

Policy Advocacy 101 Toolkit

Policy is a powerful tool for addressing issues of inequity in our communities. Laws, ordinances, and regulations can make an important difference in sharing resources and creating opportunities. They also send a message to the community about the value we place on certain issues and what can be done to make a change. This toolkit provides an introductory overview of policy advocacy, focusing on the local level. The information contained in this Toolkit was collected as part of the La Gente Unida study on Latinx Immigrant and Indigenous Health and Advocacy on California's Central Coast.

COUNTY POLICIES

County governments are an important place for policy work. Counties are primarily responsible for carrying out state-funded programs, enrollment into public services, infrastructure, education, and local public health departments. In particular, the County typically oversees things like **roads, utilities, permits, and parks for all unincorporated areas** – places that are not formally part of any city government.

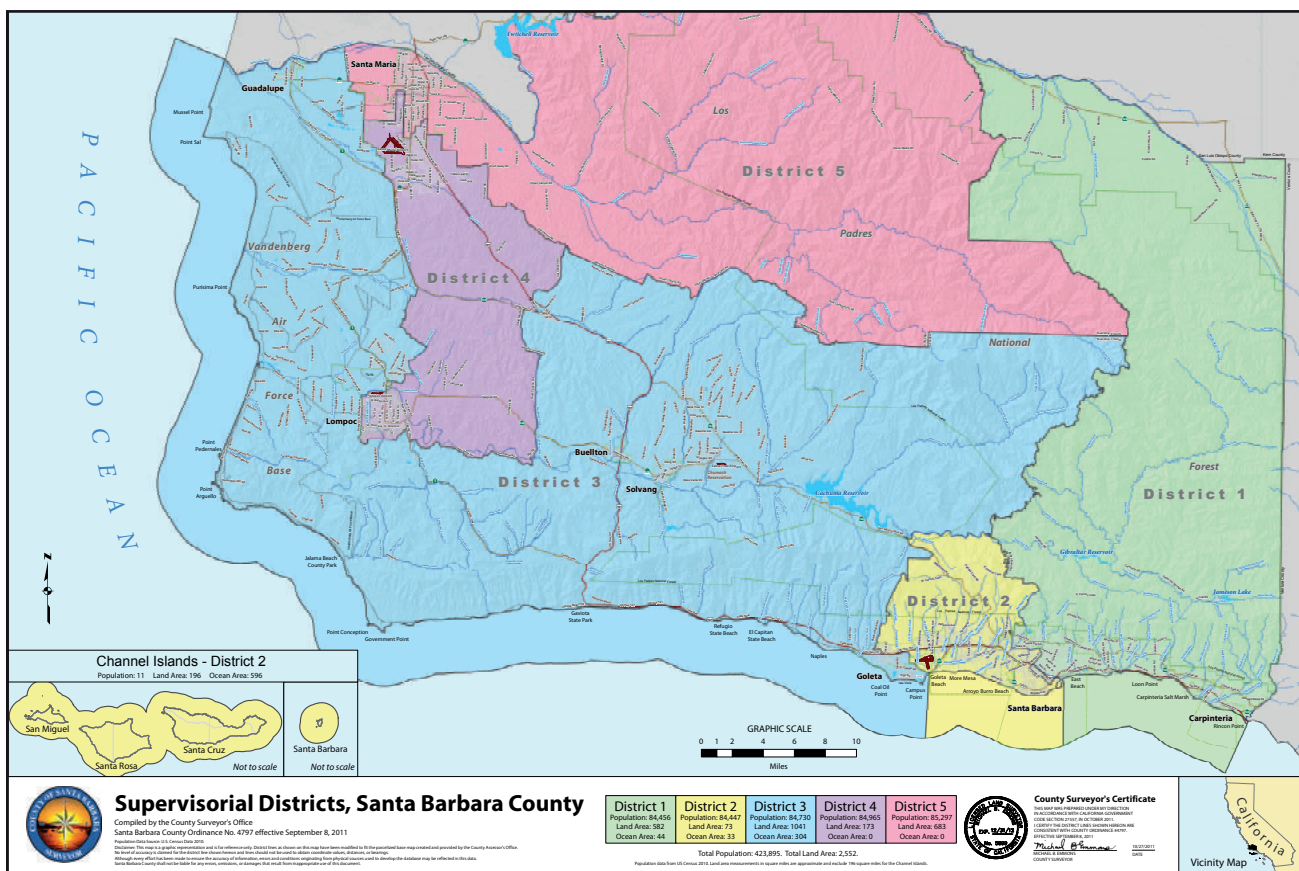


Image Source: Santa Barbara County



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In California, each County is organized into **Districts**. Each District is then represented by one member on the **Board of Supervisors**. Supervisors are elected once every four years. The Board of Supervisors is required to hold regular public meetings that include opportunities for residents to share their views on policy issues. Each Supervisor is also expected to be available to residents of their own District to hear concerns, complaints, and issues that may arise. Due to the large number of people in any given District, staff members and legislative analysts are usually involved in collecting this information and sharing it with the Supervisor. **In the chart (page 1), you can see the five Districts that make up Santa Barbara County.**

In addition to the Board of Supervisors, each County has a **Planning Commission**. The structure of the Planning Commission is similar, with each District being represented by one individual. These individuals are appointed and approved by the Supervisors. The role of the Planning Commission is to represent the interests of residents in developing a **General Plan**, investigate policy issues, sit on relevant committees, and provide recommendations on policies that the Board of Supervisors is considering.

While the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors are in charge of making policy decisions, various officers and agencies carry out the implementation of these policies. The individuals holding these positions are often appointed or hired directly and not elected by the people. **However, as public officials, they are required to act in the best interest of the communities they serve.**



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CITY POLICIES

Government systems in cities and towns can vary somewhat in their structure, based on the size and political background of the local community. For example, in Santa Barbara County, Goleta was recently incorporated as a city in 2000. The people elect **Councilmembers** and the Mayor through a city-wide election, and they also take on the role of **Planning Commission** as well. Up until 2018, the position of **Mayor** was determined internally by the City Council, who would appoint one Councilmember to the position.

Larger cities, like **Santa Barbara** and **Santa Maria**, are set up similar to the County government, with separate District elections and a **Planning Commission** that the elected officials appoint. City Planning Commissions similarly develop a **General Plan**, hear from the public, and provide advice to the City Councilmembers, Mayor, and City staff on the formation and implementation of policy.

At the city level, it can make an especially big difference how people vote for their elected officials. For example, in 2018, the City of Santa Maria changed its election format to have residents vote for City Council members within a specific District, rather than being elected city-wide. **This switch allows for voters to be represented by someone from their own area and ensures that no single region of the city is determining policy for everyone.** In cities that are growing in size, local government can be targeted to make policies, as well as to actually change the way that government works.

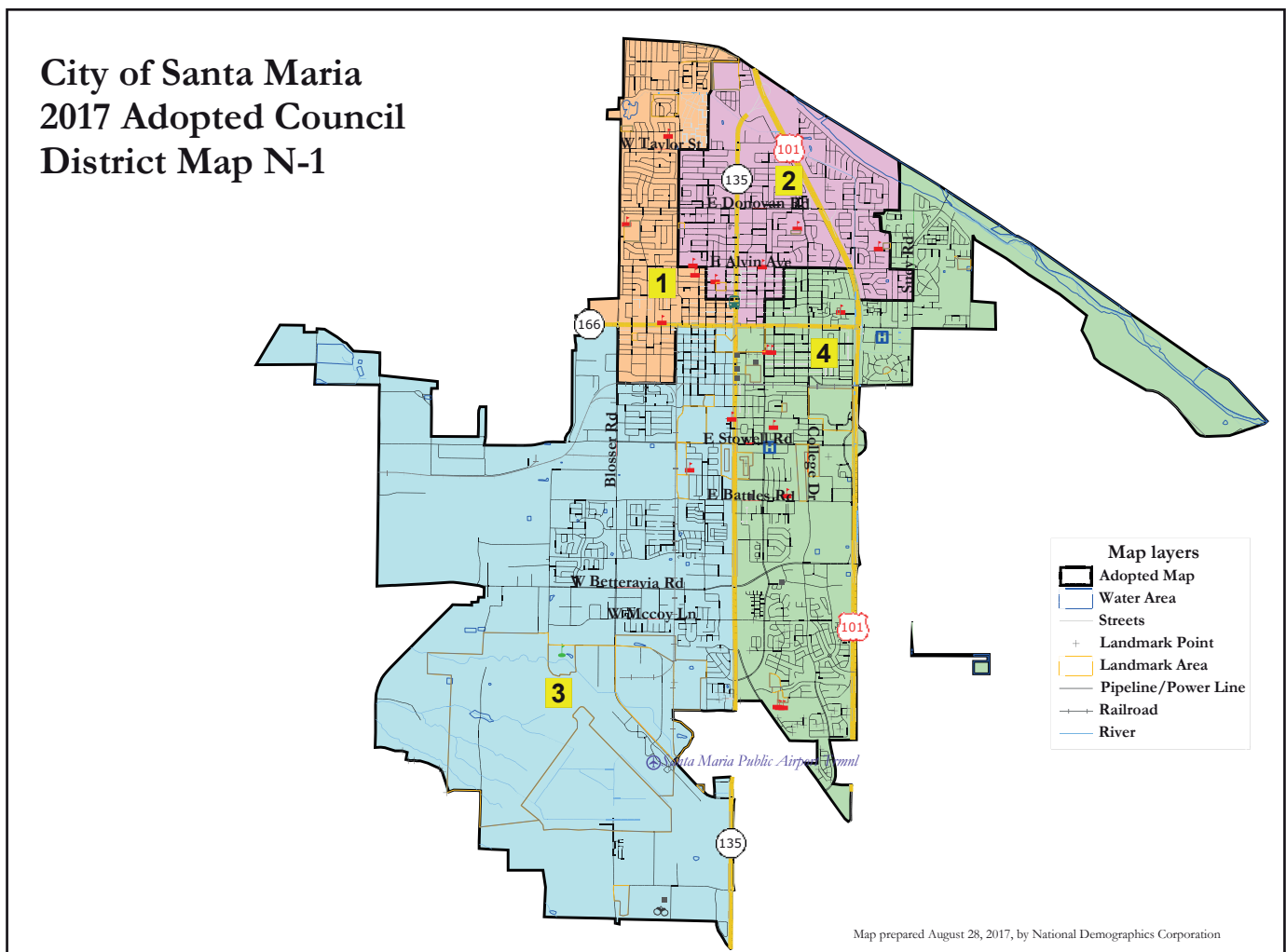


Image Source: City of Santa Maria



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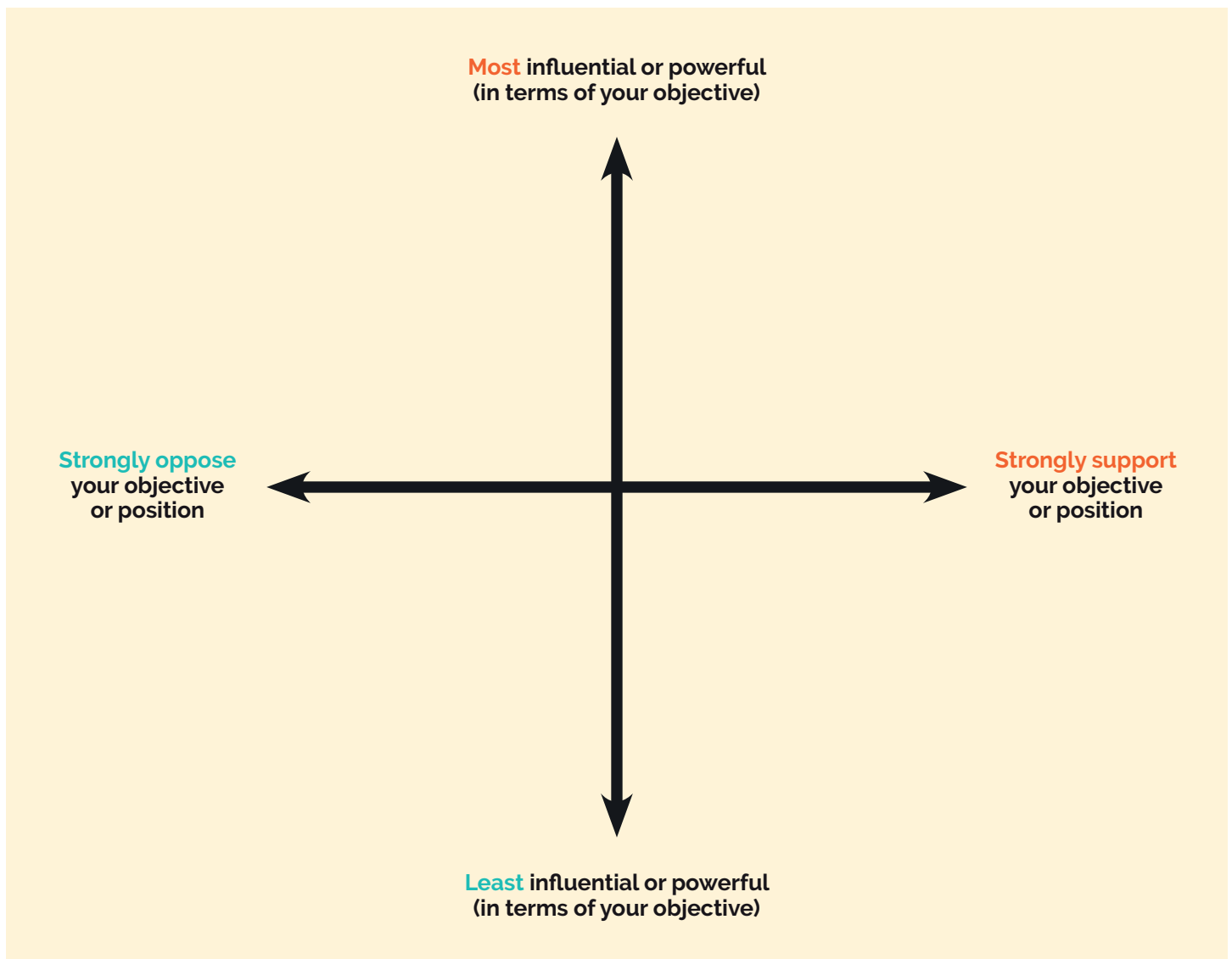
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POWER MAPPING

While these government officials are the most directly involved in actually writing and passing local policies, **other stakeholders can influence the formation of policy and how well policies are implemented.** First off, by influencing everyday people, you can change **hearts and minds**, impact **future voting patterns**, and diminish the **bias and discrimination** that creates unnecessary barriers for minoritized groups. In addition, other organizational decision-makers may be relevant to a specific policy goal, like School Board members, school administrators, hospitals, and business owners.

Power Mapping is a technique that helps to identify the multiple potential targets in a policy campaign. The chart included here is a beginning guide to using this method. First, you evaluate decision-makers in terms of their values. You can use information from the news, their website, and past voting history to estimate whether they will most likely support or oppose your goals. Then, you can **place individuals on the included chart by also considering how much influence they have on your specific outcome.** Laying this out visually can then help to identify the most effective points of intervention for advocacy work.





ADVOCACY STRATEGIES

There are lots of ways to advocate for new and updated policies that can better serve our communities. The most effective strategies typically combine multiple tactics to target different stakeholders.

TACTICS	WHEN TO USE
Voting in government elections. Adult U.S. citizens are eligible to vote and must register to receive a ballot. Although Presidential election cycles every four years are the most popular, important local elections often occur in midterm and off-year elections.	<i>Every time! Voting is crucial to deciding who will be making laws, bringing about new policies, and ensuring long-term political change.</i>
Position papers are letters of support or opposition that communicate the impact of policies for specific groups. These letters are often written by organizations, but they can also be submitted by individual advocates, community members, and experts.	<i>When a policy is being proposed or considered, especially when you believe that one or more key votes can influence the outcome of a vote.</i>
Public comment allows individuals to speak their position aloud during a formal meeting and be heard by a group of policymakers. Public comments can be made during general meetings or hearings focused on a specific issue or topic.	<i>For contentious policies that you expect will have substantial disagreement, either from the public or among the decision-makers who are voting.</i>
Legislative briefings are similar to traditional "lobbying" and include times when advocates share information, perspective, and stories with an elected official or their staff. This may include the Legislative Director, Field Representatives, or other staff members.	<i>Either attempting to propose new policies, providing substantial amendments to a policy that has been proposed, or to gain support for a specific decision on a policy.</i>
Policy memos are an opportunity to showcase in-depth research that supports one or more policy changes. Policy memos need to be clear, to the point, and well-supported in order to convince a legislative audience.	<i>To introduce new ideas into policy conversations and shed light on issues that are being ignored by elected officials.</i>
Direct action includes a range of tactics like protest, marches, and strikes . Direct action relies on creative strategies that can bring attention to a community or perspective that is being excluded from mainstream conversations.	<i>To hold policymakers accountable, direct action is useful for bringing media attention to a group, issue, or event.</i>
Community organizing is an approach that focuses on developing solutions to issues that are rooted in community capacity and strength. This may include direct service as well as efforts to develop leaders and community-based organizations.	<i>Organizing is needed all the time and is especially useful for when policymakers are not receptive to a group's issues, or are actively hostile.</i>

For more resources and examples of successful advocacy materials, visit <https://tinyurl.com/Advocacy101Toolkit>



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PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR BIO

Mario Espinoza-Kulick (*he/él*) is a Doctoral Candidate in sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Mario draws from his own experience as an HIV+, Queer, Latinx, and Indigenous person to raise awareness around health inequities.

For more information about this study, please visit our website at <https://tinyurl.com/LaGenteUnida>.

You can contact Mario at mvespinoza@ucsb.edu or by phone at (805) 904-9225.

METHODOLOGY NOTE

This report is based on a larger project examining Latinx immigrant and Indigenous health across California's Central Coast, including participant observation, interviews, focus groups, collection of news data, and a survey of health assets and needs. Individuals were eligible to participate in the study if they were an immigrant community member (Undocumented, Dreamers, mixed-status family member, resident and/or a naturalized citizen), or as an advocate (individuals that actively participate in social change efforts toward advancing immigrant health equity).

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