



**To:** California Racial Equity Commissioners

**From:** Racial Equity Commission Staff

**Re:** Community Meet-n-Greet Summary

**Date:** June 21, 2025



Figure 1: Photo of attendees at Clinton Park on June 21, 2025. Credit: Katherine Nagasawa / El Tímpano.

On Saturday, June 21, 2025, the [California Racial Equity Commission](#) partnered with [El Tímpano](#) and [Trybe, Inc.](#) to co-host a Community Meet-n-Greet at Clinton Park in Oakland. In this region of the Bay Area, there is a large Mayan community that speaks Mam, an indigenous spoken language of Guatemala. For this Community Meet-n-

Greet, the Commission centered the Mam-speaking community by having the Meet-n-Greet spoken primarily in Mam.

Approximately 30 adult community members were in attendance, majority were Mam-speaking. A local media organization, Radio B'alam, was also in attendance to livestream the start of the Meet-n-Greet for Mam-speaking residents who were not able to attend in-person. There were also three local Mam interpreters in attendance who provided interpretation in Todos Santos Mam and English for Commission Staff and partners to be part of the conversation and to listen to community in their native language. The livestream led to additional residents coming later in the event to learn more about the Commission and share their voices.

## Opening Remarks

El Tímpano's Mam Community Engagement Coordinator, Martha Calmo Ramirez, opened the morning welcoming community in Mam. The Racial Equity Commission's Executive Director, Dr. Larissa Estes shared the Commission's purpose for hosting community engagement events throughout the state: to listen to community, learn about their lived experiences, and gain an understanding of their community-specific priorities. The Commission's Senior Program Analyst, Jourdan Ringgold, provided an overview of the Commission and its [charge](#).



Figure 2: photo of attendees. Credit: Katherine Nagasawa / El Tímpano.

After the opening remarks, attendees formed a circle to engage in conversation. Martha led introductions with a prompt for the group: share your name and one word that describes your day. One attendee shared, **"I am happy because I can hear people speaking my native language."** Many of the attendees expressed gratitude and shared that they were curious about the event and came to learn and be in community.

Martha provided an overview of the interactive activity and facilitated the discussion with guiding questions. Below is a summary of key themes that emerged from the Mam-speaking Community Meet-n-Greet.

### Access to Resources and Services

Several attendees shared the challenges they experience with accessing public benefits and services, as the Mam language is only spoken, not written. One community member said, **"I wish there was more resources and support from the government for the Mam community."** Community members shared the importance of having Mam speakers working within community-based organizations that help residents access resources and services, and how these organizations need funds to be able to hire more people who speak Mam and create materials inclusive of the different Mam dialects. Another attendee shared, **"we work, we pay taxes, but those tax dollars don't reach our community."**

In addition, programs, resources, and services are often available in Spanish. Many attendees have experienced being labeled Guatemalan and/or Latino, which dismisses their Indigenous identity. One community member said, **"I don't speak English**

**or Spanish. I only speak Mam.”** Attendees also shared their experience of being left out of their children's education due to language barriers. In Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), Mayan Mam-speaking students are the largest newcomer group, yet there is very little support for these students and their families. One attendee shared, **“parents have no avenue to understand what is happening. Never invited to parent-teacher conferences because they never reserved resources. Oakland has a few Mam-speakers in the district...not every district has awareness or community support.”**

### Access to jobs and living wages

A common concern that was shared during the Meet-n-Greet was access to jobs, specifically jobs that can pay for the high cost of living in the region. Attendees shared similar sentiments: **“we need to work, but there is no work...we can't live if we don't have a job...working two to three days [a week] is not enough to pay rent and buy groceries.”** Job insecurity creates fear and worries among community members, specifically for those who are undocumented – they are more likely to fall into crisis.



Figure 3: photo of attendees during interactive discussion. Credit: Katherine Nagasawa / El Tímpano.

### Need for Adult Education

Many attendees also described the need for adult education to address poverty and limited capacity. One attendee shared that kids are sent to work at an early age and taken away from education [to help financially]. Another attendee shared her desire for adults in her community to learn English and Spanish as well as go back to school. She shared, **“the first thing we think about is to support our children, but we forget to support ourselves...if there is a school for adults it can help us with success.”** Other attendees shared the need for adult education and support for new arrivals.

### Considerations for the Commission

The Community Meet-n-Greet in Oakland was informative for both the Mam-speaking community and the Commission. The concerns and priorities that were shared provide



the Commission with a snapshot of the unique needs of the Mam-speaking community in Oakland. For additional insight on the event, the Commission's community partner, El Tímpano, published an [article](#) highlighting the Community Meet-n-Greet.

In addition, this Meet-n-Greet was the first time the Commission offered a community engagement event primarily in a language other than English. The Commission will continue to consider this approach in future community engagement efforts.

*Prepared by Jourdan Ringgold, Senior Program Analyst*





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