

A photograph of a woman with short dark hair and glasses, wearing a grey hoodie over a red shirt, smiling and hugging a young child with curly hair. They are holding a white sign with the word 'SCHOOL' in blue and red letters. The background shows a building with large windows and greenery.

SAN FRANCISCO
RISING

Rising in Unity

A Ten-Year
Retrospective of SF Rising

2019 has been a banner year for progressive change in San Francisco. We've rejected politics that benefit big corporations at the expense of everyone else, and now have a progressive supermajority on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. We've passed a historic proposal to close Juvenile Hall. We've moved \$44 million in our city budget to people-centered needs like housing, health, and eviction defense. In the face of a hostile federal administration and a racist, xenophobic president, we've defended sanctuary for all.

No movement wins every fight. But where we've lost races, it's by a margin of a few hundred to a thousand votes – even when we've been significantly outspent by corporate and development opposition.

Here's the bottom line: People power can take on corporate money, and win. We're San Franciscans united for a bold progressive vision, and we're just getting started.

A rising majority



Working families and people of color hold enormous political power when we organize strategically and increase civic engagement among our communities. From the Bayview to Chinatown, the Tenderloin to the Mission – and everywhere in

between – folks who have been shut out of the electoral process by status quo politicians are returning our democracy to the people. With the demographic shifts across the country, we've demonstrated it's time for people of color to lead the fight for justice. Together, we make up the rising majority – and we're dismantling the machinery of San Francisco politics.

Bold ideas take time, but they're worth the investment. The hard-fought victories we've won in the last year were nearly unthinkable a mere decade ago.

When we founded San Francisco Rising in 2009, the nation was in the midst of a recession. City leadership was cutting social services left and right, and they were decimating vital programs that had kept some of the ravages of gentrification at bay.



Instead of requiring the richest among us to pay their fair share, elected officials told low-income communities of color to tighten our belts. Revealing their true priorities, they cut crucial programs and essential services for low-income communities of color.

We didn't have majority representation on the Board of Supervisors or in the Mayor's office that answered to our communities at the time. All across the city, folks were giving in to electoral apathy – demoralized by the understandable belief that San Francisco politics was an impenetrable machine that could never work for them.

It was time to throw down.



Long-standing grassroots organizations that had spent decades organizing Black, Latinx, Chinese, and Filipino communities in San Francisco formed the San Francisco Rising alliance to shift the balance of power and push back against establishment politics

that were harming our communities.

We all had different focuses – housing and worker rights, environmental and racial justice, and youth and women's empowerment – but what we had in common was a progressive vision to build power together. We also had a strategy to win.

Because we'd been doing grassroots organizing in our communities for years, we knew that there were tens of thousands of voters throughout

from 2008, which would have established a citywide affordable housing fund, lost by only about 7,600 votes. In fact, these progressive measures all lost by roughly 8,000 to 13,000 votes - a small but crucial margin. We now had a clear and concrete goal for turning out voters from our communities--so that our communities would become that margin of victory.

Our first step as an alliance was to share our organizing lists among ourselves and commit to reaching our alliance's collective membership of about 4,000 voters by the end of 2009. In our first year, San Francisco Rising members knocked on thousands of doors in the Mission, Bayview, SoMa, and Chinatown. In Spanish, English, Tagalog, and Chinese, we spoke with residents all across the city – many of whom no one had ever contacted before about an election.

Our data shows that when we talk to our communities, they vote. When we contact voters, those people generally vote 12-17% more often than the citywide average in San Francisco. This kind of transformation is what is making working-class communities and communities of color the margin of victory for change in San Francisco.



By the end of our first few years as an alliance, we had dramatically improved voter turnout in communities of color. We'd also proven that our multi-racial organizing model was working.

A decade of victories

Over the last decade, San Francisco Rising has talked to over 50,000 San Francisco voters through our multilingual field campaigns. Our civic engagement programs educate San Francisco voters about issues and policies that lift up working-class communities, give us insight into the kinds of progressive policies our communities want, and have allowed us to lay the groundwork for a series of progressive victories.

Since the launch of our first civic engagement program in 2010, our members have helped to pass landmark legislation including a \$15

minimum wage, a “mansion tax” that funds free City College, and even statewide initiatives like Prop 30 and Prop 55, which tax the richest in California to fund schools and social services. We’ve also mobilized to block local legislation that would take us

backwards, like Propositions P and U, which would have made it harder to build affordable housing and taken housing away from the lowest-income



transformative victories.

For instance, San Francisco City College faced an accreditation crisis in 2014 – threatening the very future of accessible and affordable higher education in our city. San Franciscans thrive at City College, whether they're getting their bachelor's, fulfilling a lifelong dream of returning to school, learning English as a second language, training in a trade skill, or taking courses for their citizenship test.

Sitting this one out wasn't an option. We collaborated with organizations and unions across the city to launch a robust defense. With a mobilized army of San Franciscans behind it, City College bounced back from its accreditation crisis and it is now serving more of our residents than ever. We helped pass a measure funding a free City College pilot program in 2016, and just this year helped secure ten more years of stable funding to make City College free and accessible to all.



An audacious vision

In the years since our founding in 2009, San Francisco Rising has established the People's Platform to guide our community organizing and civic engagement work. Our united organizations share an audaciously progressive and increasingly winnable vision for San Francisco's future.

We believe in a city where all of us can access quality healthcare, affordable public transportation, and excellent public education opportunities for both youth and adults. The San Francisco we're fighting for will be a safe and healthy place for us to live – standing against government-supported gentrification, planning for growth in coordination with those of us who already live here, allowing us to afford to live near the places we work, and ensuring that we have clean air to breathe and clean water to drink.

And finally, we see a future in which San Francisco puts people before profit, in which corporations and the wealthy pay their fair share, and our budget priorities are shaped by working families, people of color and immigrants, not corporations.

We won't achieve this vision through electoral politics or civic engagement alone. This work will always require strong organizing efforts on the ground. By implementing a sophisticated electoral strategy paired with a commitment to base-building and grassroots organizing, we're proving that a new progressive paradigm is possible.

Looking forward to the next decade of this work, we should be optimistic

We're on the verge of leveling up, and we'll need to try things that haven't been tried before.

We need our supporters to invest in big ideas, like College for All, even when they seem audacious. We need the freedom to fight for policies that take time to win. We need the flexibility to run nimble campaigns that meet the needs of voters, whether that means talking to them about the latest ballot measure or helping them hold elected officials accountable.

People power has driven a progressive movement in our city that seemed impossible ten years ago. With your support, we can continue to empower a progressive future built for the people, by the people, in San Francisco and beyond.



