



2016 Community Listening Sessions Report

ALL IN Alameda County



2016 Community Listening Sessions Report

About ALL IN Alameda County

ALL IN Alameda County is a multi-stakeholder innovation incubator within County government bringing together community residents, business owners, nonprofit leaders, government agency staff and elected officials to end poverty in Alameda County. With nearly one in four residents living in poverty, California has the nation's highest poverty rate and the highest rate among seniors. In Alameda County, over half our children live in poverty in 15 neighborhoods and more than one-third live in poverty in another 36 neighborhoods.

Launched by County Supervisor Wilma Chan on the 50th Anniversary of President Johnson's War on Poverty, *ALL IN* addresses the areas of employment, income equality, food security, housing, education, health, and child care. Individuals sitting on all sides of a social issue work collaboratively to design new solutions, and apply creative thinking to remove barriers and take advantage of opportunities for progress.

What are the ALL IN Listening Sessions?

Our building is on the corner of 37th and E12th. Our front door is up the stairs on the 37th side and there is a buzzer for OCYO. Please ring the buzzer for entry.

Please Join Us!

OCYO 3700 E12th street Oakland, CA 94601

All-In Alameda County Listening Session

We want to hear what you think we can do to improve people's lives in our community; from employment opportunities, to housing, to making the city more beautiful

**Wednesday, Dec. 14th
from 6:00 pm to 7:15 pm
at OCYO**

The mission of Choices for Freedom is to improve the lives of individuals who have been, or are at risk of being, involved in the criminal justice system. We do this with prevention, mentoring, counseling, education, and other supportive services for pro-social rehabilitation and community reintegration. We believe that everyone deserves the chance, with education and opportunity, to make better choices

ChoicesForFreedom.org Hosted by: Choices for Freedom, a California nonprofit organization founded by Nate Williams

For information call Nate at: 510-815-3488

Food, Refreshments & Gift cards will be provided for Participants

Listening Session flyer for Choices for Freedom

opportunities for residents to exercise leadership, organize around critical issues and become directly involved in local government.

Last year, *ALL IN* requested proposals from nonprofits, businesses, and community leaders within Alameda County to hold meetings in late 2016 to engage residents on community strengths and challenges. Following a review by *ALL IN* Action Team representatives, Steering Committee members and community partners, approved organizations were awarded grants between \$1,000 and \$3,000 (depending on the number of sessions planned).

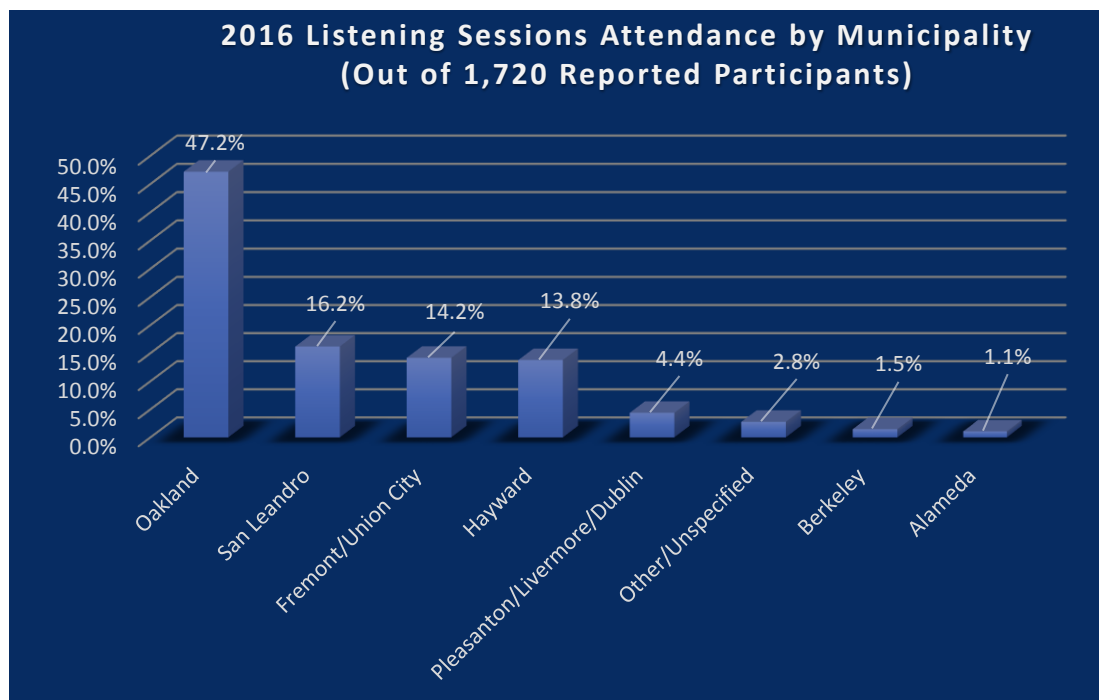
Ongoing community dialogue, engagement and leadership have become essential touchstones for *ALL IN* and its mission of helping County programs more effectively respond to the needs of low-income populations. Throughout *ALL IN*'s inception, input from residents helped shape the content of our day-long *Social Innovation Fair*, and led to the formation of Action Teams in the areas of Affordable Housing, CalFresh Enrollment, Food as Medicine, Food Recovery, Entrepreneurship, and Youth Career Pathways.

Building off of its inaugural sessions in 2015, *ALL IN* is committed to an ongoing cycle of Listening Sessions, which creates meaningful

Who attended the 2016 listening sessions?

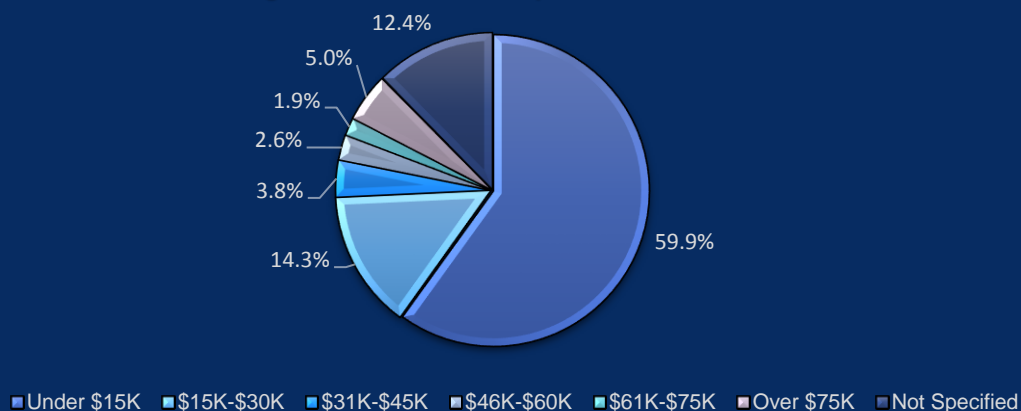
In total, the 74 organizations that submitted successful proposals to *ALL IN* held over 100 Listening Sessions with community residents during the autumn and winter of 2016, reaching over 1,700 people.

Listening Sessions took place in seven municipalities and the unincorporated areas of the County, with the majority of participants attending sessions in Oakland, followed by San Leandro, Fremont/Union City, and Hayward.



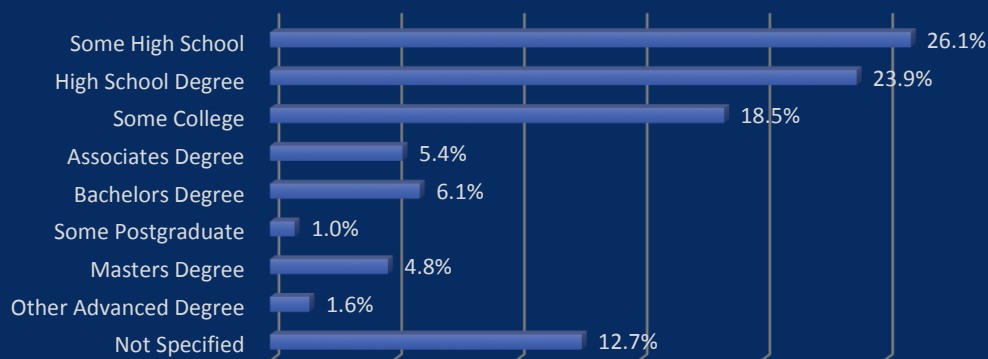
The high percentage of Oakland participants is due to the fact that over 59 percent of Listening Sessions in 2016 were held in the City. Attendance at non-Oakland sessions was impressive, as 53 percent of all participants attended the approximately 41 percent of Listening Sessions held outside of Oakland.

Listening Session Participant Levels of Income

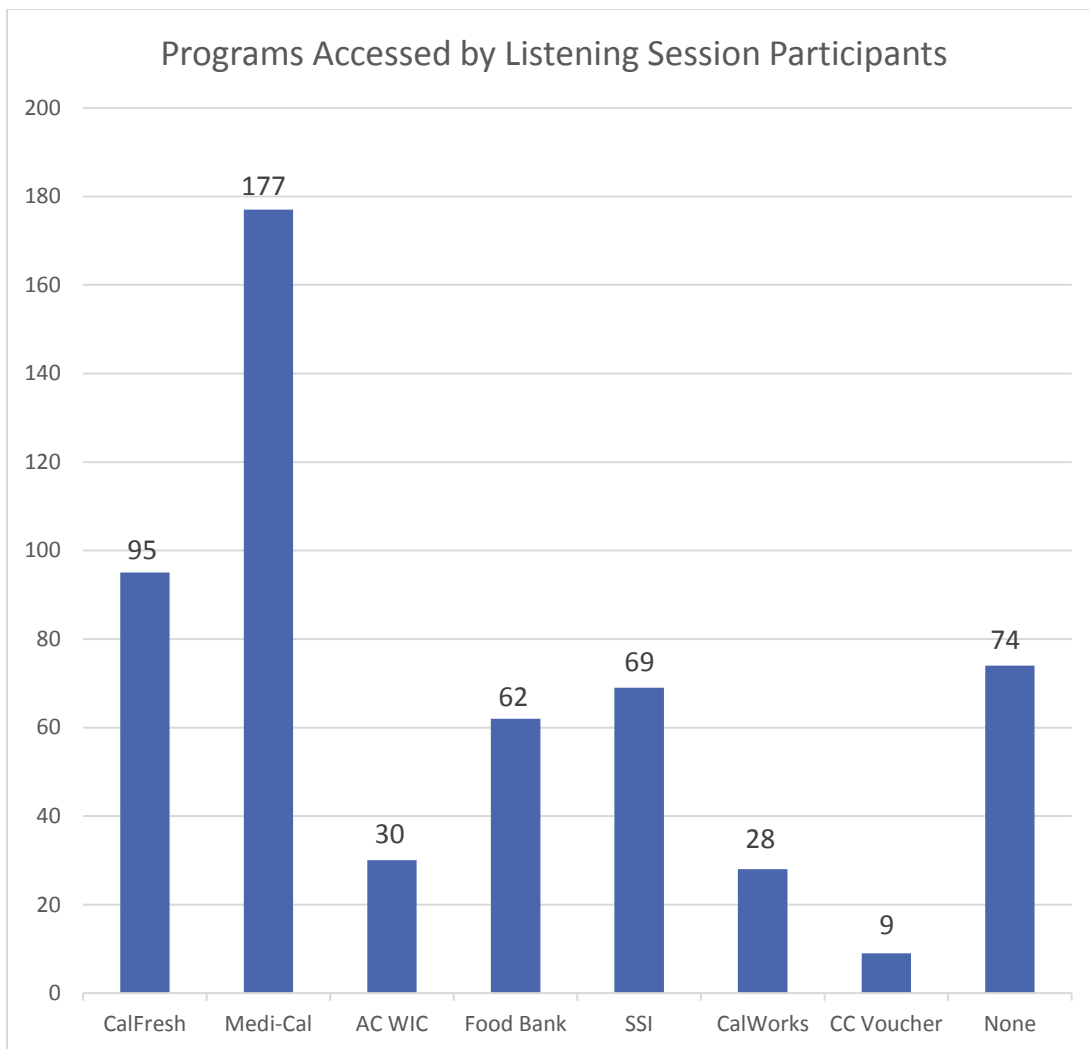


The vast majority of participants – 59.9 percent – reported earning less than \$15,000 per year, although a small percentage of this group were school-aged youth. In total, almost 75 percent of residents who participated currently earn \$30,000 or less, with just over 13 percent making more than \$30,000 annually.

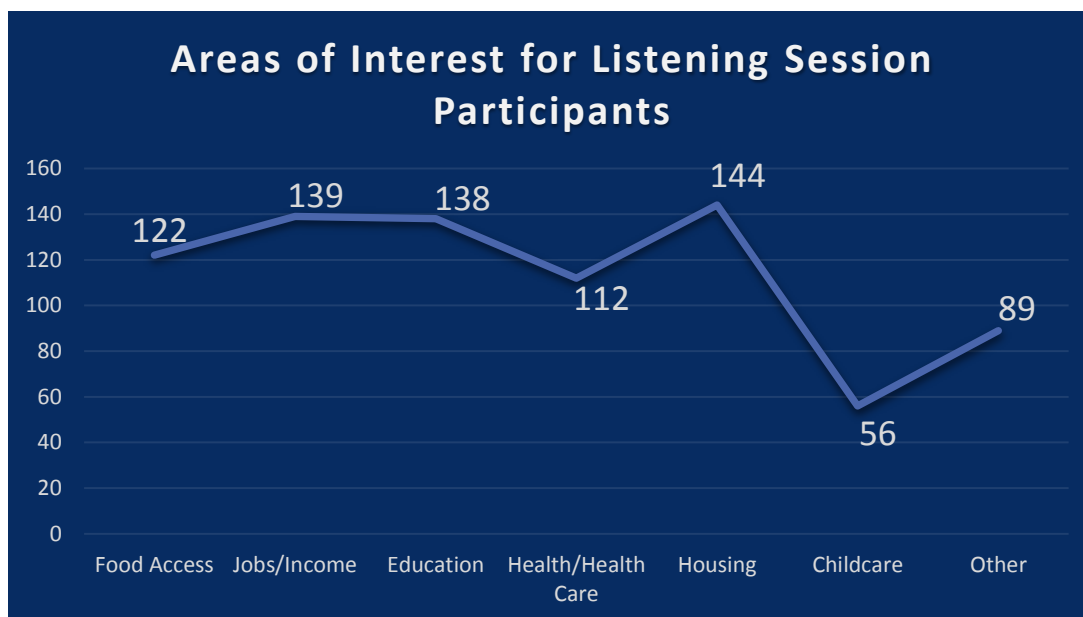
Education of Listening Session Respondents



Of those who provided information on their educational background, 50 percent either completed some high school or earned a high school degree. Including those who attended some college, 68.5 percent earned less than a college degree while approximately 19 percent completed a higher education curriculum.



Medi-Cal was by far the program most frequently accessed by session attendees, with its 177 participants almost doubling the next highest category. The high levels of interest in CalFresh and the Alameda County Community Food Bank demonstrate the continued demand for healthy and accessible food options among low-income communities.



Participants were allowed to select any number of issues that currently impact their lives. Although interest in all categories was widespread, the interconnected themes of Housing, Jobs/Income and Education received the highest number of responses among Listening Session attendees.

Key Themes from 2016 Listening Sessions

Affordable Housing

The greatest challenge facing Listening Session participants was the lack of affordable housing and rise in rental costs. Almost every session mentioned housing as either a top priority or a critical challenge. This was a significant concern in Oakland in particular but also throughout the entirety of Alameda County.

Participants cited the devastating impact that high housing costs have on the everyday lives of families, stating that a majority of income ends up being allocated to rent. For some families, as much as 70 percent of income is allocated to monthly rent, which has a negative domino effect on their ability to meet other basic obligations, such as purchasing food, paying bills and providing for children.

The widespread lack of affordable housing options throughout Alameda County have left many citizens struggling to survive. Respondents state that this housing deficit has had dire consequences ranging from living paycheck to paycheck, increased familial stress, being forced to move out of their communities, or in some cases having to become homeless.

Employment

One of the reasons that high rents and housing deficits are so pronounced is the lack of good jobs that pay living wages. A common complaint was that available jobs were low-wage positions such as fast food/restaurants, home cleaning, and childcare. Many residents are forced into working two or even three jobs just to make ends meet, but are still struggling. With almost 75 percent of participants reporting income of \$30,000 a year or less – the vast majority of whom earn less than \$15,000 a year – the current employment alternatives are insufficient to help them and their families succeed.



Alameda County Healthcare for the Homeless Listening Session

In addition, individuals on a fixed income or who are receiving benefits report that these forms of assistance are not enough to meet their obligations. Similarly, other respondents state that they would appreciate more financial support but that income thresholds for eligibility are too low to help families earning above the threshold but still in need of additional help (see section on Program Access).

Food Issues

Despite an array of nonprofit emergency food providers in the county, food access is still a need for vulnerable populations. An issue for many families who are able to access food is obtaining healthy foods, as many residents complained that the number of food options in their neighborhoods were severely lacking. Purchasing healthy foods such as fresh produce is also a challenge due to their high costs or the fact that nearby stores do

not carry them. Complicating these challenges, many people lack familiarity with healthy foods and how to prepare them, resulting in poor eating habits that are often passed down to younger generations.

Education



St. Mary's Center Listening Session

Education also emerged as an important factor that interconnects with the issues of housing costs and workforce viability. Many working adults in Alameda County have not furthered their education beyond high school, and research has demonstrated a direct

correlation between educational attainment and annual salary.

Many low-income adults expressed a desire to further their education but face barriers, including lack of time due to working several jobs and/or shortage of money due to high rent/household expenses. Some parents admitted feeling unprepared to help their children with lessons or to advocate for their children's academic needs. And many youth believe their schooling does not adequately prepare them for a career or provide a pathway for continuing their education.

Transportation

There was some variance regarding transportation issues, with some Listening Sessions concluding that transportation was a significant issue and others not mentioning it at all. Those who were concerned expressed that public transportation was too expensive (especially for lower-income residents, disabled individuals and seniors), could not access regions that offer stronger employment opportunities, and lacked culturally diverse staff. Another barrier mentioned in certain sessions was the difficulty experienced by many residents in qualifying for paratransit.

Health Care

Health care was mentioned as a significant issue, and although many residents were complimentary of California and the Affordable Care Act (ACA), affordability is still a concern. Some expressed difficulty accessing care due to language barriers, few LGBT-friendly services, the lack of local community-based clinics, and possible ACA repeal. Others spoke of concerns regarding mental/behavioral health services, including varied levels of staff training, limited hours/flexibility in group homes, issues with law enforcement's handling of those with disabilities, gaps in service, and access to information about treatment.

Access to Services

A number of Listening Sessions revealed barriers to accessing public assistance programs such as childcare, subsidy assistance, Medi-Cal, CalFresh, and others. These barriers included being unaware programs existed, not knowing how to access them, and inability to meet eligibility requirements. Many residents expressed frustration at making too much money to qualify for services but barely enough to get by. Other barriers reported were difficult application processes and significant lag times to receive benefits.





Elsa Casanova with La Familia & Sandra Macias with ask sandra

Community Livability

Numerous participants (particularly Oakland residents) complained of poor conditions in their neighborhoods such as no sidewalks, a lack of street lighting, graffiti, litter and dumping issues, violent crime, and drug use. They considered these conditions to be demoralizing and a reflection of the area's poverty. Almost all respondents said that their fellow residents are their neighborhood's greatest asset and want to improve their respective communities, but do not know how to affect that change.

With regard to crime, many residents cited both violent and nonviolent crime as a major challenge. While some people did view neighborhood safety as a strength, a large percentage expressed serious concerns with the amount of illegal activity, with some expressing concerns that youth could also become involved in criminal activities.

Oakland Unified Reentry Project Presents







*Testimony & Solutions From Those Who Have **Survived** Poverty & Incarceration*

Alameda County's War on Poverty, **ALL IN** has awarded O.U.R. Project a grant to gather people share their voices, strengthen their relationships with each other, and to build the power to overcome poverty. **ALL IN** is all of us together, and that is a powerful thing. There are over 300,000 formerly incarcerated individuals in this county, 30,000 of whom are currently on supervision; 80% are black males. This is not acceptable, and this event is your chance to speak truth to power.

Accommodations: Snacks, bus passes & childcare, all available by request.

Sponsored and Hosted By:
The Office of Alameda County Supervisor Wilma Chan, and All In - The New War On Poverty

December 18
1PM to 4PM
&
December 21
6PM to 8PM

Location:
Roots Community Health Center
9925 International Blvd,
Oakland, CA 94603

RSVP to intern@rootsclinic.org

O.U.R Project's Mission:
Driving social, political and economic empowerment for the formerly incarcerated and the communities in which we live

Facebook.com/ourreentry • Twitter.com/ourreentry • ourreentry@gmail.com

Oakland Unified Reentry Project Listening Session Flyer

Language Access

The majority of Alameda County residents generally view diversity as a significant asset in their communities. However, many immigrant residents – particularly non-English speakers – have faced some significant challenges. Spanish-speakers and those of Asian heritage reported difficulty accessing programs such as health care and SSI due to language barriers and a lack of culturally-diverse staff or language-appropriate forms. Many residents cited issues with law enforcement, including language, cultural discrimination, and lack of police response. Some non-English speakers also alluded to discrimination towards youth and undocumented immigrants (or those perceived to be).

Additional language-related barriers mentioned were in the areas of obtaining housing, food distribution, and accessing public resources such as County-specific information.

Community Involvement

Throughout the Listening Sessions, the majority of participants expressed a desire to make their communities stronger, but for the most part were not sure about how to get involved or make a difference. Many residents who were either homeless or trapped in a cycle of poverty explained that they were living with a sense of hopelessness that their situation would be permanent with no real pathway to improvement. This lack of knowledge and feeling of inertia has made difficult efforts to organize and foster sustained community revitalization.



Korean Community Center of the East Bay presentation at the Listening Session Poster Session

Children and Youth Issues

Childcare emerged as a significant concern among respondents, with many parents unable to access care for their children due to the lack of available spaces. Many parents are in the difficult position of having to care for their child instead of taking on full-time employment. In addition, some respondents pointed to an interconnection between high housing costs and the ability to afford childcare services.

Placement of special needs children is also a challenge, with one session reporting that almost all childcare facilities would not accept those with special needs. This places an additional burden on families who are already facing severe economic pressures due to low wages and high living costs.

Summary of Community Strengths



NICHE Community Health

By far, the greatest strength cited by session attendees were the people currently living in their communities. Participants regularly described their fellow residents as helpful, supportive, and dedicated to building unity. Cultural diversity and proximity to residents of the same ethnicity were also listed as sources of emotional support, as was the

enthusiasm expressed by many participants to get involved in their community.

Although the theme of unity as a community strength was predominant throughout the Listening Sessions, many communities listed other unique assets which can be viewed in the individual organizational profiles available in an addendum to this report.

NEXT STEPS FOR ALL IN

ALL IN will continue to work with Listening Session grantees and participants to advance recommendations and promote future contributions. Given that the basis for these sessions is to gain the perspectives of residents experiencing poverty, continued dialogue, collaboration and action are necessary to produce sustainable solutions.

ALL IN will shift its General Membership quarterly meetings to the evenings, and will focus these meetings on topics raised in listening sessions that are also high priorities for Alameda County government, and/or that present opportunities for action. Listening Session grantees and their participants will be invited to attend these meetings, and **ALL IN** will recruit presenters and facilitators for these meetings from among the grantees.

ALL IN will use Listening Session results as a blueprint for action. Identifying community needs will allow **ALL IN** to unite stakeholders and leverage County resources behind innovative, impactful programs. Through this model, we can translate information into real results for the benefit of current and future generations. In 2017, **ALL IN's** three primary focus areas will be:

- Increasing the amount of healthy food available in low-income communities
- Increasing the jobs available for CalWORKS clients and formerly incarcerated individuals
- Addressing the needs of homeless individuals throughout Alameda County.

ALL IN will move the Listening Sessions program to a two-year cycle going forward. We want to allow ample time for the information, relationships and perspective gathered during the 2016 sessions to grow into action projects and influence policy aimed at eradicating poverty within Alameda County.



Community Recommendations

Recommendations made by the communities interviewed during these Listening Sessions were varied, unique and thoughtful, and have provided **ALL IN** with valuable insight into the needs and challenges of Alameda County residents living in poverty. Several of the suggestions provided by grantees could serve as targets for implementation by **ALL IN** within the coming year:

Affordable Housing

- Reuse of empty buildings as affordable/transitional housing
- Lower rental costs/implementation of rent control
- Facilitate collaborations with organizations to expand affordable housing resources
- Greater rent subsidies for low-income/homeless residents
- Relief programs for basic needs (e.g. rent, electricity, water, etc.)

Economic Empowerment

- Create community-based employment resource centers
- Sponsor a job training/entrepreneurship summit
- Mentorship/internship/apprenticeship opportunities for youth
- Career pathways education and vocational/technical training for youth
- Secure a commitment from area corporations to find and train local talent
- Promote positive images of people of color in the STEM workforce
- Create a Business Improvement District in East Oakland's vacant business corridors
- Flexible access to adult job training, career counseling and resume/skills building
- Offer employers incentives for the hiring of the formerly incarcerated

Homelessness

- Creation of a master plan to guide homeless residents to self-sufficiency
- Using healing techniques as a long-term solution to poverty and homelessness
- Offer public education to fight stigmas (e.g. homeless/low-income, addiction, LGBT)
- Mechanism for providing residents basic necessities (e.g. toiletries, clothing)
- Offer creative shelter solutions, such as shipping containers or Homeless Huts
- Implement portable showers/toilets or facility access (e.g. Alameda Naval Base)

Education

- Form a partnership between Alameda County and higher education institutions to create a pathway for low income residents to access education or life skills training
- Affordable education/college and ESL night classes
- Programs to improve youth literacy skills (e.g. after-hours homework assistance)
- Create a financial education program that provides instruction on money management, saving/investing, getting out of debt, starting a business, etc.

Health Care

- Introduce a mobile health clinic for low-income/homeless populations
- Provide ethnically-diverse staff at doctors' offices/clinics
- Create a more effective intervention service model for behavioral health patients to break the cycle of 911 calls, emergency room visits, and crisis home stays
- Open a center to help residents complete medical, housing and school applications
- Widen network to provide whole-person services, including mental health
- Develop culturally-appropriate mental/behavioral health programs
- Address health/education disparities within the African American community

Transportation

- Provide better public transportation options to areas like Silicon Valley
- Free public transportation for seniors
- More transportation access, as many cannot qualify for Paratransit
- Accessible transportation, including those with Chinese and/or Vietnamese staff
- Offer monthly bus passes for low-income students

Food Issues

- Introduce community markets and grocery stores that offer healthier alternatives
- Interactive cooking classes and/or healthy food workshops
- Prevention services for healthy lifestyles, including nutrition and/or cooking classes
- Awareness of food-related resources & healthy eating training
- Availability of more culturally-appropriate food for Spanish-speakers

Children and Youth Issues

- Create more childcare slots for the children of low-income residents
- Encourage greater parental involvement in a child's education
- Enhanced after-school programs & recreational activities for area youth
- Program for transitioning foster youth, possibly through dorm-style housing
- Creation of CalFresh-type program for teens
- Programs for youth employment, entrepreneurship and access to financial aid
- Create more positions of youth visibility, especially at Oakland Youth Commission
- Connection to juvenile justice advocates in Alameda County
- Mentoring programs for young adults and "youth work" by educational nonprofits

Language Access

- Information center for non-English speaking families, particularly regarding benefits
- Make resources for childcare more well-known to non-English speakers
- Update Alameda County resource lists annually and in different languages
- Bilingual professionals to aid those seeking immigration and health care services
- Provide County website and online police report forms in Spanish

Community

- Make assistance programs more accessible by reducing eligibility requirements
- Assistance connecting residents with services and community engagement
- Create Neighborhood Ambassadors to organize community beautification initiatives
- Provide more rigorous code enforcement
- Create a watchdog web site to keep track of politician voting records
- Launch enrollment clinics for rental assistance, medical coverage and job training
- Ensure trust with and cooperation from law enforcement within neighborhoods
- Create a workshop/organizational meeting on advocacy & civic participation
- Include communities in any future collaborative processes



An Initiative of



Join our [mailing list](http://allin.acgov.org): allin.acgov.org

Like us on [Facebook](#): ALL IN Alameda County

Follow us on [Twitter](#): @allinalameda



Supervisor Wilma Chan with a 2016 ALL IN Listening Session Grantee