



**To:** California Racial Equity Commissioners

**From:** Racial Equity Commission Staff

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

**Date:** March 10, 2025



Figure 1: Group photo of attendees at Imperial Valley College on March 19, 2025

On March 19, 2025, the [California Racial Equity Commission](#) and the [California Youth Empowerment Commission](#) co-hosted a Community Meet-n-Greet at Imperial Valley College in Imperial, California. The Commissions collaborated with two community-based organizations to plan and promote the event: Comite Civico del Valle and Imperial Valley Equity and Justice Coalition. Over 70 community members were in attendance, with about a third of the audience utilizing interpretation services. Both Commissions visited Imperial Valley to host a joint Meet-

n-Greet event for community to learn about each of the Commissions and for the Commissions to engage and listen to community members' experiences of living in the area.

**Opening Remarks** The Executive Director of Comite Civico del Valle (CCV), Luis Olmedo, opened the evening welcoming the Commissions and the community. The Executive Organizer of Imperial Valley Equity and Justice Coalition (IVEJ), Daniela Flores, also gave opening remarks, emphasizing the importance of community power and strength and also briefly shared about current local policy proposals that will impact many community members of Imperial Valley. Racial Equity Commissioner, Dr. Manuel Pastor explained his purpose for serving on the Racial Equity Commission and shared a personal story about the recent wildfires that impacted Los Angeles. In his closing, Commissioner Pastor expressed, **“racial equity is not a special interest, it is a public interest.”**



Figure 2: Commission Pastor giving opening remarks at Imperial Valley College on March 19, 2025



Figure 3: photo of research presentation

Figure 4: group photo of UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Staff, students, and Commissioner Pastor at Imperial Valley College on March 19, 2025

After the opening remarks, Director of the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, Dr. Veronica Terriquez, and several students from Imperial Valley College, UC San Diego, and UCLA presented their research findings that explored racial inequities, disparities, and youth needs in the Imperial Valley. The students' survey focused on job aspiration and training, air quality and health coverage, educational attainment, and civic engagement.

Their survey findings raised several key needs and a question: *How do we invest more in young people?* The youth residents need more pathways toward upward mobility and job access as well as tailored guidance in career-readiness, educational attainment and degree completion. Additionally, there is a need to make job training and access in certain industries more inclusive of young women and non-binary people in the Imperial Valley. At the end of the presentation, one recommendation to address the needs of youth was to make the research areas and survey findings priorities for local

improvements, which could provide opportunities for the local government to establish trust within communities and find solutions.

After the presentation, Executive Director of the Youth Empowerment Commission, Thomisha Wallace, shared an overview of the Youth Empowerment Commission and its purpose to listen, learn, and advocate for youth as well as to make recommendations to address pressing issues impacting California's youth. Director Wallace also shared the issue areas that the Youth Empowerment Commission will focus on, including education and career-readiness, mental health, homelessness and housing, juvenile justice and foster care, and climate crisis and civic engagement.

Senior Program Analyst of the Racial Equity Commission, Dyllyn Turner-Keener, provided an overview of the Racial Equity Commission and its purpose to address racial inequities in California. She explained the role of the Commission is to listen to communities throughout the state and translate their lived experiences into information that informs



the development of a Racial Equity Framework. The Framework will offer best practices and tools for state and local government agencies to address racial disparities and inequities, specifically in the areas of budget, data, and community engagement.

Executive Director of the Racial Equity Commission, Dr. Larissa Estes transitioned the evening by inviting attendees to participate in a community dialogue. Attendees took turns speaking (in English and Spanish), sharing their experiences, concerns, and priorities in the Imperial Valley. Several community members shared personal stories and lived experiences of racial inequities and discrimination – particularly highlighting challenges unique to living on the border. Below is a summary of key themes that emerged from the Meet-n-Greet discussion in Imperial Valley.

### **Basic Needs and Access**

Community members shared stories about the difficulties of having their basic needs met, specifically with housing, public restrooms near border crossings, disability services, and transportation. One attendee shared that in Calexico, trash cans and bathrooms were removed, and public facilities are not allowing people to use their restrooms, which results in “people having to use the bathroom in public (on the ground).” In addition, another attendee shared **there is a need for support and more access to resources for both invisible and visible disabilities**, especially for young adults who age out of existing programs.

### **Disparities in Outcomes**

A few members of the community commented on **conditions and outcomes being “worse than ever” for residents of the Imperial Valley**. One attendee shared her experience in witnessing discrimination against women who were going through divorce and were not receiving appropriate language translation of legal documents or legal process, which has led to disparities in economic outcomes for divorced women in Imperial County.

Another attendee shared their experience as a farmworker and how his exposure to pesticides resulted in cancer, along with several of his peers. He shared that among his peers, he is the remaining survivor. This attendee’s story illustrates the disparities in health outcomes for farmworkers in the Imperial Valley.



## **Civic engagement**

Several attendees shared their desire for more civic engagement in the Imperial Valley. One attendee shared that he attended Imperial Valley College 55 years ago. He shared that **“we need our young people [who leave the Imperial Valley for higher education] to come back to their community.”** Another attendee shared that in Imperial County, voting turnout is one of the lowest in the state and emphasized the importance of voting for the low-income, labor class, and agriculture workforce in Imperial County.

After community dialogue, the Vice Chair and Commissioner of the Youth Empowerment Commission, Aidan Lin-Tostado, concluded the evening with closing remarks. Commissioner Aidan expressed his gratitude to the Imperial Valley community for sharing their stories and recognized the **intergenerational solidarity** in the room. He encouraged the community members to continue to have courageous dialogue, and to do it unapologetically.

## **Considerations for the Commission**

The Community Meet-n-Greet in the Imperial Valley was informative and invigorating for both the community and the Commissions. Several attendees expressed their gratitude for both Commissions coming to the Imperial Valley to listen to their stories, questions, and feedback. The unique stories that were shared by community members of the Imperial Valley helps paint a clearer picture of the different lived experiences of Californians, which will inform the Framework, community engagement, and the work of both Commissions.

*Prepared by Jourdan Ringgold, Senior Program Analyst*