California 100 Leads Community-Driven Policy-making

Earlier this month, in community centers, high school cafeterias, and parks across Oakland, over 100 members of the San Antonio, East Oakland, Acorn, and Hoover Foster neighborhoods gathered to vote on the Everyday Indicators of community safety and wellbeing. “You don’t see people hanging out on their porches” had many votes as an indicator of a lack of community wellbeing, as did “people outside the neighborhood dump their garbage on our streets”, and “the parks have homeless people instead of kids”.

This novel approach to community-based policy making is a partnership between the Possibility Lab, California 100, and Everyday Peace Indicators seeking to answer the question: how would we design and assess Oakland’s public safety reform if the concept of “safety” was truly being defined by communities themselves? In communities that have been over researched and underserved, the goal is to develop indicators that directly reflect residents’ experiences with which to evaluate the results of policy changes and inform needs assessments. This is where the philosophy of bottom-up policymaking becomes hands-on practice and implementation. The California 100 Innovation Projects are dedicated to establishing this new normal in public policy: collaborative research that includes underheard communities in the creation of policies that affect their lives.

“It’s important for the city and county to know that we lived here a long time, and our concerns are heard. Community wellbeing and community safety is a big plus for everybody. Just this last weekend, we saw so much death in our community. There is so much trauma going on that we gotta focus on keeping our wellbeing.” -Annette Miller, community organizer and focus group facilitator

Tapping into the highly localized expertise in these neighborhoods, California 100 researchers partnered to collaborate and co-facilitate with several organizations from the Oakland Frontline Healers collaborative, including Adamika Village, SAVE Oakland, and BOSS, as well as with TRYBE, a community based organization that serves youth in the San Antonio neighborhood. Four communities across Oakland held multiple focus groups tasked with creating a list of Everyday Indicators of community safety and wellbeing, followed by neighborhood-specific Town Halls to vote on which of these indicators were most relevant to their lives.
Some of the Everyday Indicators of Community Wellbeing included: “Teachers put in extra time supporting their students”, “People can join each other’s events, like cookouts and BBQs”, and “The park is clean”. These Everyday Indicators can become the metrics by which to craft a rigorous plan to identify, pilot, and evaluate reforms, ensuring that policy changes are authentically matching local priorities – in this case, the desire to create more safe and just communities.

The Everyday Indicators (EI) process is a conceptual approach and field-tested methodology for generating participatory, community-centered indicators that draw on community members’ experience of everyday life. Rather than imposing categories, meanings, and pre-defined choices as conceptualized by researchers or policymakers, EI's methodology allows the construction of meaning to emerge from community members themselves in the context of their lived experience. At the same time, the EI process helps translate the “insider’s perspective” into quantitative indicators.