provide sufficient funding and support for that.

> ***She's gone back, gathering that information for us, able to give us guidance. - Grantee***

The other significant way that the Voices program impacted the work of the Louisiana state team is through their work with their Steering Committee TA partners. The Voices state team members met regularly with their TA providers, led by Amanda Ptashkin with support from Breanna Sharer. Amanda's relationship with the Louisiana groups predates Voices, having been involved with the Medicaid expansion actions in the state, and then maintaining tangential relationships since then, primarily with Invest. In interviews, the Voices partners were positive about their relationship with Amanda, sharing that she kept them updated on the national environment and shared information relevant to Louisiana. When they have asked for information, "*she's gone back, gathering that information for us, able to give us guidance*." The partners noted that Amanda has consistently reinforced that they can reach out if they need anything, which they appreciated. In describing their role in an interview at the mid-point of the project, the TA providers indicated that their main point of contact was during check-in calls, and that they provide resources and information. However, they noted that, despite this positive relationship, the partner organizations may view them as a funder rather than a partner supporting their work, and so Amanda noted she wishes "*I had a better way to get them to utilize us*."

A notable shift happened in early 2026, when the Amanda was laid off during a broad restructuring at Community Catalyst, and the LA state team learned this when she did not show up at a meeting with the team scheduled for the afternoon of the day she was laid off. The

Louisiana state team partners expressed to me and Breanna, their CBPP TA provider, that the lack of information and the sudden severing of a positive relationship with their TA provider negatively impacted their perception of Community Catalyst. The LA team was not assigned a new TA provider by Community Catalyst and only restarted TA calls with their CBPP TA provider several months later.

Sustainability

The LA state partners see the relationships they developed as a key outcome of their project and are confident that these relationships will continue past the support from the national program. Stacey shared "*I can't imagine not showing up if Catherine ever wanted me to do something*" and Catherine said "*we will continue having Stacey come in to our [CHW] meetings, to inform CHWs about what's going on within the state capital*" and "*Chiara is there always as an ally as far as community health workers are concerned so that's going to stay*." She added, "*I just feel that even if there's no funding, we would still be in some type of partnership to keep whatever's going.*"

> ***I just feel that even if there's no funding, we would still be in some type of partnership to keep whatever's going. -Grantee***

They do note that the capacity to continue the work will be impacted by the end of funding. Stacey shared "*I don't know what the capacity will look like without the extra funding to support it*," as the funds gave her capacity to "*show up in spaces*." They are hopeful they can continue to move forward in some ways, recognizing the strength of the ties they've built, with Catherine sharing "*even if there is no funding from Voices, I think [the Voices partner organizations] can continue to do what needs to be done. It may not be in the same capacity, but some kind of way*." Stacey made a similar point, as "*we do have general support at our organization that lets us pick and choose places that we can show up and we try to do that*." She does try to prioritize work she supports, like their Voices project, but she also notes that when her salary is covered by another funder, "*someone else is buying my capacity so I have to show up in those spaces*."

Lessons learned about health care system change and power building

Looking at everything that has happened through the many years of the LA Voices project, several key learnings emerged about what it takes to build a community power-based campaign designed to lead to progressive health care system change.

The first is the importance of building a strong foundation for a project, which makes it possible to effectively implement and adapt once work starts. In Louisiana, this was grounded in the relationship building the partners did and the time they invested in planning. It takes extensive effort to figure out which actions will help them progress towards their goal. Stacey said, "*I do feel like there is a lot of effort that goes into just understanding and surfacing and articulating*."

That planning also has to be iteratively updated and refined as they learn what strategies are effective and as circumstances change. As an example of learning from how things were unfolding, the team originally assumed they would be able to focus on providing advocacy training to CHWs and they expected that CHWs would then take that training and engage in advocacy. They learned that many CHWs were not allowed to do that by their employers, but they also learned that the training wasn't wasted, as CHWs explored ways to be advocates outside of their official capacity. Stacey said that they may not be able to write op-eds in local papers, but they can go into the community and help community members be better informed. Throughout the project, state partners highlighted much they were learning and how they invested time as a team to think through how to make changes. An impact of the fact that the LA team put time into creating an effective working structure that allowed them to pivot as needed is that they could be responsive to changing situations in a way that still aligned with their priorities, and they could trust each other to move things forward.

> ***The work that's gone into building trust, building infrastructure, building this whole connectivity that I think you can now call on. - Grantee***

Another lesson worth highlighting is that the foundational phase takes time and effort and includes many steps that are sometimes not visible to external observers of the project. As mentioned earlier, Stacey described this work like an iceberg. As she says, "*the work that's gone into building trust, building infrastructure, building this whole connectivity that I think you can now call on*" is critical. And "*that takes a lot of time and capacity to build*." One example is the process through which the team identified how to implement an advocacy training campaign for CHWs. While LACHON had deep knowledge of CHW work and positioning, Catherine was not as familiar with advocacy and was not initially able to envision what training and support was needed for CHWs. With Stacey's support, Catherine built her advocacy skills, eventually going to the State Capital to give testimony. Catherine shared that that experience led her to engage with Stacey in a different way, helping her develop "*a vision for what CHW engagement has looked like in that space and how we could deploy it together*." This then led to the team entering a new stage in their planning process, as LACHON grew in their ability to lead the project. Another example would be the process it took to bring the mock legislative sessions to CHWs. Stacey reached out to the researcher who developed the mock legislative session model partway through Voices 1.0, to discuss the possibility of adapting it to the Louisiana legislative context, and it took three years to redesign the model, raise the funds to pay the moderators, and implement the sessions in Louisiana for CHWs.

LA partners shared that they have to approach their work with the broader arc of time in mind. Stacey praised Catherine's "*perspective of history*" and the fact that you may make progress and then have to take steps back. "*It doesn't mean the steps aren't important. It doesn't mean that learning to walk isn't important. It just means that we don't control the policy landscape. We don't*

control the elections. But we are very good at figuring out where you can make progress and making it where we can." They were able to make steps forward, like getting Medicaid amended to include reimbursement for CHW work in clinical settings, which wasn't as far forward as they wanted, "*but it's something we can build on*." However, considering the hostility of the current political environment, they also realized as a team that they needed to shift "*from 'let's build on it' to 'let's preserve it.'*" For example, they succeeded in getting a CHW Board established by the LA legislature (in Voices 1.0), and are now focused on supporting that board, to make sure that "*that board is nurtured, that that board grows and is able to engage meaningfully in different areas, can result again in very concrete incremental progress*."

> ***There's now a much more robust ecosystem. -Grantee***

Relevant to this, Stacey reflected on how this kind of work has impacts beyond a single campaign win. She was involved with the Medicaid expansion campaign in Louisiana, which culminated in its passage in 2015, and she reflected on how much of an ecosystem for progressive healthcare work has grown in LA since then. Compared to 10 or 20 years ago, when there might have been one advocate working on patient-centered or community-centered issues, "*there's now a much more robust ecosystem*" and she's still connected to a network of people who first came together for the Medicaid expansion work. She still has people she knows she can reach out to draw on their expertise. Hopefully that will be something that comes from the Voices project too. Building an ecosystem for progressive healthcare work requires having the right person in the room at the right moment, who can quickly organize and "*go into response mode*." In order to have the right people in the right places when the right moment arrives, however, there has to be ongoing financial support for staff to be there.

Future of the work

When discussing the future of the work, conversations always circled back to funding. Both Catherine and Stacey had concrete visions for what they would do to grow their current work. Catherine highlighted that her staff are part-time, and if she had the funding to bring them on full-time, she'd want to do "*more advocacy, but across the state*," be able to be in person with people more, instead of Zoom, get more time from Ashley Wennerstorm, a co-founder of LACHON who is a professor at LSU, and increase the number of their advocacy trainings. Stacey could see both building on the groundwork of 2.0 at the same funding level, by continuing to empower people, and then maybe adding on a "*component of how do we provide the pathway for the stories and the experiences to show up in a policy environment*." If there were more funding, she would "*love to see a Community Health Worker day at the Capitol, where you're really raising the profile of the profession. And you're raising the profile of advocacy within the profession. You're also creating this anchor event where people are like 'yeah, that's a thing that we do' and it starts to build into identity. But that's an expensive thing to do, even though it pays off in visibility and exposure*." With Medicaid cuts, there are going to be stories that need to be

told about the impacts of the cuts, not just on individuals who lose coverage, but the trickle down effects. Stacey feels "*this partnership [supports] the opportunity for CHWs to be a voice in their community in a way that is going to be really important*". But without the capacity provided by the grant, their ability to lift up those stories in the future is in doubt.

The Louisiana Voices project brought together a team that had not worked together, who took this opportunity to build a strong foundation for future work, began an ongoing campaign to support and empower community health workers, and managed to be flexible and responsive to changing political circumstances and contribute to defensive advocacy efforts. Working with Louisiana as a case study provided a lens to understand how a Voices project plays out on the ground, offering insight into how the work is slow moving and builds on itself, how a campaign can be built and rolled out, and how team and capacity building are core to making their success possible.