

Rising in Unity

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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

families Working and people of color hold enormous political power when organize we 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

San Francisco that had been discounted by the political process. No one at City Hall was taking meetings with them. Candidates were skipping over them to knock on the doors of "reliable voters," reinforcing a cycle that discouraged their political power. Political consultants that sent mailer after mailer to older, wealthier white voters were ignoring our communities. The message was clear: People of color, immigrants, and low-income voters were not seen as politically valuable to those already in power.

Those voters - our communities - were about to create a new political reality for San Francisco.

City Hall just didn't know it yet.

We got to work building a multi-racial alliance that had enough political unity and boots on the ground to put the needs of communities of color front and center inside City Hall and inside every election.

San Francisco Rising was brand new, but we had the raw ingredients we needed to create a grassroots, community-based political infrastructure capable of running sophisticated electoral operations each election cycle, and winning.

We had less funding and a smaller budget than we would have liked. But we had the organizing expertise, language skills, deep roots in our communities, a commitment to civic engagement as one strategy among many, and a wealth of common causes that could unite our members.

Before we launched SF Rising in 2009, we did a review of local ballot measures of the previous six years that were narrowly defeated and which would have benefited working-class communities of color. One measure 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 households who need it the most.

Together as an alliance, we have been able to support the policy campaigns of our affiliates, ensuring that the California Domestic Worker Bill of Rights, the Free MUNI for Youth campaign, and the DueProcess for All ordinance passed.

We've also taken a stand for the institutions that ensures San Francisco remains a city that cares for all. In 2012, our communities fought back when a powerful hospital conglomerate tried to shut down St. Luke's Hospital, which has long served San Francisco's Mission District and prioritizes treating immigrants, the elderly, and low-income patients - 90% of whom are on Medi-Cal or Medicare. By collaborating with community groups and labor unions across San Francisco, we even secured a \$70 million community benefits agreement from the hospital group, CPMC, and commitments to honor labor agreements with nurses and healthcare workers.

We entered the 2016 election cycle with a strong commitment to continue our work locally against the backdrop of an increasingly troubling presidential race. While the battle on the national front unveiled new levels of right-wing conservatism and normalized hate speech against immigrants, we worked to ensure that San Francisco stuck to our values. Our years of building power within City Hall allowed us to work with electeds to revise and update San Francisco's decades-old sanctuary policy, preparing the City to stand strong against the immoral and unconstitutional challenges it would face under the Trump Administration.

Our first decade of work has proved that when San Franciscans stand united, we can turn some of our most urgent problems into our most 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

and even bolder.

We've built power in San Francisco by building multi-racial alliances across neighborhoods and organizations. Now we're leveling up – we're building alliances with Rising groups across the Bay Area, and have formed the regional network Bay Rising. In 2017, we co-founded the Bay Resistance Network, a rapid response network that defends our communities from the Trump Administration's attacks and brings new people into local movements, led by people of color and those most impacted by right-wing policies.

We're building power regionally through Bay Rising, and statewide with California Calls for even bigger victories. Our first order of business is passing the Schools and Communities First initiative, which will restore the resources we need for our communities by ensuring that everyone pitches in for each other in California, including the wealthiest corporations. We're poised to make this a historic win at the state ballot in November 2020. Simultaneously, we know that in order for San Francisco and the state to become the leading edge of visionary politics, we must activate and organize young voters. To achieve that, SF Rising is a founding member of College for All California: this is a campaign to make all four-year public universities free, and importantly, a campaign that prioritizes the needs of low-income students and students of color. It's the first of many intra-state campaigns we intend to wage for the future of California.

In California and across the country, the corporate stranglehold on our democracy is stronger than ever. This moment requires us to be bold. Our funders and supporters will need to be bold with us. We're always outspent by our opponents, but that doesn't stop us from winning or learning new lessons as we contest for power.

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.



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Learn more about SF Rising and stay connected at sfrising.org.