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**California Civil Rights Division
Community Conflict Resolution Unit:
Background, Impact, Analysis, and Case Studies**

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* Note: This interim version of the report is intended to focus on the policy client, the California Civil Rights Department Community Conflict Resolution Unit (CRD CCRU). In July 2026, an additional version will be distributed publicly and posted to Policy Lab practicum website for the community conflict dispute resolution field as a whole.

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I. About the California Civil Rights Division Community Conflict Resolution Unit

The California Community Conflict Resolution Unit (CCRU) was launched in October 2022 within the California Civil Rights Department (CRD). CCRU was part of the State’s response to rising reports of hate crimes, hate incidents, and broader community tensions linked to discriminatory practices.¹ Unlike enforcement-oriented civil rights functions, CCRU operates as an impartial non-law-enforcement resource that provides confidential conflict resolution support at no cost to participating communities.² Its primary role is to promote peaceful relations by providing support to communities in conflict.³ To these ends, the unit provides services including:

- Design conflict resolution processes
- Facilitation
- Education
- Consultations
- Mediation

CCRU has been designed to help communities in conflict reach a mutually acceptable outcome, as the unit also works with local communities, including community-based organizations, non-profits and governmental agencies.⁴

CCRU’s statutory authority is grounded in the California Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA) and related provisions of the Government Code, which authorize CRD to act as a peacemaker in times of community conflict and to coordinate with local human relations commissions throughout the state.⁵ Given that this responsibility is under-resourced and staffing is limited, CCRU envisions its role as a source of support for conflict resolution practitioners across the state: Taking the lead in building a statewide infrastructure allows for greater collaboration and mutual aid among existing resources. In addition, CCRU will provide this support by co-hosting annual meetings among conflict resolution experts and practitioners, providing an ever-green directory of services inclusive of all conflict resolution programs in the state, and by hosting virtual sessions among communities of practice in conflict resolution. While in many ways, this statutory design mirrors the federal Community Relations Service (CRS): CCRU does not investigate or adjudicate claims, impose penalties, or determine liability. Rather, its focus is to use and further develop approaches using facilitation, mediation, training, consultation, and process design services aimed at preventing escalation, repairing

¹ *Cnty. Conflict Resolution Unit*, CAL. CIV. RIGHTS DEP’T, <https://calcivilrights.ca.gov/community-conflict-resolution-unit/> (last visited Jan. 2, 2026) (describing CCRU’s mission and launch).

² *Id.* (listing neutrality, confidentiality, lack of law enforcement authority, and free services as core features of CCRU’s work).

³ CAL. CIV. RIGHTS DEP’T, 2022 ANN. REP. 11-12, (2022) <https://calcivilrights.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/32/2024/06/CRD-2022-Annual-Report.pdf> (describing the launch of the Community Conflict Resolution Unit).

⁴ CAL. CIV. RIGHTS DEP’T CMTY. CONFLICT RESOLUTION UNIT, BUILDING A COMM.-CENTERED FOUND. FOR CIV. RIGHTS MEDIATION 7–9 (Aug. 28, 2023).

⁵ Cal. Gov’t Code §§ 12931–12933; Cal. Code Regs. tit. 2, §§ 10300–10303 (authorizing CRD to coordinate with human relations commissions and address community conflict).

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relationships, and restoring community trust.⁶

A. About CCRU

Since its launch, CCRU has operated with a deliberately flexible service model that prioritizes responsiveness over formal intake thresholds. Between October 2022 and January 2025, CCRU conducted more than 130 community engagement sessions and meetings, including over 60 consultations and at least 12 formal trainings, and interacted with 4,000 participants statewide.⁷ Its work spans urban, suburban, and rural communities and includes engagement with school districts, tribal governments, local governments, nonprofit organizations, faith-based institutions, human relations commissions, and state agencies.⁸

CCRU's interventions have addressed a wide range of conflict contexts, including racial and ethnic tensions among youth, hate incidents affecting LGBTQ+ communities, disputes between tribal governments and local authorities, community concerns about access to public resources, and conflicts arising from misinformation or fear following high-profile acts of violence.⁹ CCRU has facilitated multi-session dialogues involving local leaders, students, advocates, and public officials, reflecting a recognition that many community conflicts are not discrete incidents but manifestations of longer-standing structural and relational breakdowns.¹⁰

CCRU has also played a coordination and capacity-building role within California's broader civil rights and anti-hate infrastructure. It has supported state agencies and grantees administering the Stop the Hate program, collaborated with the California Commission on the State of Hate, and worked extensively with city and county human relations commissions to align local response mechanisms with state-level resources.¹¹ In some communities, CCRU's involvement has helped catalyze the formation of new anti-hate coalitions or strengthen existing local institutions tasked with addressing discrimination and community conflict.¹²

At the same time, CCRU's scope and scale remain constrained. CCRU operates with a very small core staff and relies heavily on partnerships, training, and consultation to extend its reach across California's diverse regions. While this model offers flexibility and preserves

⁶ *Cnty. Conflict Resolution Unit: Meet the CCRU*, CAL. CIV. RIGHTS DEP'T, <https://calcivilrights.ca.gov/community-conflict-resolution-unit/#meetCCRUBody> (last visited Apr. 26, 2026).

⁷ See Cal. Civ. Rights Dep't, 2024 Annual Report 17 (2025), <https://calcivilrights.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/32/2025/11/CRD-2024-Annual-Report.pdf> (noting that in its first two years, CCRU held more than 120 community sessions, including more than 20 conciliations and more than 12 trainings); Comm'n on the State of Hate, *Minutes 5* (Feb. 26, 2025), https://calcivilrights.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/32/2025/03/Attachment-A_CSH-Meeting_2.26.2025_Minutes.pdf? (where CRD staff reported CCRU had held "over 100 community engagement sessions, dozens of consultations, and 10 trainings, reaching 4,000 people since its inception" as of February 2025). CCRU staff provided conservative estimates of current numbers.

⁸ *Cnty. Conflict Resolution Unit: Who We Work With*, CAL. CIV. RIGHTS DEP'T, <https://calcivilrights.ca.gov/community-conflict-resolution-unit/#weWorkWithBody> (last visited Apr. 27, 2026).

⁹ *Cnty. Conflict Resolution Unit: Testimonials*, CAL. CIV. RIGHTS DEP'T, <https://calcivilrights.ca.gov/community-conflict-resolution-unit/#testimonialsBody> (last visited Apr. 26, 2026).

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.*

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neutrality, it also raises questions about sustainability, prioritization, and the degree to which a state-level facilitation unit can embed consistently in communities facing recurring or deeply entrenched conflict. These design trade-offs, several of which reflect longstanding issues encountered at the federal level, establish the context for the subsequent analysis and recommendations.

1. Types of Matters Handled by CCRU

Since 2022, CCRU has worked on numerous perceived discrimination matters. And when dealing with each case, CCRU has considered various paths to quell or address conflict, based on the needs of the individual communities within California. The main categories of discrimination matters addressed by CCRU are:

Racial Discrimination: Racial discrimination has been a prominent category for CCRU to address. For categorization purposes, racial discrimination matters include any issues of discrimination or hate between two races or ethnicities, including Black-Latino relations and anti-Asian slurs.¹³ CCRU has been involved in at least fourteen cases to resolve a matter dealing with race-based discrimination in a community.¹⁴

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity: Sexual orientation and gender identity issues are the second most common type of matter handled by CCRU. As California experienced an increase in anti-LGBTQ+ hate incidents, CCRU addressed nine cases involving discrimination and hate against the LGBTQ+ community.¹⁵ These include matters regarding transgender violence, conflict between LGBTQ+ communities and local police, and conflict between members of the LGBTQ+ community when celebrating Pride.¹⁶

Indigenous/Tribal Rights and Discrimination: CCRU's scope includes substantial indigenous and tribal sovereignty work, as California is routinely involved in addressing conflict related to historical injustices to Native tribes and persons.¹⁷ CCRU has coordinated several programming activities to work directly with indigenous and tribal conflict, including mediating matters between tribes and governmental entities and facilitation of conversations for the California Truth and Healing Council.¹⁸

Interfaith Hate and Religious Discrimination: Interfaith and religious discrimination, while not as common, appears to be a growing area of conflict for some Californians. It includes any hate or threats targeting faith groups and consultations about religious community protection. Four matters have been reported for the last three years, and CCRU is presently seeing an increase in reported incidents of faith based and religious conflict. For interfaith-related matters, CCRU has historically dealt with such tension by organizing facilitated

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Cnty. Conflict Resolution Unit: Testimonials, supra.*

¹⁷ *Welcome to the Governor's Off. of Tribal Affairs*, GOVERNOR'S OFF. OF TRIBAL AFFAIRS, <https://tribalaffairs.ca.gov/> (last visited Apr. 27, 2026).

¹⁸ Cal. Strategic Growth Council, *Attachment A: Strategic Growth Council Agency Updates 2* (Aug. 22, 2024), https://sgc.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/20240822-Item7_AttachmentA.pdf

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listening sessions among religious leaders in the local area.¹⁹ It is anticipated that CCRU will be called upon to engage in expanded efforts at community problem-solving and design of processes, offering new opportunities for collaboration around religious tensions.

Housing Discrimination, Disability Discrimination, and Accessibility: CCRU has hosted at least four housing and disability forums or meetings to address reported discrimination against Californians.

Immigration and Civic Participation Conflict: CCRU works hard to provide a safe and confidential environment for Californians to report conflicts related to discrimination based on immigration status. In aggregate, CCRU has handled at least two matters concerning immigration hate and tensions arising in various areas of California. Given current societal conditions, CCRU anticipates increased calls for assistance in conflict resolution and new opportunities to uplift immigrant communities' capacity for effective civic engagement.

General Hate/Public Conflict Matters: In some matters, CCRU may be called upon to respond to general hate matters within the community that require serious intervention or training. Some of these matters likely overlap with other categories that have been listed above. A total of at least twenty-two matters are reported to reflect the work done by CCRU under this category.

2. Trends over Time in CCRU's Work

CCRU has progressively shifted its energies based on the needs of the community and the resources provided, and its role has expanded to become more effective at handling discrimination.

Shift 1 - Reactive to Preventive: Since its inception, CCRU has evolved its focus to better utilize its statewide presence as a community conflict resolution resource. The unit has built relationships with local community-based organizations in order to maintain awareness of what is happening across all California communities. CCRU is now a more visionary division that can implement and mobilize resources dedicated to prevention of conflict, rather than being reactive and addressing harms only as they happen. Today, the team engages in more activities like de-escalation training, conflict management, and safety planning. In doing so, CCRU serves as a knowledge base with information about local resources for mutual aid, a convener (or co-convenor) among conflict resolution practitioners, a thought partner for confidential consultation, and a provider of guidance on appropriate conflict prevention or intervention.

Shift 2 - Short-Term to Long-Term: When CCRU's activities began, the needs were often single events. When CCRU engaged with a conflict, their plan would be to host an activity aimed at addressing the tensions between community members. In many cases, CCRU attempted to address issues with listening sessions and facilitation of conversation between members. It became clear over time, however, that CCRU could play a more effective role: Specifically, CCRU learned that—given its statewide responsibility with limited resources in a field with growing needs—it must have steady and repeated engagement with conflict resolution partners.

¹⁹ *Id.*

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CCRU is creating strategies that will allow it to be nimble, effective, and valued among conflict resolution practitioners in the long term.

Shift 3 - Expansion of Partnerships: The main organizations affiliated with CCRU initially included local community groups, advocacy groups, and faith leaders. Overall, hate and discrimination incidents have increased and problems have been further complicated by economic, political, and social tensions that go well beyond their local community and the state of California. In 2025, hate crimes required more of CCRU's attention, necessitating greater efforts at outreach to identify and engage support among networks of conflict resolution experts as well as more creative responses to the increasingly-complex situations. More recently, CCRU has strengthened partnerships with community stakeholders, including local human relations commissions, state agencies, and tribal governments. In addition, CCRU has identified thought leaders and organizers across the country who are dedicated to peacebuilding and peacemaking. The opportunity is untapped for CCRU to bring visibility to innovations in the field of conflict resolution, and through the expansion of partnerships it has the capacity become a leader in supporting communities that are facing threats of conflict and violence: building understanding about sources of conflict, developing creative ways to share narratives about sources of tension, and showing young people skills in preventing conflict and intervening in efforts to get to common ground. By maintaining its partnerships and building new relationships, CCRU is able to shape agendas, assist groups with creating policy responses to community conflict, and help mediate issues between governmental entities and community members, as well as others who face disruption and threats of violence in their communities.

B. Impact of CCRU

California is home to people with amazingly diverse identities and backgrounds. CCRU's work is essential to the role of CRD and has the potential to uplift the complexities of issues related to identity, economic disparities, and the ever-evolving culture in a state known for its rich diversity. CCRU provides a unique avenue where those who are experiencing tensions can turn to for proactive support before the tensions erupt into actual violence and impact a larger population. While CRD's other services typically handle matters that have already reached the legal complaint stage, CCRU delivers additional value because of its proactive conflict resolution focus. It remains one of the most reliable ways to assess source(s) of tension and identify key players to help gain insight and provide leadership in a community, all of which are essential in reducing tension likely to lead to litigation.

1. CCRU's Value to California Communities

This report borrows from categories of services established by the U.S. Department of Justice's Community Relations Service (CRS) to evaluate CCRU's impact on the state of California. All data relied upon in this report is from publicized information of CCRU's activities since its 2022 launch.²⁰

²⁰ 2022 Annual Report, *supra*.

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General Community Relations: General community relations matters refer to incidents within communities that are not related to conflict in schools or conflict rising between community members and law enforcement. According to the data, at least eight interventions by CCRU in California have been due to general community relations issues. These include:²¹

- Creating an anti-hate coalition and fostering ongoing support
- Creating Black and Latino community and student dialogues
- Hosting forums that allow community members to respond to hate incidents
- Working on contingency planning with Pride groups
- Hosting interfaith listening sessions
- Engaging with local human relations commissions
- Assisting with regional summits and community convenings

CCRU has done extensive outreach enabling community members to easily request CCRU's services. When community leaders and organizers need support or access to resources beyond their knowledge, CCRU is able to collaborate and provide answers. For example, when the unit learned from a Filipino American association about a rise in hate speech, CCRU organized and conducted a de-escalation training session to help train community members.²² CCRU has also worked on forming a more positive relationship between tribes and local governments in California. When CCRU learned of the strained relationships between tribes and the county governments, it sought out relationship building with both parties and discussed the possibility of building more collaborative opportunities together.²³ Once both parties agreed, CCRU brought the representatives together and began collaborative trust building relationship work. These examples of intervention by CCRU highlight the ways in which its presence is critical for communities across California.

Administration of Justice: Administration of justice matters focus on the practical application of law and managing legal systems in relation with community members. It includes work between community and law enforcement organizations, including city police departments and tribal police offices. These include:

- Mediating over perceived discriminatory municipal permit allocation²⁴
- Police and LGBTQ+ trust-building
- Mediation between tribes and local governments, including police departments²⁵
- Development of a rapid response coordinations after Monterey Park and Half Moon Bay Shootings²⁶
- Facilitation of the California Truth and Healing Council's subcommittee on Status and Identity

²¹ Roelle Balan, *Documentary on Unhoused Motivates Pub. Action*, TRI-CITY VOICE (Dec. 2, 2025), <https://tricityvoice.com/documentary-on-unhoused-motivates-public-action/>, (article about the City of Fremont organizing a screening of the *Beyond the Bridge* documentary, where CCRU moderated post-screening conversations and assisted in event planning and execution, as one example of this work).

²² *Civil Rights Resources*, CA vs. HATE, <https://www.cavshate.org/additional-services> (last visited Apr. 29, 2026).

²³ *Cnty. Conflict Resolution Unit*, supra.

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ Cal. Senate Budget and Fiscal Review: Subcom. No. 4, *Agenda 7* (May 8, 2025), https://sbud.senate.ca.gov/system/files/2025-05/sub-4-5.8.25-hearing-agenda-final_0.pdf.

²⁶ *Id.* at 6.

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- Mediations with neighborhood councils
- Developing a safety and contingency plan when communities receive threats

CCRU has been able to collaborate with various non-profits and local government entities to find ways to remove or mitigate barriers to welfare benefits. For instance, CCRU completed listening sessions with CBOs that worked directly with welfare applicants. And in order to appropriately address the structural barriers they heard about, CCRU provided recommendations to welfare service providers and other relevant stakeholders. As a result, immigrants, non-citizens and persons with disabilities were listened to by government representatives, and those representatives were able to advocate for them on their behalf. CCRU has also expanded access to government support by working more closely with rural communities. CCRU organized an educational summit in a rural county that was going through conflict between residents and housing providers. The speakers at the summit discussed misinformation and the importance of having housing providers implement changes to rural housing to comply with disability access.

Education: Education matters refer to school-related incidents that have caused some tension between groups within school, or with larger communities. CCRU has worked with numerous educational institutions and community groups in order to address hate in schools, including training school leaders and students how to address conflict when they come across it. These include:²⁷

- De-escalation training for grantees and canvassers
- Conflict-resolution training city staff
- Trainings for LGBTQ+ and other historically marginalized communities
- Anti-hate education for students and campuses
- Resource education for Family Empowerment Day
- Stop the Hate grantee trainings on de-escalation
- Presentations on civil-rights resources and reporting options
- Instruction and assistance for requested consultations

The dismantling of CRS on the federal level means that states have an even greater responsibility to meet the needs of their residents. Ironically, as hate incidents continue to increase nationally, resources to prevent threats of violence have decreased. California is fortunate to have already committed itself to providing leadership by creating CCRU within CRD. Now, divisions like CCRU must become even more engaged in the work of anticipating, assessing, and supporting peaceful relations in communities across the state. CCRU is an essential resource for addressing tension in schools with children, teachers, and administrators. In 2024, CCRU was called upon to help a middle school respond to tensions between Black and Latino youth. Incidents were reported about fighting, use of racial slurs, fighting, and other discriminatory actions. CCRU responded by organizing a three-dialogue facilitation that included community leaders and middle school students. CCRU remains invested in creating more training opportunities on hate crime prevention and hate incidents more broadly and is working on building an anti-hate, anti-discrimination training for K-12 training for administrators for K-12.

²⁷ Cmty. Conflict Resolution Unit, supra.

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Community/government trust building: In addition to CCRU’s efforts to assist community members on a daily basis, it enriches relationships between the state government and local communities. As mentioned above, CCRU is the division of CRD that enables members of the public to directly access a representative of the state of California to voice concerns about possible conflict or violence arising out of discrimination. However, CCRU also exists in a neutral space between parties in conflict. This impartial position and the essential principle of confidentiality are particularly valuable in situations where there are tensions involving law enforcement and the public.

CCRU’s ability to retain trust is not only crucial in its work but also serves as a key function of CRD when it comes to proactively engaging in the community. While other CRD divisions engage with community members with respect to a complaint or settlement, CCRU provides an opportunity for collaboration, relationship building, and thought partnership around identifying potential solutions to a community problem. In 2022, CRD employed Mission Consulting to perform an environmental assessment of the department.²⁸ When surveying the department, some of the strategies for improving the department included:²⁹

- Targeting and improving outreach to vulnerable and underserved communities including those with limited English proficiency.
- Continue to work with CBOs with the best understanding of the opportunities and challenges in their communities.
- Increase access to information about rights and responsibilities.

These strategies and goals of the department have been furthered with the help of CCRU. It is CCRU’s exposure to community and its posture as a neutral facilitator which allows CCRU to engage in open dialogue with and within California communities. While *maintaining* CCRU funding is necessary, CCRU should also be *expanding* its impact: According to a discussion paper on Princeton’s *Bridging Divides Initiative*, “...the evolving risk environment in the U.S. over the past 10 years, and especially in the months since the 2024 election, has increased the demand for community safety and de-escalation support.”³⁰ Community-government relationship building is essential in addressing the increasing challenge of tensions and conflicts arising out of discrimination and resulting in harassment, destruction of property, and physical injury to persons. CCRU’s presence and engagement with communities reflects not only its impact but the dire relevance for it to remain and grow for the foreseeable future.

2. Dollar-for-Dollar Savings from CCRU

While CCRU is specific to community conflict resolution work, it remains rooted in the efforts of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) systems. One of the most discussed benefits of

²⁸ Cal. Civ. Rights Dep’t, Strategic Plan: Fiscal Year 2025-29 2 (June 2025) <https://calcivilrights.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/32/2025/07/Strategic-Plan-FY-25-29.pdf>.

²⁹ *Id.* at 4.

³⁰ Princeton Univ. Bridging Divides Initiative, Understanding How the Cmty. Safety and De-Escalation Ecosystem is Responding to Political Violence Risk 9 (Sept. 2025), https://bridgingdivides.princeton.edu/sites/g/files/toruqf6646/files/documents/BDI_Community%20Safety%20and%20De-Escalation_Discussion%20Paper_September%202025.pdf.

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having a division like this in addition to the state’s litigation capacity is that ADR has historically saved communities and the state’s financial resources by avoiding litigation or settling cases after damage has accrued by failing to engage early and later facing settlement talks after the filing of a lawsuit. ADR programs like CCRU reduce staff time, freeing up attorney talent for other needs, lowering litigation-related expenses, and minimizing disruption to other state agencies.³¹

For example, the last taskforce done by the California Justice department regarding the quality of alternative dispute resolution showed that alternative dispute resolution reduced litigation costs for participants with an estimate of \$1.3 million in aggregate savings.³²

3. Possible Substantive Outcomes and Financial Implications

Without CCRU, potential outcomes and financial implications to California and its residents include:

Less prevention and more discrimination: Without CCRU, communities would not have a reliable resource that will help them address tensions within their communities. As a result, communities would more likely feel unheard, unseen, and vulnerable to conflicts arising out of a lack of support, capacity to build self-sufficiency to resolve issues. Further, the state itself would miss opportunities to identify and work with credible and impactful local leaders. In times of increased polarization such as today, it is predictable that we will see higher levels of tension, likelihood of discrimination, and incidents of hate.³³ As a result, a decrease in resources for preventive actions can be expected to lead to more community conflict. Local nonprofits are often seen as organizations that may take up this mantle and gaps in ADR services, but that is not realistic: Non-profits face huge mission obligations and have very limited funding and resources. It is unrealistic and unfair to expect non-profit, community-based organizations to add significant additional resources to compensate for CCRU’s current work.

Higher overall costs for Californians and more cases going to litigation: As mentioned above, the impact to California would be both financial and logistical, as residents would see disruptions to services and benefits. CCRU enables unique alternatives to litigation, with both financial benefits and greater outcomes for Californians.

Potentially destabilized communities: The most recent Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission report, dated December 2025, provides insight on the state of hate-related incidents in a large, diverse, and complex region of the state.³⁴ “Key findings show high levels of

³¹ *Alt. Dispute Resolution at the Dept. of Just.*, U.S. DEP’T OF JUST., <https://www.justice.gov/archives/olp/alternative-dispute-resolution-department-justice> (last visited Apr. 29, 2026) (finding ADR processes in DOJ litigation saved thousands of days of staff time); *ADR Benefits*, CAL. COURTS, <https://courts.ca.gov/programs-initiatives/alternative-dispute-resolution-adr/adr-benefits> (last visited Apr. 29, 2026) (noting ADR saves parties time and money).

³² TASK FORCE ON THE QUALITY OF JUST.: SUBCOMM. ON ALT. DISPUTE RESOLUTION AND THE JUD. SYSTEM, ALT. DISPUTE RESOLUTION IN CIV. CASES (Aug. 1999), <https://courts.ca.gov/sites/default/files/courts/default/2024-08/adrreport.pdf>.

³³ Jeffrey M. Jones, *Ams. Agree Nation Is Divided on Key Values*, GALLUP (Sep. 23, 2024), <https://news.gallup.com/poll/650828/americans-agree-nation-divided-key-values.aspx> (finding that in 2024, a record high percentage of Americans (80%) believe the U.S. is divided on key values).

³⁴ *LA Cnty. Releases Annual Report on Hate Crimes: Second-Highest Total of Hate Crimes in 44 Years*, CNTY. OF LOS ANGELES COMM’N ON HUMAN RELATIONS (Dec. 24, 2025), <https://lacounty.gov/2025/12/04/la-county-report-reveals-the-second-highest-hate-crimes-in-44-years/>

victimization across multiple groups, with record levels of reported hate crimes targeting African Americans, LGBTQ+ individuals, Jewish people, Latino/as, Middle Easterners, women, Israelis, Muslims, and Scientologists.”³⁵ In other parts of the state with less ability to track such events, the state has a very limited view of where tensions and potential statewide problems may arise.

Compounding disadvantage upon some of the most marginalized communities within California: As revealed in the case studies and data provided, many of the individuals engaging CCRU are individuals that are members most vulnerable in California— namely, racial minorities, women, gays, lesbians and other historically marginalized individuals— will also be those most affected by the absence of CCRU. As a result, the members most reliant upon CCRU to keep their communities stable may no longer have a place to request safety intervention and proactive community building.

II. Analysis of CRS and CCRU Data

Taken together, the evidence supports a focused expansion of CCRU’s preventive and capacity-building functions, coupled with a phased structural evolution designed to maximize impact under resource constraints. In the near term, CCRU should prioritize high-risk conflict categories, pilot targeted innovations such as real-time mediation, and formalize its role as a convenor and knowledge hub. Over the longer term, CCRU should evolve into a regionalized, statewide coordinating node capable of developing and sustaining conflict resolution capacity while providing situational-awareness monitoring across California.

At the federal level, CRS offered one of the only sustained domestic institutional records of what it looks like for the government to facilitate civil dialogue and conflict de-escalation without enforcement power. Decades of annual reporting demonstrate that early, neutral intervention can lower immediate escalation risk and preserve space for locally driven problem solving—even when deeper structural inequities remain unresolved. CRS’s value does not derive from adjudication or formal authority. It came from its posture as a peacemaker: confidentiality, voluntary participation, and an explicit separation from prosecutorial functions. That design allowed CRS to restore communication, convene stakeholders who otherwise would not sit in the same room, and legitimize nonviolent pathways for dispute resolution. The reports also show how CRS uses training, consultation, and dialogue as capacity multipliers, leaving behind local protocols and relationships that reduce the need for repeated outside intervention.

A. History and Impact of the Federal Community Relations Service

1. History of CRS

Established under the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the federal Community Relations Service (CRS) in the U.S. Department of Justice was designed as a non-enforcement, confidential intermediary to assist communities in resolving identity-based conflicts that

³⁵ *Id.*

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threatened public order and civil rights. Congress defined CRS’s mission broadly but carefully limited its role to conciliation assistance rather than enforcement. The core function of CRS has been facilitation, restoring communication, convening stakeholders, and creating nonviolent pathways for resolving disputes where race, religion, national origin, and other protected characteristics are implicated. But a federal facilitation model is capacity-limited by design: it operates across a national footprint with finite staff, and it cannot embed everywhere that conflict arises.

2. Current Dismantling of CRS

In 2025, the Trump Administration “systematically dismantled” CRS, culminating with total dissolution of the agency in October 2025.³⁶ Following significant pushback from lawmakers and activists and a lawsuit from a number of civil rights advocacy groups, the DOJ in January 2026 reinstated some CRS employees.³⁷ However, CRS is not currently operating in any relevant capacity with regards to its stated mission.

3. Today’s Challenges and Opportunities for CCRU

Historically, CRS has functioned as an impartial intermediary in moments of acute tension, playing a peace-making role, facilitating dialogue and de-escalation while preserving confidentiality and voluntary participation. But a federal model cannot be everywhere at once; in practice, communities often confront rapidly evolving disputes without timely facilitation, a gap that is especially consequential in a state as large and diverse as California.

CRS’s work product provided process and infrastructure services rather than enforcement. Its core modalities—facilitated dialogue, mediation, training, and consultation—were deployed across three recurring matter areas: administration of justice, education, and general community relations. These categories correspond to the main places where civil rights conflicts frequently intensify: disagreements over policing and the legitimacy of public safety, issues within schools and universities, and wider community tensions sparked by hate incidents, changing demographics, and debates about access to services. CRS’s record matters for California because it provides a long-run view of what communities repeatedly ask the government to do that police and courts, by design, do not do well: convene, de-escalate, and build durable local problem-solving capacity. Additionally, many of the institutional constraints that shaped CRS’s performance as a federal entity—limited staffing, geographic dispersion, and reliance on non-embedded engagement—also confront state-run conflict-resolution agencies,

³⁶ *CRS Restoration Project*, CRS RESTORATION PROJECT, <http://AmericasPeacemakers.com> (last visited Apr. 14, 2026); Suzanne Monyak, *DOJ Terminates Staff at Peacemakers, Access to Just. Units*, BLOOMBERG LAW (Oct. 1, 2025), <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/us-law-week/doj-terminates-staff-at-peacemakers-access-to-justice-offices>.

³⁷ Sarah N. Lynch, *US Civ. Rights Groups Sue to Block Closure of Race-Relations Off.*, REUTERS (Oct. 24, 2025), <https://www.reuters.com/legal/government/us-civil-rights-groups-sue-block-closure-race-relations-office-2025-10-24/>; Suzanne Monyak, *DOJ Reverses Firings at Peacemakers, Access to Justice Units*, BLOOMBERG LAW (Jan. 10, 2026), <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/us-law-week/doj-reverses-firings-at-peacemakers-access-to-justice-units>.

albeit in different form and scale.

As federal capacity remains extremely limited and the longevity of CRS is uncertain, states are positioned to carry much of the preventive conflict-resolution burden by default. Currently, states cannot rely on the federal CRS as they have in past decades. Regardless of what unfolds next at the national level, the recent dismantling of CRS highlights the vulnerability of reliance on federal programs when there are political shifts. As federal resources and programs become less predictable, the need for greater action by states has become ever more apparent.

The state-level need is therefore not simply to “replace” CRS, but to adapt CRS’s blueprint—impartial facilitation, mediation, and capacity-building—while designing around the federal constraints that show up most clearly during surge events and in repeat jurisdictions. The recommendations later in this report treat CCRU as a preventive civil rights infrastructure. Its role is to establish an integrated, statewide platform that offers local communities a way to engage in early assessment of threats to peace, insight into factors that are at the source of conflict in local regions, engagement with partners throughout the state who have a role in maintaining stability and safety in communities, and a place where creative community problem-solving can be developed.

B. Methodology and Analytical Framework

This report evaluates the strategic relevance and future design of California’s Community Conflict Resolution Unit (CCRU) by drawing on comparative analysis of federal Community Relations Service (CRS) data, programmatic documentation, and historical trends in civil rights–related community conflict. The evaluation also includes a vision for where CCRU can provide the greatest value to civil rights protections while leveraging the potential for building invaluable partnerships and relationships across the state. All of the possibilities also allow CRD to build its reputation as an effective and credible government partner that can be trusted by local communities. Because CCRU is a relatively small and young unit with limited publicly reportable data, this analysis does not attempt to conduct a direct quantitative impact evaluation of CCRU outcomes. Instead, **it adopts a comparative, theory-driven policy analysis framework, using decades of federal CRS experience as an evidentiary baseline to assess the plausibility, scalability, and institutional value of state-level community conflict resolution.**

Methodologically, the report relies on CRS annual reports (2009–2023) as the primary longitudinal record of federal non-enforcement conflict resolution, paired with CCRU program materials and de-identified CCRU data (2022–2025). Because preventive facilitation rarely produces clean counterfactuals, the analysis focuses on institutional design lessons, recurring conflict typologies, and capacity constraints rather than overstating causal impact.³⁸

³⁸ See U.S. DEP’T OF JUST. CMTY. RELS. SERV., ANN. REPS. FY 2009-23 (2010-24) (reporting CRS activity through engagement categories, matter types, and service delivery rather than causal impact measures, reflecting the inherent difficulty of evaluating preventive facilitation through counterfactual analysis).

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1. Federal CRS Data Sources

The primary empirical foundation for this analysis is publicly available data and documentation produced by the U.S. Department of Justice Community Relations Service between 2009 and 2023. These sources include:

- CRS Annual Reports submitted to Congress, which summarize matter types, service modalities (dialogue, mediation, training, consultation), geographic coverage, and notable interventions;
- Program descriptions, service frameworks, and explanatory narratives contained within CRS annual reporting, including descriptions of training, outreach, and facilitation models;
- Narrative discussion within CRS reporting regarding staffing levels, capacity constraints, and prioritization pressures associated with nationwide service delivery;
- Annual-report descriptions of CRS engagement following major national incidents, including police–community crises, mass demonstrations, public health–related tensions, and spikes in hate crimes.

While CRS reporting does not provide case-level quantitative outcomes or counterfactual comparisons (such as randomized evaluations or long-term recidivism measures), it does supply consistent, longitudinal descriptive data regarding the types of conflicts addressed, the timing and modalities of intervention, and the institutional roles CRS was repeatedly asked to play. As a result, CRS data is best understood as supporting analysis of demand patterns, intervention design, and structural capacity constraints, rather than causal impact estimations.

2. Comparative Logic: CRS as an Analog for CCRU

This report treats the federal CRS not as a perfect comparator for CCRU, but as a functional analog. CRS and CCRU differ in scale, jurisdiction, and institutional placement; however, they share core defining characteristics that justify comparative analysis:

- Non-enforcement mandate: Both entities operate without adjudicatory or prosecutorial authority, relying on voluntary participation, neutrality, and confidentiality.
- Early-intervention orientation: Both focus on de-escalating community conflict before it escalates into violence, litigation, or federal enforcement.
- Civil rights adjacency: Both address conflicts rooted in identity-based discrimination, bias incidents, or structural inequities, rather than purely private disputes.
- Capacity-building function: Both emphasize training, dialogue, and local problem solving mechanisms as durable outcomes.

CCRU cannot—and does not seek to—replicate CRS in form. However, CRD understands the functions CRS historically performed at the federal level and recognizes the ongoing necessity of that work.

CCRU has the opportunity to work in communities across California while simultaneously preserving state resources, identifying local/regional needs, and building conflict resolution

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tools and methods designed to take into consideration local cultures and capacities. This report explicitly distinguishes between CRS and the potential for CCRU using the following approach:

- Transferable lessons (e.g., the value of early intervention, the role of trusted intermediaries); and
- Non-transferable conditions (e.g., CRS’s federal stature, nationwide jurisdiction, and the federal appropriations structure that shapes staffing and deployment).

3. Theory of Preventive Impact

Because community conflict resolution includes both prevention and intervention, traditional outcome measurement tools—such as arrest rates, conviction counts, or litigation outcomes—have limited value in capturing the actual contribution that an office like CCRU and CRS delivers. This analysis instead relies on a theory of preventive impact, which evaluates programs based on their position within known escalation pathways. Drawing from CRS documentation and conflict-resolution scholarship, civil rights–related community conflicts often follow a predictable progression:³⁹

1. **Triggering incident**, such as a hate crime, police use of force, discriminatory policy;
2. **Community mobilization and narrative hardening**;
3. **Institutional breakdown**: loss of trust in local government or law enforcement;
4. **Escalation**: protests, violence, litigation, or federal intervention.

CRS interventions historically targeted stages (2) and (3), aiming to:

- Interrupt misinformation and rumor cycles;
- Re-establish communication channels among stakeholders;
- Create structured spaces for dialogue and problem-solving;
- Build local capacity to manage future conflicts without external intervention.

The analytical premise of this report is that preventing escalation at these stages produces real, if difficult-to-quantify, public value, including reduced violence, avoided litigation, lower law enforcement burden, and preservation of institutional legitimacy. CCRU’s work is evaluated through this same lens.

4. Methodological Limitations and Guardrails

This report intentionally avoids making claims that cannot be supported by available

³⁹ See *id.* (describing CRS engagement following triggering incidents such as hate crimes, police use-of-force incidents, and mass demonstrations, and emphasizing the Service’s role in facilitating dialogue, addressing misinformation, restoring communication among stakeholders, and supporting local capacity during periods of heightened tensions).

data. Several key limitations are especially notable:

- **Absence of counterfactuals:** CRS data does not systematically compare communities that received intervention with those that did not.
- **Time-series comparability:** CRS updated what it counted as a “case” (or “matter,” for the purposes of this report) in FY 2014 (linking case status to the provision of two or more services or outcomes) and again in FY 2018 (streamlining criteria and reducing the number of reported matters). These definitional shifts complicate year-to-year comparisons of both volume and category shares.⁴⁰ Where this report discusses trends over time, it treats those breaks as structural and emphasizes directional patterns rather than precise effect sizes.
- **Qualitative reporting bias:** Annual reports emphasize notable successes rather than routine or failed interventions.
- **Attribution challenges:** Community outcomes are shaped by many actors beyond CRS or CCRU involvement.

However, these limitations are not unique to CRS or CCRU; they are common across preventive public-sector interventions, including public health, disaster preparedness, and environmental regulation. Policymakers routinely rely on plausibility, pattern recognition, and institutional experience when deciding whether to fund such programs.⁴¹ Accordingly, this report adopts a policy-relevant standard of evidence: whether the historical record demonstrates consistent demand for CRS-type services, credible mechanisms of impact, and unacceptable risks associated with the absence of such capacity. The analysis that follows is designed to inform strategic decision-making under real-world uncertainty, not to substitute for experimental social science.

C. Insights from Data Analysis

A review of CRS annual reports (2009–2023) alongside CCRU data (2022–2025) surfaces a set of strategic findings about what drives demand, where conflicts most reliably escalate, and which institutional functions are hardest to replicate through enforcement or litigation alone. These findings are not presented as causal proof of “what works” in the strict evaluation sense; they are pattern-based signals meant to inform CCRU’s strategic deployment of limited resources.

⁴⁰ See U.S. DEP’T OF JUST. CMTY. RELS. SERV., ANN. REP. FY 2010 (2011) (introducing a standalone “Hate Crime Prevention” category not used in adjacent years); U.S. DEP’T OF JUST. CMTY. RELS. SERV., ANN. REP. FY 2014 (2015) (revising matter-counting criteria to link a reported matter to the provision of two or more services or outcomes); U.S. DEP’T OF JUST. CMTY. RELS. SERV., ANN. REP. FY 2018 (2019) (describing further streamlining of matter-counting and reporting methodology). These reporting changes somewhat limit direct year-to-year comparability of both total matter volume and category distributions.

⁴¹ See, e.g., U.S. GOV’T ACCOUNTABILITY OFF., DESIGNING EVALUATION (2012 revision, Jan. 31, 2012). <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-12-208g> (recognizing that many public-sector programs, particularly preventive or risk-mitigation interventions, cannot be evaluated through experimental designs and must instead be assessed using plausibility, trend analysis, and institutional experience); CRS ANN. REPS. FY 2009-23, *supra*, (describing CRS activity and demand patterns without claiming causal attribution).

1. Strategic Findings

Finding 1: Over a 14-year period, CRS caseload shifted from an Administration-of-Justice (AOJ) dominant profile toward General Community Relations (GCR). In FY 2009, approximately 63% of CRS matters fell under AOJ, with 19% under GCR and 18% under Education.⁴² By FY 2023, the mix had inverted: GCR comprised a majority (112 of 220 matters, or 50.9%), while AOJ accounted for 67 matters (30.5%) and Education accounted for 41 matters (18.6%). For CCRU, the design implication is that “police–community relations” cannot be the only organizing frame; the modern conflict portfolio is broader and increasingly anchored in community-wide identity and bias disputes.

Finding 2: Hate and bias incidents have become the dominant intake pathway within GCR, and they frequently widen into broader community conflict. In FY 2021, CRS completed 87 GCR matters, with the majority tied to alleged hate crime incidents (50 matters). FY 2022 followed the same pattern (84 GCR matters with 51 related to alleged hate crime incidents). In FY 2023, CRS completed 112 GCR matters, including 75 hate crime incidents. This suggests that CCRU’s future structure should treat hate/bias response as core infrastructure (triage, facilitation, and preventive capacity-building), not as an occasional or “specialized” line item.

Finding 3: AOJ demand remains surge-sensitive, and it spikes around policing crises even in years when overall volume is constrained by reporting criteria. In FY 2023, CRS completed 67 AOJ matters, with police–community relations (31) and conflicts over excessive use of force/police misconduct (11) at the top. In FY 2020, AOJ rose to 98 matters (39.8% of the federal caseload) amid nationwide unrest.⁴³ CRS also reported a 500% increase in “alert closures” between the first and second halves of FY 2020—jurisdictional incidents where CRS lacked staff availability to offer services—highlighting that surge demand can outstrip capacity precisely when rapid facilitation matters most.

Finding 4: Schools, especially K–12 systems, are a persistent site of civil-rights tension and often function as a proxy battlefield for broader community disputes. Education casework rebounded from 29 matters in FY 2021 to 46 in FY 2022 and remained substantial in FY 2023 (41 matters). In FY 2022, K–12 conflicts accounted for 34 of 46 education matters; in FY 2023, the largest education subcategory was hate or bias-motivated incidents in K–12 settings (16 matters), followed by disputes over disparities in treatment or opportunity (12) and student racial conflicts and tensions (7). CCRU’s future offerings should treat education systems as a core partner ecosystem—not as an occasional client.

⁴²U.S. DEP’T OF JUST. CMTY. RELS. SERV., ANN. REP. FY 2009 (2010) (not providing the total number of completed matters, but instead reporting matter distribution exclusively as percentage shares across service categories and indicating that approximately 63% of CRS engagements involved Administration of Justice, 19% involved General Community Relations, and 18% involved Education related disputes).

⁴³CRS ANN. REPS. FY 2009-23, *supra*. (CRS data reflects a general downward trend in the proportion of Administration of Justice (AOJ) matters from the beginning of the monitoring period in FY 2009 through FY 2023, notwithstanding episodic increases during periods of heightened national unrest. Although AOJ’s share of total CRS activity has declined over time, it remains a substantial component of the federal caseload, as illustrated by the FY 2020 increase to 98 AOJ matters (39.8%), coinciding with widespread police–community conflict following high-profile incidents.)

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Finding 5: Civil rights and hate-crimes jurisdiction often overlap in practice, which argues against siloed intake and “either/or” framing. In FY 2023, CRS completed 64 matters, jurisdictional under both Title X of the Civil Rights Act and the Hate Crimes Prevention Act; FY 2022 reported the same (64), and FY 2021 reported 50. This overlap signals that many incidents begin as alleged bias or hate-motivated conduct but quickly implicate broader civil rights tensions, access-to-services claims, or public-institution legitimacy. CCRU should design its matter taxonomy and referral pathways to reflect that reality.

Finding 6: CRS increasingly relies on scalable capacity-building modalities, but its federal footprint still limits local embedding. In FY 2022, CRS facilitated 93 dialogues across 43 states and territories and provided 388 consultation sessions—an explicit move toward reach and replication. Yet CRS operated with only 10 regional offices and three field offices nationally, which constrains continuity and follow-through at the municipal level. A California state model can preserve the neutrality and confidentiality features that make CRS credible while improving speed, cultural competence, and institutional memory through sustained regional presence and strategic collaboration with partners to consistently monitor and resource expedient interventions.

Together, these findings support a CCRU structure that is both rapid-response and capacity-designed: able to deploy quickly after trigger events, but also able to institutionalize prevention through trainings, cross-jurisdictional convening, and repeat partnerships with schools, local governments, and law enforcement. The recommendations that follow translate these federal lessons into a state-level offering that is realistic under budget and staffing constraints.

2. National Conflict Typologies Addressed by CRS

The goal with analyzing federal CRS data is to identify patterns that might shed light on program design and prioritization for CCRU: What kinds of conflicts repeatedly triggered requests for help, when intervention appears most valuable, how services can be delivered, and what functions CRS performed well and why.

Across the 2009–2023 reporting period, CRS matter volume and category mix are not static. Total matters peaked in FY 2011 (1,100) and later declined, with a major break after FY 2018 when CRS streamlined its matter criteria (449 matters in FY 2017 versus 292 in FY 2018).⁴⁴ In the most recent years captured here, CRS completed 184 matters (FY 2021), 188 (FY 2022), and 220 (FY 2023), with General Community Relations becoming the largest service category and hate/bias incidents representing a growing share of that portfolio.

Across reporting periods, CRS consistently intervened in a relatively stable set of conflict categories. While the relative frequency of each category fluctuated over time, the underlying typology remained remarkably consistent, underscoring the persistent nature of identity-based community conflict in the United States.

⁴⁴Total matters were not reported in CRS 2009 and 2010 FY reports.

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Hate crimes and bias incidents: Hate crimes and bias incidents—particularly those involving race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, and gender identity—constituted a core component of CRS’s workload. CRS reports document repeated engagement following:

- Violent hate crimes targeting racial or religious communities.
- Nonviolent bias incidents that nonetheless generated widespread fear or risk of retaliation.
- Symbolic acts (graffiti, threats, online harassment) that destabilized community trust.

Importantly, CRS intervention was not limited to post-incident mediation. In many cases, CRS facilitated community-wide dialogues, interfaith convenings, and law enforcement trainings designed to prevent retaliatory violence and normalize reporting pathways. This reflects a broader CRS understanding that the social consequences of bias incidents often extend well beyond the initial act, particularly in communities with existing histories of marginalization.

Police-community relations and administration of justice: Police-community relations matters represented one of the most escalation-prone categories addressed by CRS. These matters frequently arose following:

- Officer-involved shootings;
- Allegations of discriminatory policing;
- High-profile arrests or uses of force; or
- Broader patterns of mistrust between law enforcement and minority communities.

CRS data suggest that these conflicts were rarely isolated events. Instead, they tended to surface latent grievances, historical trauma, and structural inequities. CRS interventions often focused on restoring communication channels, facilitating dialogue between community leaders and law enforcement, and supporting the development of local problem-solving mechanisms.⁴⁵ For California, this category is particularly salient given the state’s size, diversity, and history of policing-related conflict. CRS experience indicates that delayed engagement in these contexts was often associated with prolonged unrest, litigation, or federal oversight, whereas earlier facilitation efforts were directed at stabilizing situations before escalation.

Education and public institution conflicts: CRS also frequently addressed conflicts involving schools, universities, and local government institutions. These matters included:

- Allegations of discriminatory discipline or access to educational opportunities.
- Campus climate disputes following bias incidents.
- Conflicts between public officials and community groups over policy decisions affecting marginalized populations.

⁴⁵ *Id.* (describing police-community relations and administration of justice matters arising from officer-involved shootings, allegations of discriminatory policing, and uses of force; noting these incidents often surface broader community grievances/mistrust; and detailing CRS interventions focused on dialogue, communication restoration, and local problem-solving, particularly to reduce escalation, prolonged unrest, or need for federal oversight).

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Although these conflicts were sometimes less visible than police-related matters, CRS reporting indicates that they often had longer institutional tails, influencing trust in public institutions and shaping community engagement over time. CRS interventions in this category emphasized structured dialogue, policy clarification, and institutional accountability mechanisms.⁴⁶

3. Temporal Patterns and National Triggers

CRS data reveals that demand for community conflict resolution services was highly responsive to national and regional trigger events. These temporal patterns are particularly instructive for state-level planning.

Major shock events: Major national and regional shock events repeatedly produced acute spikes in demand for CRS services. CRS reporting across multiple fiscal years identifies several recurring categories of triggering events, including:

- High-profile police use-of-force incidents and deaths in custody, particularly those involving allegations of racial discrimination or excessive force.
- Mass demonstrations and periods of civil unrest following catalytic incidents, often involving simultaneous protests across multiple jurisdictions.
- Spikes in hate crimes and bias incidents, including threats, vandalism, and violence targeting racial, ethnic, and religious communities.
- Periods of heightened political polarization, including election cycles and other moments of national political stress.

CRS annual reports consistently describe these events not as isolated local disputes, but as catalysts that rapidly generated community tension across jurisdictions, frequently overwhelming local response mechanisms and triggering requests for federal facilitation.⁴⁷ In such periods, CRS was often called upon to engage simultaneously in multiple cities or regions, placing acute strain on its limited staffing capacity. CRS reporting also reflects that these events were particularly likely to produce compound conflicts—where an initial incident (such as a police shooting or hate crime) intersected with preexisting mistrust, misinformation, or unresolved grievances, leading to broader challenges involving schools, local governments, faith institutions, and civil society organizations.⁴⁸ As a result, CRS interventions during these periods frequently extended beyond post-incident mediation to include large-scale dialogues, interfaith convenings, law enforcement trainings, and assistance aimed at de-escalation and stabilization.

The capacity implications of this surge dynamic are most clearly illustrated by CRS's

⁴⁶ See U.S. DEP'T OF JUST. CMTY. RELS. SERV., ANN. REP. FY 2013 (2014) (describing education and public institution-related conflicts that, while less immediately visible than police-related matters, often produce longer-term effects on community trust and institutional legitimacy, and detailing CRS interventions on structured dialogue, clarification of institutional policies, and development of ongoing accountability and problem-solving mechanisms).

⁴⁷ CRS ANN. REP. FY 2009-23, *supra*, (describing CRS deployments following high-profile police incidents, mass demonstrations, election-related tensions, and spikes in hate crimes across multiple jurisdictions simultaneously).

⁴⁸ *Id.* (noting that CRS engagements during periods of unrest frequently addressed broader community mistrust, misinformation, and institutional breakdown beyond the initial triggering incident).

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experience during FY 2020. In that year, CRS reported a 500% increase in “alert closures” between the first and second halves of the fiscal year, driven largely by nationwide civil unrest following high-profile police killings and by community tensions related to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴⁹ CRS defines “alert closures” as situations in which the Service had jurisdictional authority to offer assistance but lacked sufficient staff availability to respond.⁵⁰ This sharp increase serves as an explicit marker of demand outstripping federal capacity during periods of overlapping national crises.

Taken together, CRS’s experience with national shock events underscores a structural reality: even when federal facilitation is authorized, credible, and in demand, it is not infinitely scalable—resources are finite in complex, dynamic time-sensitive incidents. Periods of nationwide stress expose the limits of a centralized model operating with limited personnel across a vast geographic footprint—a lesson that bears directly on the design of state-level conflict-resolution capacity.

Diffusion and lag effects: CRS reporting reflects a recurring surge dynamic that is easy to miss if you treat each incident as a self-contained “local case.” Demand often diffused geographically: a high-profile incident in one jurisdiction would reverberate through others, especially when communities shared identity characteristics or when a single media narrative became the dominant frame through which local actors interpreted their own conditions. In FY 2020, for example, CRS described COVID-era bias and hate incidents affecting Asian American and Pacific Islander communities “across the country,” driven in part by misinformation, and responded by coordinating casework and strategies across regions rather than treating the problem as jurisdiction-bound.⁵¹ CRS also reported coordinating staff support across six CRS regions to meet requests tied to national attention following the police killing of George Floyd—another concrete illustration of spillover demand moving across city and regional lines.⁵²

Equally important, CRS experience suggests that demand often arrives with a temporal lag. Escalation does not always track the initial triggering act; it can accelerate days, weeks, or even months later—after misinformation spreads, after institutional responses harden perceptions, or after a prior incident is rediscovered or recirculated. CRS’s FY 2020 casework includes a straightforward example: community racial tension in Dover, New Hampshire intensified in late 2019 after a racially offensive video (originally created in 2018 and later posted on social media) became salient again, requiring structured intervention in 2020.⁵³ That pattern—old incidents, new attention, delayed conflict—shows up repeatedly in modern community disputes where social media functions as both archive and accelerant.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ U.S. DEP’T OF JUST. CMTY. RELS. SERV., ANN. REP. FY 2020 (2021) (500% increase in alert closures from first and to halves of the fiscal year, driven by nationwide civil unrest and COVID-19–related tensions).

⁵⁰ *Id.* (defining “alert closures” as when CRS had jurisdictional authority but lacked available staff to offer services).

⁵¹ *Id.* at 32 (describing a spike in discrimination, alleged bias incidents, and hate crimes affecting AAPI communities “across the country,” preceded by misinformation, and CRS’s coordinated, cross-regional response).

⁵² *Id.* at 75 (describing CRS’s virtual response to requests following the police killing of George Floyd and coordination of staff support from six CRS regions).

⁵³ *Id.* at 40–41 (Dover, New Hampshire: describing increased racial tension in 2019 caused by a racially offensive video posted on social media years after it was created, and CRS intervention in 2020).

⁵⁴ CRS ANN. REP. FY 2018, *supra*, at 39–40 (noting viral social media messages and cyberbullying can incite “tension, anger, and fear,” and describing CRS responding with training, facilitated dialogues, consultation, and mediation).

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The operational implication is not abstract. A geographically dispersed, interconnected event favors anticipatory and preventive capacity—relationship-building before crisis, established protocols for convening stakeholders quickly, and targeted trainings which reduce friction when a surge hits. CRS’s own reporting emphasizes preventive tools of exactly that kind, including training and contingency planning designed to reduce risk around public events, and efforts to establish sustainable response mechanisms and improve reporting pathways for hate and bias incidents.⁵⁵ A purely reactive deployment model will always be late to the point where narratives harden and institutions lose credibility.

For California, the translation is direct. CCRU demand is likely to rise sharply following national events even when the triggering incident occurs elsewhere, because California communities will experience those events through shared identity linkages, shared narratives, and local histories of mistrust. The design implication is that CCRU should be built as standing capacity, not an ad hoc surge function—because the demand curve is both geographically diffuse and temporally uneven.

4. CRS Intervention Modalities and Observed Outcomes

CRS employed four primary intervention services: facilitated dialogue, mediation, training, and consultation. Over time, CRS increasingly emphasized training and capacity building, reflecting lessons learned about sustainability and scale.

Facilitated dialogue and mediation: CRS used facilitated dialogue and mediation as its core tools in acute, escalation-prone disputes—especially when local actors needed a neutral intermediary to reopen communication and prevent a situation from hardening into violence or litigation.⁵⁶ CRS describes its conciliation specialists as impartial and explicitly frames its work as helping communities develop “mutual understandings and agreements” as alternatives to coercion, violence, or litigation.⁵⁷

Across the reporting period, CRS consistently emphasizes three design features that made dialogue and mediation viable in politically charged settings: (1) neutral, trusted third-party facilitation; (2) confidentiality (to enable candid discussion); and (3) broad stakeholder inclusion, including public officials, civil rights groups, community leaders, and law enforcement, where relevant.⁵⁸ CRS also describes participation as voluntary—a structural

⁵⁵ *Id.* (identifying CRS training programs including “Reducing Risk During Public Events: Contingency Planning”); CRS ANN. REP. FY 2020, *supra*, at 32 (describing CRS efforts to build “sustainable response mechanisms” and improve hate/bias reporting methods as part of coordinated response work).

⁵⁶ CRS ANN. REP. FY 2009, *supra*, at “FAQ” section (CRS describes its services as being provided when communities face “conflicts, tension, or violence” and notes “the most intense casework” tends to involve police excessive use of force, major demonstrations, major school disruptions, and hate incident activity).

⁵⁷ U.S. DEP’T OF JUST. CMTY. RELS. SERV., ANN. REP. FY 2019 (2020) (describing CRS’s role in facilitating mutual understandings/agreements as alternatives to coercion, violence, or litigation; and stating conciliation specialists are impartial and do not take sides).

⁵⁸ *Id.* (CRS describes facilitated dialogue as opening lines of communication among diverse stakeholders and often including local agencies/institutions/community members; and describes mediation as neutral, third-party problem solving with confidentiality enabling candid discussion. *See also* CRS ANN. REP. FY 2018, *supra* (neutral third-party role; confidentiality; stakeholder inclusion)).

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choice that preserves neutrality but necessarily limits coercive leverage.⁵⁹

While CRS reporting does not provide causal outcomes for individual matters, it highlights a consistent pattern of short-term stabilization. This includes dialogues that reopen lines of communication, uncover core issues, and create action plans developed and owned by local participants; as well as mediations that result in written agreements—often formalized as MOUs or mediation documents—designed to rebuild functional relationships and prevent future problems.⁶⁰

Training and consultation: Over time, CRS increasingly leaned on training and assistance as a practical solution to a predictable constraint: mediation is labor-intensive, and a small federal footprint cannot embed everywhere tension arises. CRS defines training as a response to existing conflict designed to create immediate local capacity to address racial conflict situations, and it frames assistance as a mechanism for helping communities overcome barriers to resolution and prevent violence.⁶¹ This orientation is not cosmetic; it reflects an institutional view that durable value comes from building local infrastructure that outlasts any single deployment.

CRS’s later reporting supports that logic in concrete operational terms. In FY 2022, CRS reports facilitating 93 dialogues across 43 states and territories, conducting 15 training programs, completing 6 mediation sessions, and holding 388 consultation sessions—a distribution that illustrates how CRS extended reach primarily through scalable, non-case modalities rather than mediation alone.⁶² And even in earlier reporting, CRS explicitly describes training and the development of locally based mechanisms as tools communities can use to prevent tension and violent hate crimes.⁶³

The institutional lesson for your analysis is straightforward: the scalable function of CRS was not mediation itself, but the transfer of conflict-management capacity to local actors—protocols, skills, and coordination mechanisms that reduce the probability that every future incident requires federal intervention.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ CRS ANN. REP. FY 2009, *supra* (voluntary/ confidential; declination: CRS states its services are provided on a “voluntary and confidential basis” and that communities may decline services).

⁶⁰ CRS ANN. REP. FY 2019, *supra* (action plans and written agreements: CRS describes facilitated dialogues as producing action plans to improve communication and partnerships; and describes mediation outcomes as frequently memorialized in written agreements (e.g., MOUs/mediation agreements) aimed at sustainable solutions).

⁶¹ CRS ANN. REP. FY 2009, *supra* (CRS defines training as a response to existing conflict intended to create “immediate capacity”).

⁶² U.S. DEP’T OF JUST. CMTY. RELS. SERV., ANN. REP. FY 2022 (2023) (reporting dialogues, trainings, mediations, and consultations; describing consultations as extending CRS expertise and supporting local leaders).

⁶³ CRS ANN. REP. FY 2019, *supra* (stating CRS conducts trainings and helps develop locally based, long-term mechanisms communities may use to prevent tension and violent hate crimes).

⁶⁴ CRS ANN. REP. FY 2018, *supra* (services enhance ability to prevent future conflicts: CRS frames its services as enhancing communities’ ability to alleviate tension and prevent future conflicts more effectively, supporting the inference that capacity transfer is central to scale).

D. Relevance of CRS Data Analysis to CCRU

1. What CRS Did Well, and Why it Worked

CRS worked when it acted like what it was designed to be: a trusted intermediary rather than a quasi-enforcement body. Its credibility rests on two linked commitments, neutrality and confidentiality. This reduced the perceived downside of participation. Parties engage CRS precisely because CRS is not building a record for prosecution, liability, or public attribution; it is trying to get the right people into the same room long enough to negotiate something workable.⁶⁵ That posture matters in practice: Many disputes CRS enters involve actors who do not trust one another and, at times, do not trust the government. A facilitator who is viewed as aligned with law enforcement, a prosecutor, or a political officeholder cannot reliably convene the full set of stakeholders required for de-escalation. CRS’s separation from enforcement is therefore not a branding choice—it is an operational prerequisite.

CRS has also been effective because it combines federal credibility with local partnership. Federal affiliation can confer perceived neutrality in jurisdictions where local government is itself a party to the dispute or is viewed as politically captured. But CRS does not (and cannot) impose outcomes.⁶⁶ It typically works through local leaders, faith institutions, schools, and civic organizations that can sustain relationships and norms after federal staff exit.

Another key lesson, often overlooked, is that CRS typically delivers institutional infrastructure rather than immediate truces. CRS interventions commonly culminate in memoranda of understanding, action plans, updated protocols, and the creation of standing community mechanisms (advisory councils, school-based councils, interfaith coalitions) that can absorb future tension without federal reentry.⁶⁷ This is where facilitation creates lasting value by developing local capacity without relying on ongoing outside help.

CRS records indicate a practical move to scalable approaches due to staffing constraints. CRS does not rely solely on case-by-case conciliation; it extends reach through trainings, forums, structured dialogues, and consultations that strengthen local capacity before the next incident. This work is not supplementary. It is how a small institution reduces future caseload pressure and builds replicable local practice in jurisdictions it cannot permanently embed in.

2. What CRS Could Not Do

CRS’s constraints are structural. The agency operates nationally through ten regional offices and only a small number of field offices. That footprint is thin relative to geography

⁶⁵ U.S. DEP’T OF JUST. CMTY. RELS. SERV., ANN. REP. FY 2021 (2022) (describing CRS mediators as “impartial,” mediation as “confidential,” and noting mediation outcomes are often memorialized in written instruments such as a “memorandum of understanding” or “mediation agreement”).

⁶⁶ CRS ANN. REP. FY 2009, *supra*, at “FAQ” section (stating that because CRS mediators are “federally funded,” they are able to “ensure their impartiality” and describing CRS’s Justice Department affiliation as contributing credibility and trust in community conflict settings).

⁶⁷ U.S. DEP’T OF JUST. CMTY. RELS. SERV., ANN. REP. FY 2023 (2024) (describing CRS-supported standing community mechanisms such as a “community relations council” and the development of a community action plan).

and the frequency of trigger events. Even with strong staff, a federal team cannot embed in every locality long enough to build sustained institutional memory or to respond with the speed that community conflict often demands.

Capacity limits become most visible during surge periods—precisely when rapid facilitation is most valuable. CRS reporting during FY 2020 reflects the reality that major national flashpoints can generate cascading local incidents faster than a small federal workforce can absorb them, resulting in documented “alert closures” where CRS lacked staff availability to offer services.⁶⁸ This is not a critique of CRS performance; it is the predictable consequence of a national mandate paired with limited deployable personnel.

CRS also cannot reliably control follow-through. Because it is not embedded in state and municipal governance structures, CRS cannot consistently align mediation outcomes with the policy levers that often drive recurring conflict (school discipline practices, local service disparities, public safety protocols, language access, and related administrative choices). When the underlying drivers are institutional, a mediator who cannot integrate with the responsible institutions is forced into a narrower, crisis-oriented role.

3. Implications for State-Level Conflict Resolution Agencies

According to CRS annual reports, the federal record points to a handful of design lessons that matter for CCRU—not because CRS “solved” civil-rights conflict, but because the same problems show up repeatedly, and CRS’s structure shaped what it could realistically deliver.

Demand is persistent: CRS caseloads remain consistently substantial across the years reviewed (e.g., 246 completed matters in FY 2020; 220 completed matters in FY 2023), and the reports repeatedly describe periods where national conditions (civil unrest, COVID-era tensions, and identity-based violence) generate sudden surges in service demand.⁶⁹ The takeaway for CCRU is straightforward: you cannot build (or fund) a program around the assumption that conflict response is episodic. The baseline demand is real, and “shock events” reliably push it past normal operating capacity—especially when multiple jurisdictions need support at once.⁷⁰

Early, neutral intervention stabilizes—even when it doesn’t “resolve”: CRS’s most consistent institutional claim is not that facilitation eliminates underlying inequities, but that it can prevent disputes from hardening into coercion, violence, or litigation.⁷¹ This is the policy logic CCRU should own explicitly: Success should be defined and communicated in near-term stabilization outcomes (restored communication channels, credible process, reduced risk of

⁶⁸ CRS ANN. REP. FY 2020, *supra* (defining “alert closures” as situations in which CRS had jurisdictional authority but lacked staff availability to offer services; and reporting a 500% increase in alert closures between the first and second halves of FY 2020, driven largely by civil unrest and COVID-19-related tensions).

⁶⁹ *Id.* (reporting CRS “completed a total of 246 cases” and describing conflict drivers including COVID-19-era tensions and civil unrest, alongside hate crimes/bias incidents and police-community conflicts as repeated incidents in multiple localities).

⁷⁰ CRS ANN. REP. FY 2023, *supra* (describing CRS’s national footprint and emphasizing “rapid response to critical incidents,” while operating with limited offices across the country).

⁷¹ CRS ANN. REP. FY 2021, *supra* (mission statement and core operating claims: CRS facilitates “mutual understandings and agreements as alternatives to coercion, violence, or litigation,” provides trainings, helps develop “locally based long-term mechanisms,” and provides services that are “impartial” and “confidential”).

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escalation), not an overpromised theory of long-term “resolution.” That framing also aligns with the confidentiality/voluntariness posture that makes parties willing to show up in the first place and can open doors for external communications.

Modern conflict increasingly sits at the civil-rights/hate-incidents seam: Recent CRS reporting shows a sustained overlap between Title X civil-rights jurisdiction and Hate Crimes Prevention Act jurisdiction. In FY 2023, CRS reported 220 completed matters; 74 were HCPA-jurisdictional, and 64 were jurisdictional under both Title X and HCPA. FY 2020 reflects the same overlap dynamic (58 HCPA-jurisdictional and 57 under both). For CCRU, the design implication is an integrated intake + triage model that can treat “hate/bias” and “civil rights conflict” as operationally intertwined (because they often are), rather than forcing staff into programmatic boxes that don’t match how incidents unfold.⁵

Capacity-building is a core function and should not be considered secondary: Across the annual reports, CRS describes training and the development of “locally based long-term mechanisms” as the way it reduces repeat dependency on outside intervention. That is also where CCRU can outperform CRS: a state unit can build relationships with city managers, school districts, and regional intermediaries, then institutionalize protocols before the next flashpoint. The reports make clear CRS already runs trainings aimed at equipping community leaders to facilitate tense meetings (e.g., FMACC) and preparing community members to keep public events safe (event marshal training)—which is basically “preventive infrastructure,” not one-off crisis response.⁷² CCRU’s opportunity is to operationalize that approach statewide: train, credential, and reinforce local capacity on a standing basis, then deploy state staff selectively where neutrality and process are most needed.

4. Regional Variation and Relevance to California

CRS is the closest federal analog to what California is attempting to build through CCRU: a non-enforcement, confidential capacity to intervene in civil rights–related community conflict before it hardens into violence, litigation, or a legitimacy crisis that no single institution can reverse. CRS’s annual reports make one point hard to ignore: “community conflict” is not evenly distributed, and the service model must be designed for uneven demand. CRS is organized around a regional structure, with a Western Region that explicitly includes California (along with Arizona, Nevada, Hawaii, and Guam) and has historically operated from Los Angeles with a field presence in San Francisco.⁷³ That footprint matters for two reasons. First, it confirms that CRS has long treated California as part of a high-demand, high-complexity service area that cannot be handled through national headquarters alone. Second, it underscores the core design problem this paper keeps coming back to: even a well-run facilitation shop becomes capacity limited when it is asked to cover multiple large

⁷² CRS ANN. REP. FY 2023, *supra* (describing training programs including Event Marshals and FMACC, aimed at equipping community leaders to manage conflict environments); CRS ANN. REP. FY 2022, *supra* (examples of CRS training modalities, including facilitation training for community leaders and law enforcement-focused cultural competency trainings).

⁷³ U.S. DEP’T OF JUST. CMTY. RELS. SERV., ANN. REP. FY 2015 (2016) (Western Regional Office listed as serving AZ, CA, GU, HI, NV; Western Field Office listed in San Francisco).

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jurisdictions with a small regional team.⁷⁴

For purposes of translating federal lessons, the “California relevance” is not about whether CRS ever worked a specific incident in a specific city (the public reports rarely provide that level of specificity). It is about whether the conflict typologies CRS repeatedly describes map onto what California faces now—and they do. CRS defines Administration of Justice work as conflicts where tension exists between communities and law enforcement organizations, and its FY 2023 reporting breaks that category into familiar subtypes: police–community relations, protests/demonstrations, allegations of excessive force or misconduct, bias-based policing/racial profiling conflict, and tensions over hate crimes or bias incidents.⁷⁵ Those are not niche federal problems—they are recurring California problems, and they are escalation-prone in exactly the way CRS’s facilitation model is designed to address (especially where early intervention can prevent a localized incident from widening into a multi-stakeholder breakdown).

At the same time, CRS’s own reporting demonstrates why a state-level entity like CCRU is not duplicative—it is structurally better positioned if California actually wants sustained coverage. By FY 2023, CRS reported operating nationally through ten regional offices and three field offices.⁷⁶ Even assuming high expertise and high effort, that is a thin national footprint relative to the frequency of trigger events and the reality that conflict often clusters and cascades. In practical terms, it means CRS can surge into a community, convene the right people, and help stabilize the moment—but it alone cannot remain long enough to build lasting institutional memory across California’s municipal regions. That limitation is not a critique; it is the predictable consequence of a national mandate paired with a small, geographically dispersed staff model.

California should take that federal structure as a planning constraint, not just background context. If the state expects (as it should) that national incidents will spill over into local conflict demand—and that local disputes will recur across the same jurisdictions over time—then the program design question is not whether CCRU can “mirror” CRS. It is whether CCRU can do what CRS cannot: maintain durable local relationships, shorten response time, and connect facilitation outcomes to the state administrative systems that often drive repeat conflict (education systems, state-local coordination, and public safety governance). In other words, CRS’s regional experience supports the core premise of this report: California’s conflict environment is not an edge case—it is the kind of environment where a standing, state-level facilitation capacity is most justified when it is resourced and structured to operate continuously rather than episodically.

⁷⁴ U.S. DEP’T OF JUST. CMTY. RELS. SERV., ANN. REP. FY 2012 (2013) (explaining CRS’s regional/field office structure and that offices are strategically located to serve states/communities).

⁷⁵ CRS ANN. REP. FY 2023, *supra* (defining administration of justice matters and listing FY 2023 administration of justice subcategories, including police–community relations, protests/demonstrations, excessive force/police misconduct, bias-based policing/racial profiling, and tensions over hate crimes or bias incidents).

⁷⁶ *Id.* (“CRS has 10 regional offices and three field offices across the country”).

III. Recommendations for CCRU

CRS provides the blueprint for what works—neutral facilitation, trusted convening, and institutional capacity-building—while its constraints show why California needs a system that is faster, more locally embedded, and more integrated with the administrative levers that drive recurring conflict. These recommendations are grounded in CRS experience, CCRU’s early operational data, and the documented limits of a federal deployment model. They are structured around three levers that a state program can control better than CRS: speed of deployment, continuity of relationships, and integration with state systems—without sacrificing neutrality and confidentiality. The aim is to maximize impact under staffing and budget constraints while building a durable, scalable form of preventive civil rights infrastructure. Recommendations are organized around a few core questions:

- Which functions should CCRU prioritize in the short term with the current limited resources?
- How should CCRU evolve structurally over the medium to long term?
- How can CCRU allocate resources strategically rather than reactively?

State-funded civil dialogue and conflict-resolution units such as CCRU operate within a set of recurring institutional constraints that materially shape their effectiveness. These agencies share similar challenges with CRS, being under-resourced and lightly staffed, limiting their ability to respond consistently across regions or to sustain long-term engagements. Budgetary uncertainty—including delayed appropriations and periodic funding lapses—further restricts planning, data collection, and staff retention, while changes in administration can recalibrate priorities, risk tolerance, and programmatic scope with little structural continuity. At the same time, CCRU-type state entities are expected to coordinate across municipal and regional jurisdictions that vary significantly in capacity, political context, and willingness to engage, often with limited staff and without formal integration mechanisms or dedicated local counterparts.⁷⁷ These dynamics underscore the need for a programmatic and organizational model that emphasizes continuity, strategic deployment of limited resources, and structured coordination with local partners, rather than expansion premised on assumptions of stable funding or administrative uniformity.

A. Institutional Structure and Approach

1. How CCRU Can Improve on CRS

A state-level model can improve on CRS where CRS is structurally constrained: speed, continuity, and integration. CCRU can shorten the distance between incident and intervention, pre-position relationships in regions that repeatedly generate demand, and reduce the time lost to federal deployment logistics. CRS trendlines—repeat conflict typologies, repeat jurisdictions, and bias-driven incidents as a dominant trigger—suggests that the highest return investments are not ad hoc statewide responses, but regionalized capacity that is already trusted before the next incident hits.

⁷⁷ *Cmt’y. Conflict Resolution Unit*, CAL. CIV. RIGHTS DEP’T, *supra* (describing the team, structure, mission, and statutory basis of CCRU on the official state website).

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CCRU can also build local competence and trust through repetition. Federal credibility can help in some contexts, but local legitimacy is usually earned through sustained engagement. A California-based team that returns to the same communities, works alongside municipal counterparts, and understands the local institutional history is better positioned to facilitate durable agreements than a rotating federal deployment. Most importantly, CCRU can connect facilitation to the state response capacity. Many conflicts CRS enters involve public institutions, schools, local governments, and public safety agencies. All of which whose policies and practices are shaped by state-level rules, funding, and oversight. A state-embedded unit can coordinate with education, housing, public health, and civil rights offices so that mediation outcomes are not merely aspirational promises, but are linked to realistic administrative pathways for follow-through.

A state model only outperforms CRS if it preserves CRS features that made federal intervention credible in the first place. CCRU's value depends on being non-enforcement, confidential, and operationally neutral.⁷⁸ The design question is therefore not whether CCRU should coordinate with state agencies, but how to do so without turning CCRU into an intake pipeline for enforcement or a platform for political messaging. The recommendations that follow treat neutrality, confidentiality, and clear scope boundaries as non-negotiable guardrails.

Additionally, CCRU could prioritize partnerships with nonprofits, mediation providers, philanthropic groups, and select private-sector platforms as a central capacity strategy. A state-level unit can formalize referral systems and swift coordination with local actors, offering flexibility that federal agencies like CRS cannot match. Unlike CRS, which faces structural limitations, CCRU can efficiently connect communities with specialized partners and coordinate across state agencies, preventing conflict resolutions from being limited by staff size.

2. Theory of Change for CCRU 2.0

CCRU's theory of change is straightforward: early, neutral intervention reduces escalation into violence, litigation, or coercive state action, and it can leave behind local capacity that makes the next incident less likely to spiral. The point is not to "solve" community conflict in its entirety; it is to intervene early enough to keep disputes governable and to maintain peace when conflict inevitably arises. CRS experience demonstrates that the most effective interventions are not those that "solve" a conflict in a narrow sense, but those that:

- Restore communication among stakeholders;
- Legitimize nonviolent problem-solving pathways;
- Reduce misinformation and rumor escalation; and
- Leave behind local infrastructure—relationships, protocols, and skills—that persist after the immediate crisis subsides.

CCRU is structured to operate this logic at the state level more consistently than CRS can nationally. A California-based unit can move faster within the state, build trusted and

⁷⁸ *Id.* (describing CCRU as neutral and impartial, confidential, and having no law enforcement authority; and describing CCRU services as facilitation/mediation/training/consultation).

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long-standing relationships, and retain institutional memory across engagements. The recommendations below align CCRU’s offerings with that preventive function while drawing clear boundaries to avoid mission creep.

B. Recommendations for CCRU

Given finite resources, CCRU must be able to say “no” as well as “yes.” This report recommends that CCRU adopt an explicit prioritization matrix based on four criteria:

- **Urgency:** Likelihood of imminent escalation.
- **Scope:** Number of affected stakeholders and institutions.
- **Replicability:** Potential for lessons learned to apply elsewhere.
- **Equity Impact:** Disproportionate harm to marginalized communities.

By making these criteria explicit, CCRU can ensure consistency, transparency, and strategic focus—while protecting staff from reactive overextension.

1. Short-Term Recommendations (1–2 Years): High-Impact, Low-Overhead Priorities

In the near term, CCRU should focus on resolution products that deliver the greatest preventive value per unit of staff time, while building a foundation for longer-term expansion.

Prioritize high-risk, high-escalation conflict categories: CRS reporting repeatedly flags a small set of conflict types as its most volatile and most resource-intensive work—especially police use-of-force and police–community breakdowns, major demonstrations, major school disruptions, and hate-incident activity.⁷⁹ On a risk basis, CCRU should explicitly prioritize:

1. Law enforcement–community conflicts, particularly following critical incidents, allegations of excessive force or misconduct, or claims of bias-based policing and racial profiling;⁸⁰
2. Hate and bias incidents affecting racial, religious, immigrant, and LGBTQ+ communities, including incidents that implicate both civil-rights conflict and

⁷⁹ CRS ANN. REP. FY 2009, *supra*, at 36 (stating that CRS’s “most intense casework” tends to involve “police excessive use of force,” “major demonstrations and counter-demonstrations,” “major school disruptions,” and “hate incident activity”).

⁸⁰ CRS ANN. REP. FY 2020, *supra*, at (Administration of Justice Cases: noting that the largest number of AOJ matters related to alleged excessive use of force and police misconduct, with significant additional casework involving police–community relations and tensions related to allegations of bias based policing and racial profiling); see also U.S. DEP’T OF JUST. CMTY. RELS. SERV., ANN. REP. FY 2016 (2017) 16 (describing Administration of Justice matters as frequently driven by allegations of excessive use of force, poor police-community relations, and allegations of bias-based policing/racial profiling).

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hate-crimes jurisdiction;⁸¹

3. Conflicts involving public institutions (schools and local governments) where perceived discrimination or disparate treatment can trigger broader legitimacy crises and durable community mistrust.⁸²

By contrast, CCRU should avoid letting issue salience or institutional bias dictate resource allocation; where a dispute is primarily interpersonal and lacks a broader civil-rights or bias related community dimension, CCRU should generally route it to community mediation centers or private ADR providers. This prioritization does not reflect a value judgment about communities; it reflects a risk based allocation strategy grounded in the likelihood of downstream harm if early intervention does not occur.

Pilot a 911 mediator/real-time de-escalation program: One of the most promising near-term innovations is the piloting of a 911 Mediator Program, modeled on initiatives tested in jurisdictions such as Ohio. Under this model, trained civilian mediators are deployed—either remotely or in person—to respond to certain categories of nonviolent, conflict-driven emergency calls.⁸³ For CCRU, a pilot program could focus narrowly on:

- Neighbor disputes with a clear identity or bias component.
- Nonviolent protests or demonstrations with escalating tension.
- Situations where law enforcement presence risks exacerbating community mistrust.

The goal is not to replace law enforcement, but to divert appropriate matters away from enforcement-first responses that may escalate conflict or generate long-term legitimacy costs. Even a small pilot, conducted in partnership with a limited number of jurisdictions, would generate valuable data and demonstrate CCRU’s capacity for innovation.

Rapid response to immigration-related and identity-based conflict: California’s demographic profile makes it especially vulnerable to conflict arising from immigration enforcement actions, misinformation about ICE activity, and perceived targeting of immigrant communities. CRS experience suggests that early neutral intervention in these contexts can prevent widespread panic, protest escalation, and retaliatory violence. In order to emphasize dialogue facilitation, trusted messenger engagement, and coordination with local leaders, CCRU should formalize a rapid response protocol for:

- Community tensions following immigration enforcement actions.
- Conflicts involving misinformation or rumor cascades.
- Disputes between local governments and immigrant advocacy groups.

Establish a roster-based mediation and assistance network: CCRU could build a statewide “bench” of trained neutrals and crisis-tested advisors who can be activated quickly

⁸¹ CRS ANN. REP. FY 2018, *supra*, at 78–79 (describing CRS jurisdiction under the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act to prevent and respond to alleged violent hate crimes based on, inter alia, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and disability).

⁸² CRS ANN. REP. FY 2021, *supra*, at 21 (Education Cases: defining education matters as school-related actions or incidents that increase tension between school groups or, in some cases, groups in the larger community).

⁸³ *Mediation Response Unit – Dayton, Ohio*, THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOV’TS: JUST. CENTER (Dec. 2022), <https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/expanding-first-response/program-highlights/dayton-oh/>.

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when local tensions spike. The point is not to outsource CCRU’s mission; it is to make CCRU scalable without sacrificing neutrality. A roster model recognizes an operational reality: California’s conflict demand is uneven, surge-driven, and geographically diffused. A two- to four- person unit cannot be everywhere at once, but CCRU can be the entity that reliably triages, matches, and coordinates the right expertise into the right setting at the right time. A roster model would allow rapid, credible surge capacity without compromising neutrality. Near-term steps could include:

- Creating a statewide roster of qualified mediators and crisis-tested advisors (including trained mediators across state agencies, former police chiefs, former mayors/city managers, and other trusted practitioners).
- Using CCRU as the intake and triage hub for screening, matching, and coordinating deployments—rather than the primary provider in every matter.
- Standardizing engagement terms (confidentiality, conflicts screening, scope limits) so outside support remains aligned with CCRU’s role.

This approach mirrors CRS’s historical use of external assistance, while improving on it by building standing, California-based capacity that can be activated quickly and repeatedly in the same regions.

Partner and invest in monitoring technology and matter pattern recognition: While CCRU should avoid overinvestment in complex or speculative technology, modest digital tools can substantially increase institutional effectiveness. Near-term partnerships and investments could include:

- Standardized digital matter tracking.
- Conflict monitoring by collaborating with Princeton’s Bridging Divides Initiative.
- Internal knowledge repositories “playbooks” and guidelines.

CCRU should adopt Microsoft Dynamics 365 (U.S. Government cloud) as its core matter management backbone to standardize intake, triage, and documentation while meeting government deployment and compliance expectations.⁸⁴ Rather than building an “early warning system” from scratch, CCRU can partner with Princeton’s Bridging Divides Initiative (BDI) for light-touch pattern recognition—while maintaining an internal, de-identified matter taxonomy that captures repeat drivers, surge conditions, and lessons learned across matters.⁸⁵ Over time, disciplined tracking of interventions and follow-through can be translated into reusable protocols and trainings for staff and partners. These tools are not about automation; they are about resource allocation, institutional memory, and overcoming the challenges of geographic dispersed facilitation programs.

⁸⁴ *Dynamics 365 US Government*, MICROSOFT, <https://learn.microsoft.com/en-us/power-platform/admin/microsoft-dynamics-365-government> (last visited Jan. 5, 2026).

⁸⁵ *Delivering Action-Oriented Research*, PRINCETON UNIV. BRIDGING DIVIDES INITIATIVE, <https://bridgingdivides.princeton.edu/research> (last visited Jan. 5, 2026) (describing BDI’s production of data and analysis to enable trend monitoring, early warning, and response).

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Formalize CCRU’s convener role: CRS experience shows effective intervention is rarely just “mediation.” It is convening: assembling the stakeholders who can make and keep commitments. These activities multiply CCRU’s impact without requiring direct matter involvement in every community. CCRU should treat its convening function as a core service by:

- Hosting targeted trainings for local officials and community leaders;
- Producing practical guides and playbooks for conflict prevention;
- Convening regional or statewide forums to disseminate best practices.

2. Long-Term Recommendations (3–5 Years): Institutional Evolution

Short-term pilots can prove CCRU’s value. Long-term viability, though, requires moving beyond a very small response unit toward a repeatable institutional model—one that can (1) prevent escalation, (2) intervene quickly when needed, and (3) build durable local capacity so the same jurisdictions don’t keep cycling back into crisis.

Adopt a prevention–intervention–recovery framework: CCRU should formalize its work across three integrated phases to clarify scope, manage expectations, and justify sustained staffing and funding. This framing matters because it tells stakeholders what CCRU is—and what it is not. CCRU is not an enforcement arm. It is a standing capacity for stabilization and institutional learning:

- Prevention: targeted training, relationship-building, and hotspot monitoring.
- Just-in-Time Intervention: facilitated dialogue and mediation during active conflict.
- Recovery and Capacity Building: post-crisis support (protocols, action plans, referrals, and follow-through pathways) to reduce recurrence.

Regionalize CCRU through hubs and local government liaisons: CRS’s federal footprint illustrates the structural limit of a centralized model: CRS operates nationally through ten regional offices and three field offices—a thin presence relative to geography and surge dynamics. Regionalization is not about building a new agency. It’s about reducing friction before conflict begins; fewer cold starts, fewer credibility gaps, and faster convening when the temperature rises. CCRU can improve on this by building modest regional coverage calibrated to California’s size and diversity:

- Establish regional hubs (even part-time or rotating) aligned to high-demand areas.
- Designate municipal liaisons within city or county governments to shorten response time and preserve continuity.
- Use the roster-based network (short-term recommendation) to staff surge response without building a large permanent bureaucracy.

Explore grant-making or resource-distribution function: If CCRU wants durable statewide coverage, it should consider a limited grant-making function to fund local capacity rather than trying to provide everything directly. The AAA-ICDR Foundation’s grant cycle is a useful proof point that dispute-resolution philanthropy can be structured with clear eligibility

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and guardrails.⁸⁶ This follows the “connector” model: CCRU remains small, neutral, and credible, while supporting the broader conflict-absorbing ecosystem:

- Competitive grants (e.g., ~\$200k range) to cities, counties, or regional collaboratives.
- Eligible uses: local mediation programs, early-intervention infrastructure, convening capacity, and training.
- Preferred structure: CCRU funds capacity, not outcomes metrics—especially where counterfactuals are hard.

Build a California early-warning and hotspot identification system: CCRU should develop a situational awareness framework—not surveillance, not prediction. The objective is operational: identify rising risk early enough to intervene before escalation. Princeton’s Bridging Divides Initiative (BDI) is a credible partner here because it explicitly describes early-warning structures, situational awareness, and “proactive alerts and strategic advising” to support early action. CCRU does not need to build a bespoke data science stack; it needs a disciplined framework for seeing recurring risk patterns early enough to mobilize relationships and protocols. Near-term building blocks include:

- Aggregated inputs from local partners (city managers, school districts, mediation centers, faith coalitions).
- High-level trend monitoring (including public information signals) focused on clusters and repeat drivers, not individuals.
- A simple “hotspot” rubric tied to CCRU’s triage categories (bias incidents, police– community flashpoints, institutional legitimacy disputes).

Adopt a “case management” institutional model with CCRU as the coordinating node: Long-term, CCRU should conceptualize itself less as a high-volume service provider and more as a high-expertise coordinator. Scalable posture means maintaining an effective team, strong reputation, reliable referrals, and firm standards for neutrality and confidentiality, with CCRU as:

- The intake and triage hub for high-risk community conflict.
- A matchmaker (mediators, assistance, partner agencies, funding streams).
- A custodian of standards and institutional learning (templates, playbooks, training modules).

Formalize federal-state-local incentives and training: CCRU should push beyond voluntary uptake by aligning training and participation with real incentives. This recommendation aims to ensure competence across the state, so credible processes under pressure are not limited to CCRU:

- Encourage (or require, where feasible) conflict-resolution training for school administrators and local human relations commissions.
- Tie participation to professional development credit, grant eligibility, or statewide recognition programs.

⁸⁶ *Annual Grants*, AM. ARBITRATION ASS’N, <https://www.aaicdrfoundation.org/annual-grant-cycle> (last visited Jan. 5, 2026).

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- Build standardized CCRU-aligned protocols for convening during protests, bias incidents, and school legitimacy disputes, modeled after similar CRS protocols.

Expand partnerships with platforms and national initiatives: CCRU should engage selectively with platforms and national initiatives where the objective is process support, not speech regulation: The DOJ’s “United Against Hate” initiative is an example of a national model that convenes forums to increase reporting and strengthen trust across communities and government partners. CCRU can learn from the convening architecture without inheriting an enforcement posture:⁸⁷

- Partner around reporting pathways, rumor control protocols, and community stabilization playbooks;
- Maintain neutrality by refusing any role as a content arbiter.

Invest in fellowships and a talent pipeline: CCRU should build a pipeline that expands capacity without committing to permanent headcount. This structure supports sustained relationship-building and mentorship, while also drawing on a scalable pool of supervised, service-oriented capacity through law students and early-career pro bono attorneys:

- Law school externships and clinic partnerships;
- Fellowships for practitioners with mediation/civil rights experience;
- Structured onboarding and ethics training that match CCRU’s neutrality and confidentiality posture;
- A pathway for fellows to support regional hubs, surge response, and playbook development.

Build relationships with partnering organizations: CCRU is well-positioned to partner with community mediation centers, non-profit community based organizations, faith-based groups, and chambers of commerce committed to programs about building community, protecting civil and human rights, and creating partnerships for community problem solving. Creating cultural competencies—in connection with leadership support, youth development, and economic responses to situations where tensions manifest into discrimination or harassment—are all areas which philanthropy often seeks to support. CCRU is the division with CRD that can build these kinds of relationships in service of helping communities build capacity to engage in the work of community actions aimed at protecting and promoting civil rights. Note that CCRU, like any state agency, must diligently follow California state policies, rules, and guidelines on philanthropic solicitation in order to avoid conflicts of interest and ethical violations.

⁸⁷ *Justice Department Launches Nationwide Initiative to Combat Unlawful Acts of Hate*, U.S. DEP’T OF JUST., OFF. OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS (June 2023), <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice%20department-launches-nationwide-initiative-combat-unlawful-acts-hate> (describing “United Against Hate” forums connecting community groups with federal, state, and local partners to increase reporting and build trust) (last visited Jan. 5, 2026).

IV. Narrative Case Studies of CCRU's Work and Impact

The California Community Conflict Resolution Unit (CCRU) plays an essential, non-enforcement role within the California Civil Rights Department. As a neutral, confidential resource, CCRU engages at the request of communities or public entities to design conflict resolution processes, facilitate community engagement, mediate conflict, and provide education, training, and consultation to address tensions related to discrimination, hate incidents, and hate crimes. This work supports communities in constructively managing conflict, reducing the potential for escalation or violence, and reaching mutually acceptable outcomes.

Despite the importance of this work, CCRU faces significant resource constraints, including limited staffing capacity and the potential loss of operational funding beyond 2026. A key aspect of this challenge is the difficulty in demonstrating CCRU's value. The value of its work often lies in the outcomes that are avoided, such as escalation, violence, and breakdowns in community relationships. As a result, traditional evaluation metrics are not well-suited to capturing this type of preventative impact. This report responds to this need by using narrative case studies to make CCRU's work more visible, with a focus on process, relationships, and capacity-building.

A. Insights and Background

The two case studies in this report, one documenting CCRU's partnership with the Santa Barbara chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and one documenting the development of the San Bernardino County Human Rights Anti-Hate Coalition, illustrate how CCRU's work actually unfolds in practice. Overall, the experiences of CCRU's community partners detailed in this report point to a clear need to sustain CCRU's staffing and operational funding beyond 2026. These cases show what that investment makes possible, and what its absence would cost.

In Santa Barbara, CCRU supported the NAACP in designing and facilitating a series of community and youth dialogues following incidents of anti-Black racism in local schools. CCRU provided facilitation training, dialogue structure, and ongoing support, which enabled the NAACP to sustain the process and develop working groups focused on anti-Blackness and youth engagement. In San Bernardino County, CCRU supported a nonprofit, the Family Assistance Program, in developing a county-wide anti-hate coalition. CCRU helped organize extensive community input into a more defined structure, including the formation of an Advisory Committee, working groups, and a 15-question hate incident reporting tool designed to address underreporting and community distrust.

What is consistent across both matters is CCRU's role in helping local leaders take a large amount of input, ideas, and urgency and translate them into structured, ongoing processes, including dialogue series and coalition models. These processes shift communities away from responding only after hate incidents occur. They instead create more sustained, preventive approaches to addressing core challenges, including anti-Black racism and gaps in hate incident reporting and response.

1. Preventive Impact and Rationale for Narrative Case Studies

CCRU's current resource constraints, including limited staffing capacity and the risk of losing operational funding, underscore the importance of clearly demonstrating its value. At the same time, CCRU's work presents a fundamental challenge for traditional approaches to measuring impact.

Civil rights mediation is often preventive. Its impact lies in what does not happen: escalation, harm (hate incidents, etc.), and breakdowns in community relationships. Traditional metrics for post-escalation enforcement, such as arrests, prosecutions, or litigation outcomes, do not capture the core of CCRU's work. Metrics such as dispute resolution rates or satisfaction with the mediation process can be useful, but often fail to capture the full scope of impact, including relationship-building and/or relationship restoration. Preventive interventions are less visible by design. Assessing their impact requires consideration of counterfactuals (what may have occurred in the absence of intervention). In CCRU's case, this challenge is compounded by the confidential and relationship-based nature of its work, which limits what can be publicly documented or quantified. These constraints are further intensified by CCRU's limited staff capacity, which restricts the time and resources available for evaluation (especially more time-intensive qualitative assessments).

Narrative case studies offer an approach well suited to this context. Rather than relying on quantitative indicators alone, they make visible the processes, relationships, and capacity-building that define CCRU's work. Through detailed accounts grounded in the perspectives and words of CCRU's clients, case studies illustrate how CCRU supports local leaders and helps prevent escalation over time.

2. Methodology: Stakeholder Interviews and Case Study Selection Process

This report is grounded in qualitative research conducted in close collaboration with CCRU. Initial meetings with CCRU Senior Attorney Mediators focused on understanding the unit's core functions, current challenges, and the broader need to more effectively demonstrate and communicate the value of its work.

Given confidentiality constraints, a range of potential case studies was considered, including more than ten collaborations across the state such as regional forums, documentary film screenings and facilitated dialogues, among other matters. From this set, two case studies were selected: (1) the Santa Barbara NAACP collaboration and (2) the San Bernardino County Human Rights Anti-Hate Coalition. These matters were selected because they demonstrate CCRU's capacity to structure and facilitate long-term, ongoing engagement. Both involve multi-year processes that began in response to hate incidents within communities but evolved into sustained, preventive structures for dialogue, relationship-building, and coordinated community action. The analysis draws primarily on semi-structured stakeholder interviews conducted via Zoom, each lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. Interviewees included:

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- Connie Alexander, President of the Santa Barbara NAACP and co-founder of Gateway Educational Services.
- Jim Bolas, Chief Program Officer of the Family Assistance Program and a key collaborator in the San Bernardino coalition.

Interview questions were shared in advance and covered several core areas: community context prior to CCRU involvement, initial entry points and trust-building with CCRU, CCRU's role and process over time, perceived impact and outcomes, and counterfactual reflections on what may have occurred in the absence of CCRU support.

Additional data sources included CCRU Salesforce inputs and internal notes, CCRU planning documents related to dialogue design and facilitation, and ongoing coordination with CCRU staff to develop matter timelines and clarify key moments of engagement. Materials from the San Bernardino coalition, including planning notes, meeting minutes, and internal documents shared by Jim Bolas, were also reviewed. Publicly available news articles documenting relevant hate incidents and regional context were used to supplement this analysis.

This approach has a few key limitations. First, both case studies represent ongoing efforts, meaning outcomes are still evolving. Second, the confidential and relationship-based nature of CCRU's work also limits the extent of publicly available documentation. As a result, this analysis relies heavily on stakeholder perspectives and internal materials, which may not fully capture CCRU's role across all interactions or over time. Third, the matters selected are not representative of the full range of CCRU's work, but rather reflect a specific subset of long-term, dialogue-based engagements.

3. Key Findings and Recommendations

Across both case studies, several consistent patterns emerge in how CCRU supports community-based responses to hate and conflict, pointing to key considerations for next steps.

Utilizing convenings and networks: These matters highlight the importance of conferences, convenings, and existing networks as key entry points for CCRU engagement. In both cases, partner organizations were connected to CCRU through conferences, convenings, and existing civil rights networks: In San Bernardino, CCRU was brought in through the Inland Empire Anti-Hate Forum and relationships across civil rights intermediaries. In Santa Barbara, the connection emerged through the Stop the Hate conference. These spaces are where trust begins to form, and they have served as essential on-ramps for CCRU's work. Continued investment in these convenings is essential, particularly as Stop the Hate funding approaches its June 2026 end date.

Capacity-building model: The case studies also reinforce that CCRU's greatest contribution to communities is its capacity-building model, particularly given its small team. This model helps local leaders translate community input into structured, sustainable processes without creating ongoing dependency on outside support. This includes supporting local leaders through design tools, facilitation expertise, feedback, and accountability. In Santa Barbara, CCRU maintained the structure needed for a consistent dialogue process and helped relieve the burden of what was otherwise 100% volunteer-led NAACP work. In San Bernardino, CCRU

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supported the translation of broad community input into a more structured coalition with defined priorities and outputs. CCRU also has a unique ability to bring in examples of how similar issues have been handled in other communities across the state., which helps local leaders think through how to structure their own approach, rather than starting from scratch.

Role as confidential, non-enforcement actor: CCRU’s positioning as a confidential, non-enforcement actor has proven essential for building trust in communities that may be skeptical of government institutions. In Santa Barbara, this had to be explicitly communicated, with NAACP leadership repeatedly clarifying that CCRU was “not the police” and not part of enforcement. This distinction was critical for building trust and getting people in the room. At the same time, CCRU’s role as state actors within the Civil Rights Department, combined with institutional experience as civil rights attorneys, gave them a form of perceived neutrality and credibility. This combination allowed CCRU to act as a trusted third party.

Invisibility of preventive work: These case studies underscore how much of CCRU’s most valuable work is not immediately visible. Rather, their impact often lies in what outcomes are prevented: escalation, violence, fragmentation, and/or a loss of momentum that communities working without this support often experience. Much of CCRU’s impact occurs behind the scenes, through planning, relationship-building, and ongoing support. In both these cases, CCRU’s impact becomes clearer when considering what the work would have looked like without them: In San Bernardino, Bolas described a landscape where “everyone’s speaking, but no one’s listening,” reflecting that without CCRU the coalition would have been “much slower, much less focused, and more reactive.” In Santa Barbara, Alexander similarly emphasized that without CCRU, “I don’t think we’d have been able to stay consistent to get through the whole process.” Their reflections suggest the value of incorporating this type of counterfactual analysis when assessing CCRU’s work. However, the invisible nature of this work underscores that some degree of trust is required in the value of preventive, relationship-based work.

Need for continued investment: Both matters point to the need for continued investment in sustaining CCRU’s work, particularly its role in supporting preventive dialogues and helping communities navigate polarization. Referring to worsening racism and conflict, Alexander emphasized, “This is hard by ourselves. We are all volunteers. This is crazy. It’s getting worse. So I feel strongly that if there is not a network of people who are committed to doing this kind of social justice work across our communities...what we might face next without that fabric of people, it’ll be even harder.”⁸⁸

B. Building a Preventive Model: The Santa Barbara NAACP

The Santa Barbara chapter of the NAACP partnered with CCRU to build a preventive, dialogue-based response to anti-Black racism in the community. The collaboration was catalyzed by two racist attacks on Black middle school students in 2022, which exposed a pattern of anti-Black racism that school administrators had failed to address. Starting in late 2023, CCRU provided facilitation training, dialogue design, and ongoing structural support that helped the

⁸⁸ Zoom Interview by Elizabeth Evers with Connie Alexander, President of the Santa Barbara NAACP and co-founder of Gateway Educational Services (Mar. 6, 2026).

chapter president Alexander move from a broad idea to a sustained series of community dialogues. This included a multi-sector community dialogue, a youth dialogue with middle school students, and the formation of working groups on anti-Blackness and youth. CCRU brought legal expertise and a state-level perspective that complemented Alexander's extensive local knowledge. Alexander reflected that without CCRU, "I don't think we'd have been able to stay consistent to get through the whole process."

1. Santa Barbara's Social and Historical Landscape

Understanding CCRU's role in Santa Barbara requires first situating the collaboration within the community's broader social and historical context. Santa Barbara is a coastal city in Southern California, located about 90 miles northwest of Los Angeles, on the unceded lands of the Chumash people.⁸⁹ Today, it has a population of roughly 89,000 residents.⁹⁰ Often referred to as the "American Riviera," Santa Barbara is widely known for its Mediterranean climate, beaches, Spanish Colonial architecture, and status as a luxury tourist destination.⁹¹ At the same time, this image of affluence masks significant economic inequality. Santa Barbara County has one of the highest poverty rates in California, with nearly 70,000 residents living below the California Poverty Measure.⁹² This translates to roughly one in six adults and one in five children living in poverty, reflecting the high cost of living in the region.

The city is majority non-Hispanic White (52.8%), with a large Hispanic/Latino population (36.4%), while Black residents make up a very small share of the population (approximately 1.4% as of 2024).⁹³ Despite this small population, Santa Barbara's Black community dates back to the 1500s. According to a 2022 city-commissioned report on Black history in Santa Barbara, early Black residents included individuals of Afro-Latino ancestry as well as formerly enslaved Africans recruited by the Spanish as soldiers.⁹⁴ The Black population grew significantly during the first and second Great Migrations. It declined beginning in the late 1960s and 1970s due to limited economic opportunity and restricted access to housing, shaped by systemic racism and exclusionary housing and employment practices.⁹⁵ By 1980, the Black population dropped for the first time in nearly a century, and this decline has continued. Today, the Black population has decreased from a peak of 3.3% in 1970 to approximately 1.4% in 2024.

Interviews conducted as part of the city-commissioned report describe the ongoing effects of gentrification and the gradual erasure of Black presence in Santa Barbara.⁹⁶ As President of

⁸⁹ *Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians*, CHUMASH INDIANS, <https://chumash.gov/> (last visited Mar. 29, 2026).

⁹⁰ *QuickFacts: Santa Barbara City, Cal.*, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/santabarbaracitycalifornia/PST045224> (last visited Mar. 29, 2026).

⁹¹ *Santa Barbara*, VISIT CAL., <https://www.visitcalifornia.com/places-to-visit/santa-barbara/> (last visited Mar. 29, 2026).

⁹² Ryan P. Cruz, *In Wealthy Santa Barbara, Poverty Rate Among Highest in State*, SANTA BARBARA INDEP. (Jan. 16, 2025), <https://www.independent.com/2025/01/16/in-wealthy-santa-barbara-poverty-rate-among-highest-in-state/>

⁹³ *QuickFacts: Santa Barbara City*, *supra*.

⁹⁴ Teresa Moore, *Black Parents Tell Santa Barbara School District: Years of Bullying of Black Students Must Stop*, AM. COMMUNITY MEDIA, (Nov. 22, 2024), <https://americancommunitymedia.org/stop-the-hate/black-parents-tell-santa-barbara-school-district-years-of-bullying-of-black-students-must-stop/>

⁹⁵ *Id.*

⁹⁶ *Id.*

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the NAACP Santa Barbara chapter Connie Alexander explains, “the anti-Blackness in our community really pushes towards... erasure of Black voices.”⁹⁷ Alexander is a key leader in the Santa Barbara community working to address anti-Blackness. She stepped into her NAACP leadership role in 2022, when the national office was considering shutting down the local chapter.⁹⁸ As she described, “I really was not wanting to see that happen to our community, so I jumped in there.”⁹⁹

Alexander’s leadership with the NAACP builds on longstanding work empowering youth in the community. She co-founded Gateway Educational Services in 2009 with Audrey Gamble. Gateway is Santa Barbara’s only nonprofit learning center.¹⁰⁰ They take an holistic approach to students’ academic and personal development, offering assessment-based reading and math interventions, college readiness programs, and academic summer camps.¹⁰¹ The organization also engages parents and builds close relationships with families that often span a student’s academic career.

2. Anti-Black Racism in SBUSD Schools

In February of 2022, in two different Santa Barbara Unified School District junior high schools, two 12-year-old Black boys were victims of racist bullying.¹⁰² In one incident, a Black Santa Barbara Junior High student was assaulted by Latino classmates mimicking the murder of George Floyd, with their knees pressed against the victim’s neck. In another incident, a Black La Colina Junior High student was targeted by a white classmate who created a TikTok video comparing him and other Black students to monkeys and apes. According to local reporting, “the video, accompanied by an offensive song, was festooned with the N-word.”¹⁰³

These incidents led to legal action against the school district. The victims’ mothers filed suit against the Santa Barbara Unified School District (SBUSD), alleging that school officials failed to adequately respond to or prevent racist bullying in a district where Black students are a small minority.¹⁰⁴ They sought both reform of district practices and compensation for the harm experienced by their sons. The mothers alleged that, despite awareness of ongoing incidents, teachers and administrators failed to intervene, protect their children, or provide timely and effective support.

For Alexander, the incident was deeply personal. Through her work with Gateway Educational Services, she knew the students and families impacted. As she described the first

⁹⁷ Interview with Connie Alexander, *supra*.

⁹⁸ Jordan Killebrew, *NAACP Santa Barbara Chapter Swears in New Officers*, NOOZHAWK (Apr. 20, 2022), https://www.noozhawk.com/naacp_santa_barbara_chapter_swears_in_new_officers/.

⁹⁹ Interview with Connie Alexander, *supra*.

¹⁰⁰ *History and Staff*, GATEWAY EDUCATIONAL SERVICES, <https://www.gatewayeducationalservices.org/about-us> (last visited Mar. 29, 2026).

¹⁰¹ Victor Bryant, *Gateway Educational Services Offers Equity Learning in Santa Barbara*, SANTA BARBARA INDEP. (July 5, 2020), <https://www.independent.com/2020/07/05/gateway-educational-services-offers-equity-learning-in-santa-barbara/>

¹⁰² Moore, *supra*.

¹⁰³ *Id.*

¹⁰⁴ *Id.*

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assault, “when this assault happened, we knew this boy and I’ve known his mother for a long time. So this was personal. And what we saw was that the schools weren’t talking about it.”¹⁰⁵ In response, Gateway (co-led by Alexander) and the nonprofit Healing Justice Santa Barbara organized parents and students in the spring of 2022 to speak out at school board meetings about anti-Black racism in SBUSD. At these meetings, students described being called racial slurs, seeing racist language written in school spaces, and being mocked and dehumanized by peers.

This public pressure prompted action from the district. School board president Wendy Sims-Moten pushed for an independent audit of the district’s racial climate. Conducted between October 2022 and February 2023, the assessment included surveys and 24 focus groups with students, families, and staff. The findings revealed that racist bullying was often ignored or normalized by school staff. As one student described, “It’s kind of normal to come to school and feel like it’s going to be a racist day today,” while another noted that “students get in trouble for cursing, but not for using the N-word.”¹⁰⁶ Staff also reported having no clear guidance for how to respond to racist incidents.

3. How the NAACP-CCRU Partnership Began

With this understanding of how hate was manifesting in the community, Alexander began searching for a different approach. As she described, “I desperately feel like there has to be a different model for all of this, a model that is preventive. How do you have conversations before things happen?”¹⁰⁷ She contrasted this with what she saw as the dominant pattern: incidents occur, tensions escalate, and only then do communities respond. “We tend to have a model in the United States of things blow up...and then it takes a long time to get everybody to calm down before you’re able to really get to the root of it.”¹⁰⁸ She saw a clear gap in Santa Barbara. “I didn’t see any place where people were coming together to have these conversations,” she explained, “and they certainly weren’t being led by the Black community at all.”¹⁰⁹

In 2023, through her work as a nonprofit leader, Alexander attended a conference sponsored by California’s Stop the Hate initiative, which was created in response to rising hate incidents across the state. In 2021, \$110 million was allocated through this initiative to support hate crime prevention and direct support work.¹¹⁰ At the conference, Alexander met Becky Monroe, a civil rights attorney who has worked for nearly two decades with leaders at the federal, state, and local levels to combat hate and support the development of community-centered responses. At the time, Monroe was serving as Deputy Director for Strategic Initiatives and External Affairs at the California Civil Rights Department. Her prior roles included directing the Fighting Hate and Bias Project at the Leadership Conference on Civil

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Connie Alexander, *supra*.

¹⁰⁶ Moore, *supra*.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Connie Alexander, *supra*.

¹⁰⁸ *Id.*

¹⁰⁹ *Id.*

¹¹⁰ *Our Story*, STOP THE HATE, <https://stopthehateca.org/our-story/> (last visited Mar. 29, 2026).

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and Human Rights, leading the Divided Community Project, and serving as Acting Director of the U.S. Department of Justice’s Community Relations Service.¹¹¹

After Alexander described the 2022 racist assaults, Monroe introduced her to the California Community Conflict Resolution Unit. Alexander then did her own research on CCRU and its previous work. She learned that Marquez Equalibria, then Assistant Deputy Director of CCRU, had previously worked closely with the Santa Maria NAACP branch while serving as a Conciliation Specialist with the Community Relations Service in the Western Region.¹¹² This included work following a 2011 cross-burning incident in nearby Arroyo Grande, in which individuals burned an 11-foot cross near a Black family’s home and were later convicted on multiple hate crime-related charges.¹¹³ When Alexander spoke with members of the Santa Maria NAACP, she recalled that “they had such great things to say about Marquez...he could be trusted and he had a good sense of community.”¹¹⁴

Following these conversations, Alexander reached out to CCRU to explore how to implement her idea of a preventive, dialogue-based model. Their first meeting took place in December 2023. From the outset, Alexander felt that the CCRU team, which also included Senior Attorney Mediators Gregory Mann and Kendra Tanacea, understood her priorities. As she described, “I’ve got this big idea...like, how do you do this?” and they responded, “Oh yeah, we understand this...how do you have pre-conversations?”¹¹⁵

Through late 2023 and early 2024, CCRU worked closely with Alexander and the NAACP to plan a series of community dialogues. In February, CCRU conducted facilitation training for NAACP members who would be leading the first dialogue later that month. From Alexander’s perspective, CCRU’s design expertise was especially valuable. She needed support in translating a broad idea into a concrete structure, including what kinds of questions to ask and how to guide participants toward consensus on community priorities. “CCRU really helped with what kind of format we can use,” she explained.¹¹⁶ CCRU specifically helped address a challenge she identified as common among local leaders, which is isolation. As she reflected, “sometimes we can be really isolated in communities and as leaders, so CCRU is a beautiful bridge between communities.”¹¹⁷ CCRU was able to bring insights from other regions across the state to then help situate Santa Barbara’s challenges within a wider landscape of similar work.¹¹⁸

¹¹¹ *Becky Monroe*, MATTHEW SHEPHARD FOUND., <https://www.matthewshepard.org/people/becky-monroe/> (last visited Mar. 27, 2026).

¹¹² *Marquez Equalibria, Ass’t Dep. Dir. of the Cmty. Conflict Resolution Unit*, CAL. CIV. RIGHTS DEP’T, <https://calcivilrights.ca.gov/executivebios/asstdepdircommunityconflictresolution-equalibria/> (last visited Mar. 29, 2026).

¹¹³ Camille Mann, *Cross Burning in Calif. Suburb Brings FBI Into Hate Crime Invest.*, CBS NEWS (Mar. 22, 2011), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/cross-burning-in-calif-suburb-brings-fbi-into-hate-crime-investigation/>.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Connie Alexander, *supra*.

¹¹⁵ *Id.*

¹¹⁶ *Id.*

¹¹⁷ *Id.*

¹¹⁸ *Id.*

4. The First Community Dialogue

The first community dialogue took place in late February 2024. It brought together a multi-sector group of participants, including city officials, school district leaders, nonprofit advocates, and representatives from faith and business communities. Attendance was by invitation, with participants selected by NAACP leadership. This invitation approach initially raised questions among community members. As Alexander recalled, “At first, people were saying to me, why is this whole thing by invitation?” She explained her reasoning clearly: “I have to make sure that this is a safe space.”¹¹⁹ CCRU supported this decision, reinforcing the importance of establishing trust and furthering Alexander’s own confidence in setting the conditions for the dialogue.

The goal of the dialogue was not to respond to a single incident, but to begin building a preventive, community-driven process. As Alexander framed it, the purpose was to ask: “What are the real priority issues you want to look at in this community? What’s on your mind?” She emphasized how aligned CCRU was with this vision, noting, “I loved that Marquez understood me and my goals immediately.”¹²⁰ In the dialogue itself, Alexander opened the session and helped bridge the gap between CCRU and the community. She grounded the conversation in the 2022 school-based incidents as an example of how hate manifests locally. Establishing trust required clarifying CCRU’s role. NAACP leaders repeatedly emphasized that CCRU was not connected to law enforcement. As Alexander explained, “we had to really explain to the community that they were not on the police side of things...we needed to repeatedly say this is not the police.”¹²¹ Trust was also built by sharing CCRU’s experience working with other communities, including Marquez Equalibria’s experience in Arroyo Grande.

CCRU then led the facilitation of the dialogue using a rotating station format, creating a highly interactive environment. “It was great because it got people out of their norm,” she explained, allowing participants to engage more actively.¹²² This also shifted the dynamic for local leaders: “It allowed me to participate, and other community members to participate, who are often in leadership positions where we get stuck having to lead everything.”¹²³ She described CCRU as a “really nice third party,” while still maintaining a “super collaborative” tone with community members.¹²⁴

Reflecting on this phase of community dialogues, Alexander identified the first dialogue as one of the moments she was most proud of in her leadership. “It’s a really big deal that people showed up,” she said.¹²⁵ “They trusted me, they trusted the NAACP, and then they began to trust CCRU.”¹²⁶ The intentional design of the process, including the invitation structure and the emphasis on CCRU’s non-enforcement role, helped ensure that participants did not feel

¹¹⁹ *Id.*

¹²⁰ *Id.*

¹²¹ *Id.*

¹²² *Id.*

¹²³ *Id.*

¹²⁴ *Id.*

¹²⁵ *Id.*

¹²⁶ *Id.*

immediately defensive. As she noted, “the way we approached it didn’t put anybody on the defensive...I’ve seen some really bad town halls.”¹²⁷

5. Centering Youth: The Student Dialogue

One of the clearest outcomes of the first community dialogue was the importance of youth support, empowerment, and engagement. Building on this, CCRU continued working with the NAACP throughout March and April to plan a follow-up dialogue focused specifically on youth. In late May, CCRU co-facilitated this community dialogue focused on youth engagement. As Alexander described, the goal was to create a space where participants could hear directly from one another “in a space that wasn’t necessarily the space they would typically find themselves in.”¹²⁸ The dialogue included small breakout groups and focused on identifying goals, priorities, and potential approaches to supporting youth in the community. This included thinking around curriculum, activities, and logistics that could promote stronger relationships among middle school students, with the longer-term goal of developing youth as anti-hate leaders as they move into high school.

From this dialogue, a clear next step emerged: engaging directly with students. Over the summer and into the fall, CCRU continued meeting with the NAACP in July and September to design this workshop with students. This process included developing questions, structuring activities, and grounding the approach in feedback from the NAACP team. The central question guiding this phase was how to equip middle school students with conflict resolution skills to address racism in SBUSD schools.

In October, CCRU designed and helped facilitate a dialogue with middle school students. Twelve students participated, with additional support from NAACP and Gateway leaders. The dialogue was structured to encourage participation, including the use of Post-it notes to make it easier for students to share responses. The student dialogue included both morning and afternoon sessions. The morning session introduced students to the concept of discrimination and racism, connected these ideas to both historical and present-day experiences, and invited students to reflect on what they see in their own schools. CCRU designed four rotating stations, with small groups of approximately three students spending around 20 minutes at each station.

The first station, Welcoming and Inclusive Schools, asked questions such as “What are positive things your school does to make you feel welcome, included, respected, and valued?”¹²⁹ The second station, General Conflict Among Students, focused on peer dynamics and asked students to share “What would make you feel more comfortable to say or do something while standing up against hate, bullying, and discrimination?”¹³⁰ The third and fourth stations focused specifically on anti-Latina/o and anti-Black experiences, respectively. Both began with the question: “Do you believe kids treat each other differently because of their race, or some other characteristic like their religion, culture, other languages they speak, or any other part of their

¹²⁷ *Id.*

¹²⁸ *Id.*

¹²⁹ Cal. Civ. Rights Dep’t, *CCRU NAACP Youth Dialogue Materials* (2025).

¹³⁰ *Id.*

identity? Why?”¹³¹ These conversations then moved to more specific questions, including: “Are kids who are considered Latin American immigrants, or kids who speak a lot of Spanish, talked about or treated badly? If so, why?” and “Do you ever hear kids at school use the N-word, and does it happen often? Why do you think kids use the N-word?”¹³²

The afternoon session shifted toward action. This session focused on how to address issues of discrimination in schools by inviting students to share solutions and learn basic conflict resolution skills. The goal was for students to take on the role of ambassadors against hate. Together, the two dialogues were designed by CCRU to move students from awareness to agency by positioning them as active leaders in creating more inclusive school environments. The first station, “Creating an Inclusive, Respectful, Welcoming, and Safe School and Community for Everyone,” asked questions along the lines of “What is something you don’t do at school that you could do to help your school be a friendlier, safer, more respectful and welcoming place for all students?”¹³³ The second station introduced the conflict resolution skill of “I” statements. This station emphasized how students can express their feelings without assigning blame or escalating tensions, and instead communicate from personal experience. Students practiced developing their own “I” statements.¹³⁴ They then reflected on how this approach could help reduce conflict and support more inclusive interactions.

At the end of the dialogue, CCRU collected student feedback through evaluation questions about their experience, key takeaways, and suggestions for improvement, continuing to utilize Post-it notes. This feedback helped surface student priorities and informed next steps for the NAACP. As Alexander described, the dialogue provided an opportunity to understand “what are [students’] real lived experiences right now?” and to use that input to guide future work: “It was a really great opportunity for the kids to give us feedback” and to move forward from there.¹³⁵ Reflecting on CCRU’s role in this phase, Alexander emphasized their experience working in school settings. “They’ve done a lot of work in schools, which is super helpful,” she noted, “because a lot of hate situations unfortunately happen in the schools.”¹³⁶ She highlighted how CCRU “can easily bring forward their knowledge and experience,” which allows them to translate complex issues like racism at school into concrete dialogue structures that students can engage with directly.¹³⁷

6. From Dialogue to Action: Working Groups

Building on the youth dialogue and earlier community conversations, the next phase focused on narrowing the information that had been gathered into a clear set of priorities. Drawing on input from both the student dialogue and prior community dialogues, NAACP leadership, with support from CCRU, worked to identify areas of focus moving into 2025.

¹³¹ *Id.*

¹³² *Id.*

¹³³ *Id.*

¹³⁴ *Id.*

¹³⁵ Interview with Connie Alexander, *supra*.

¹³⁶ *Id.*

¹³⁷ *Id.*

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In the first half of 2025, the NAACP hosted two additional community dialogues, in March and June, both facilitated by CCRU. The goal of these dialogues was to identify a set of priorities that could guide more sustained work through working groups. These dialogues also included spaces specifically for leaders of color, particularly to surface and communicate needs between Latino and Black communities in Santa Barbara. By June 2025, two priority areas had emerged: anti-Blackness and youth. These became the focus of two working groups, with CCRU participating in each. The working group structure was intentionally chosen to encourage active buy-in and ongoing engagement, as well as a sense of shared responsibility for moving the work forward.

Throughout the summer and early fall, CCRU continued meeting with the working groups as well as NAACP leadership. For example, in September, CCRU attended an anti-Blackness working group meeting and provided information on the Uniform Complaint Procedures (UCP). The UCP process in California allows students and families to file complaints with school districts regarding discrimination, harassment, or other violations of education law.¹³⁸ The discussion focused on potential pathways for students and families to bring complaints against the local school district and, if necessary, the California Department of Education. The session, led by CCRU, also emphasized the importance of storytelling. CCRU team focused on how to capture and share lived experiences to inform and educate on anti-Blackness. The youth working group similarly focused on translating dialogue into action. CCRU met with the group to develop concrete recommendations to present to the school board on addressing racism in schools. A key focus of this work was, again, on storytelling, including how students could share their experiences of racism in ways that inform and push for change.

In November, the NAACP hosted a community dialogue to bring these two strands of work together. Participants reviewed and voted on action plans developed by the working groups. CCRU facilitated discussions for both the youth and anti-Blackness groups and helped capture share-outs and votes. These action plans became part of the NAACP's strategic plan for the next two years. As Alexander explained, this process was intentional: "I want the community to hold me accountable as someone who's leading."¹³⁹

Several concrete outcomes emerged from this process. One was the development of an anti-Blackness statement from the NAACP. In late 2025, CCRU facilitated meetings of the Anti-Blackness working group and an ad hoc committee to draft this statement. Another outcome was the development of a scorecard to evaluate local leaders and institutions. As Alexander explained, "people come to us and they want political endorsements...we don't do that, but it's still important for us to be able to evaluate what you are doing."¹⁴⁰ The scorecard is intended to assess where individuals and institutions stand on racial equity and related issues, and this work remains ongoing. Reflecting on this progress, Alexander emphasized the importance of being able to see tangible outcomes over time. "What was really nice is that the group themselves could see, here's where we started," she noted, and then see "here's the action plans, the strategies, here's what we're going to specifically go implement."¹⁴¹ This sense of

¹³⁸ *Understanding Cultural Proficiency*, CAL. DEP'T OF EDUC., <https://www.cde.ca.gov/re/cp/uc/> (last visited Mar. 29, 2026).

¹³⁹ Interview with Connie Alexander, *supra*.

¹⁴⁰ *Id.*

¹⁴¹ *Id.*

encouragement from “seeing that things are actually moving” helped sustain momentum and reinforce continued engagement in the work.¹⁴²

7. The Next Phase: Law Enforcement Engagement

Building on this foundation from a year of community dialogues, Alexander identified that the next step is to engage with law enforcement in Santa Barbara. Explaining the motivation for this next phase, Alexander pointed to the current context of increased immigration enforcement: “Because right now, when you've got ICE running around our communities, we have to have some conversation with law enforcement to say, how do you interact? What can we do to start this dialogue between communities of color and you all?”¹⁴³ She emphasized the absence of communication and growing frustration: “right now, we ain't talking to each other. Everybody's just mad...they're mad at the sheriff's department, mad at the individual police departments...so how do we have some conversation with them?”¹⁴⁴

As of March 2026, CCRU has been working closely with the NAACP to plan this next phase. Both Alexander and CCRU emphasized the importance of intentional design, particularly given the history of police brutality and over-policing of communities of color in the United States. As Alexander noted, “CCRU especially warned me: this has to be done a whole different way.”¹⁴⁵ She also underscored her reliance on CCRU's expertise in this area: “I know nothing about that part, so I'm going to be really appreciative of them walking us through this process.”¹⁴⁶

Unlike earlier dialogues, which focused on building trust within and across community groups, these planned conversations introduce actors associated with institutional power, historical harm, and deep mistrust. As a result, the success of this next phase depends heavily on the trust that has been built through earlier CCRU-facilitated processes. As Alexander explained, “since [community members] trusted us once with the process with CCRU, I'm hoping that will get [community members] back in the room, because they trust the way we did it before.”¹⁴⁷ This shows how CCRU's impact builds over time: the trust developed through earlier dialogues makes it possible to bring people back for even more difficult but necessary conversations.

8. CCRU's Role: Building Community Capacity

Across this case study, CCRU's role can be understood most clearly as building capacity. Rather than leading the work themselves, CCRU supported the NAACP and broader community in sustaining a process that could move beyond one-time, reactive responses. A key part of this capacity building was consistency, accountability, and structure. As Alexander reflected on what this process would have looked like without CCRU, “I think that we might have tried the dialogues ourselves, but I don't think we'd have been able to stay consistent to get through the

¹⁴² *Id.*

¹⁴³ *Id.*

¹⁴⁴ *Id.*

¹⁴⁵ *Id.*

¹⁴⁶ *Id.*

¹⁴⁷ *Id.*

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whole process. So that's what I appreciated...the accountability of CCRU team. Because it's easy to let things fall by the wayside.”¹⁴⁸ CCRU’s ongoing presence created a structure that kept the work moving. As she described, the community began to expect that consistency: “the community was like, Oh, they're coming. When are we having that next one?”¹⁴⁹

CCRU also expanded the capacity of local leadership by reducing the burden of carrying the work alone. As Alexander explained, “by myself, and even with our Executive Committee...doing this work would be a heavy lift...so having some other people that are helping us to think through it adds that capacity.”¹⁵⁰ CCRU’s support made the work more sustainable over time and helped mitigate burnout. It often allowed local leaders to shift their role within the process. As Alexander described, CCRU’s role allowed her to participate in spaces where leaders are often expected to lead every aspect of the conversation. This shift is important in sustaining ongoing engagement because it enables leaders to remain present rather than overextended.

In addition, CCRU contributed design and facilitation expertise that helped translate ideas into structured processes. Throughout the case study, this is reflected in the planning meetings, feedback loops, and dialogue design, including the youth dialogue. Rather than leaving NAACP leadership to determine how to operationalize a preventive, dialogue-based approach, CCRU helped develop formats, questions, and facilitation strategies that made the work actionable. CCRU’s involvement also expanded capacity by connecting the community to broader knowledge and experience. As Alexander noted, “sometimes we can be really isolated in communities and as leaders,” but CCRU serves as “a beautiful bridge between communities,” showing leaders how similar challenges have been approached elsewhere and what might be possible in their own community.¹⁵¹

Finally, CCRU’s role is shaped by how they are positioned. They are part of the state’s Civil Rights Department, but not part of law enforcement. That distinction was essential for building trust with communities of color in Santa Barbara. At the same time, CCRU brings extensive legal expertise. As Alexander emphasized, “it really helps that Kendra and Greg are both civil rights attorneys,” with the ability to understand any legal ramifications at every step.¹⁵² They can help think through complaint processes and what is possible within the law, while still being someone the community feels comfortable working with. As Alexander emphasized, “all of [this work] comes from relationships.”¹⁵³ CCRU’s positioning makes them a particularly effective partner in this kind of relationship- and trust-based work. This study illuminates how CCRU worked with local NAACP leadership to build a model of preventive dialogue in a community struggling with the erasure of Black voices. CCRU’s role was not to step in and lead, but to support and strengthen the capacity of local leaders.

¹⁴⁸ *Id.*

¹⁴⁹ *Id.*

¹⁵⁰ *Id.*

¹⁵¹ *Id.*

¹⁵² *Id.*

¹⁵³ *Id.*

C. Building the San Bernardino County Human Rights Anti-Hate Coalition

The San Bernardino County Human Rights Anti-Hate Coalition case study documents how the Community Conflict Resolution Unit partnered with the Family Assistance Program (FAP) and its Chief Program Officer, Jim Bolas, to build a county-wide coalition addressing hate crime underreporting and community fragmentation. After connecting with Bolas through a network of civil rights intermediaries in mid-2024, CCRU served primarily as a thought partner and capacity-builder, helping Bolas translate extensive community input into a focused, actionable coalition structure, including the formation of an Advisory Committee and working groups. CCRU contributed a broad, state-level perspective that complemented Bolas's deep local knowledge, while also providing facilitation tools, agenda design support, and trainings on hate crime recognition and reporting. A key outcome of this collaboration was the development of a streamlined 15-question rapid hate incident reporting tool, designed to address community distrust of law enforcement and the gaps in official data. Bolas reflected that without CCRU, the coalition would have been "much slower, much less focused, and more reactive."¹⁵⁴

1. Regional Context: San Bernardino County and the Inland Empire

San Bernardino County, located east of Los Angeles, is the largest county in the United States. It is larger than nine U.S. states and more than 70 countries, spanning over 20,000 square miles.¹⁵⁵ Home to approximately 2.1 million residents as of 2024, the county is both geographically expansive and demographically diverse.¹⁵⁶ Latino residents make up 54.2% of the population and are the largest racial and ethnic group, followed by White (23.9%), Asian (9.9%), and Black (9.1%) residents. Nearly half of residents, 46%, speak a language other than English at home.¹⁵⁷ Over the past four decades, the county has shifted from a majority White to a majority Latino population.¹⁵⁸

San Bernardino County is part of the broader Inland Empire, which the U.S. Census Bureau defines as the Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario metropolitan area. The region spans more than 27,000 square miles and includes over 4.6 million people.¹⁵⁹ Nearly 75% of the population has arrived since 1980, and approximately 22% of residents in the region are immigrants.¹⁶⁰ Much of this growth has been driven by migration from coastal counties such as

¹⁵⁴ Zoom Interview by Elizabeth Evers with Jim Bolas, Cmty. Program Officer, Family Assistance Program (Feb. 26, 2026).

¹⁵⁵ *San Bernardino Cnty. History: The Story of San Bernardino Cnty.*, SAN BERNARDINO CNTY., (Feb. 19, 2026), <https://main.sbcounty.gov/2026/02/19/san-bernardino-county-history-the-story-of-san-bernardino-county/>

¹⁵⁶ *Cnty. Profile*, SAN BERNARDINO CNTY., <https://indicators.sbcounty.gov/county-profile/> (last visited Mar. 29, 2026).

¹⁵⁷ *Id.*

¹⁵⁸ Ileana Wachtel, *A Key Economic Region of Southern Cal. Faces Daunting Challenges*, USC DORNSIFE (Oct. 5, 2023), <https://dornsife.usc.edu/news/stories/southern-california-inland-empire-latino-population-growth/>.

¹⁵⁹ *San Bernardino Cnty. History: Origin of the Inland Empire*, SAN BERNARDINO CNTY., (Jan. 15, 2026), <https://main.sbcounty.gov/2026/01/15/san-bernardino-county-history-origin-of-the-inland-empire/>.

¹⁶⁰ Humberto Flores, *Inland Migration: Migratory Patterns to the Inland Empire from Cal. Coastal Cities Resulting Anti-Immigr. Sentiment*, BERKELEY POLITICAL REVIEW (July 18, 2023), <https://berkeleyjournal.org/2023/07/18/inland-migration-migratory-patterns-to-the-inland-empire-from-california-coastal-cities-resulting-anti-immigration-sentiment/>.

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Los Angeles, as families relocate in search of more affordable housing. The Inland Empire has been one of the fastest-growing regions in California in recent decades.¹⁶¹

Understanding present-day conditions in San Bernardino County requires situating the region within its recent economic history. Beginning in the late 20th century, the Inland Empire became a destination for families, particularly households of color, seeking more affordable homeownership as housing costs rose in coastal Southern California.¹⁶² This demand fueled rapid residential development, often supported by subprime and predatory lending practices. Lenders disproportionately targeted Black and Latino households in the region with high-risk mortgage products, even when some borrowers qualified for more stable loans.¹⁶³ When the housing market collapsed during the Great Recession, the Inland Empire was among the hardest-hit regions in the country. The effects were especially severe in the city of San Bernardino, where foreclosure rates reached 3.5 times the national average.¹⁶⁴ By the mid-2010s, the city faced bankruptcy and significant economic distress. A 2015 *Los Angeles Times* article described San Bernardino as “the poorest city of its size in California, and a symbol of the nation’s worst urban woes.”¹⁶⁵ These conditions contributed to long-term instability and disinvestment in the county.

In the years since, the region’s economy has shifted toward logistics and warehousing, driven by its proximity to the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. Today, the Inland Empire contains more than 4,000 warehouses, compared to 234 warehouses in 1980.¹⁶⁶ This growth has generated jobs and positioned logistics as a leading sector, accounting for approximately 20% of employment in San Bernardino County.¹⁶⁷ However, these changes have also introduced new challenges. Warehouse expansion has been concentrated in largely Latino, unincorporated communities, where residents face disproportionate exposure to environmental harms, including air pollution from diesel truck traffic.¹⁶⁸ At the same time, many warehouse jobs pay relatively low wages, around \$17.50 per hour on average, limiting pathways to economic mobility and homeownership.¹⁶⁹

These dynamics, including demographic change, economic instability following the Great Recession, and uneven development tied to the logistics economy, shape a region where many communities experience structural disadvantage and limited access to coordinated support. These conditions are also shaped by longstanding tensions between communities of color and government institutions, including experiences of policing and surveillance. Research from the Othering & Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley found that cities across the Inland Empire have invested more in policing than in interventions that support and incorporate residents amid the

¹⁶¹ Wachtel, *supra*.

¹⁶² Kfir Mordechay, Inland Boom and Bust: Race, Place, and the Lasting Consequences of the S. Cal. Housing Bubble (Dec. 2019), <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/inland-boom-and-bust>.

¹⁶³ *Id.*

¹⁶⁴ Joe Mozingo, *San Bernardino: Broken City*, L.A. TIMES (June 14, 2015), <https://graphics.latimes.com/san-bernardino/>.

¹⁶⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶⁶ Jim Newton, *Cal. Warehouse Boom Comes with Health, Env’t Costs for Inland Empire Residents*, CALMATTERS (Jan. 26, 2023), <https://calmatters.org/commentary/2023/01/inland-empire-california-warehouse-development/>.

¹⁶⁷ Manfred Keil & Mark Schniepp, Need for Diversification in the Inland Empire, Part 1: San Bernardino Cnty. (Aug. 19, 2025), https://www.cmc.edu/sites/default/files/SCNG_08_19_25.pdf.

¹⁶⁸ Newton, *supra*.

¹⁶⁹ *Id.*

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demographic changes of the last few decades.¹⁷⁰ Together, these dynamics contribute to distrust of law enforcement and often affect individuals' ability to report harm.

2. The Family Assistance Program and Community Needs

Within this context, the Family Assistance Program (FAP) plays a key role in supporting communities across San Bernardino County. Founded in 1985 as the High Desert Domestic Violence Program, FAP originally focused on providing shelter and advocacy services to survivors of domestic violence.¹⁷¹ Over time, the organization has expanded to include transitional housing, youth shelters, outreach services, reentry programming, and community-based initiatives. Across these programs, FAP's work is centered on supporting low-income families in creating safe and stable homes.

In 2023, FAP received funding through the California Department of Social Services' Stop the Hate Program.¹⁷² This program awarded funding to qualified nonprofit organizations to provide support and services to victims and survivors of hate incidents and hate crimes and their families, as well as to facilitate prevention efforts.¹⁷³ Jim Bolas, Chief Program Officer at FAP, led the organization's work to determine how to implement and best utilize this grant. Bolas has over 30 years of experience in the nonprofit sector, with a focus on homeless and runaway youth.

As a recipient of this funding, Bolas described an opportunity to support not only direct service provision, but also to address hate incidents through a more "preventive, systems-change" approach.¹⁷⁴ Through conversations with community members and a 2024 focus group, several key challenges relevant to hate crime prevention became clear. First, hate incidents are significantly underreported in the county. As Bolas explained, "looking at the hate crime reporting data and incident reporting data, it's severely lacking based upon anecdotal experience."¹⁷⁵ This gap between what is reported and what community members experience makes it difficult to understand the scope of harm, allocate resources, or secure funding for programs. Bolas emphasized the need to support individuals, particularly young people and underrepresented groups, in feeling able to report what they experience or witness.

These conversations also revealed a broader sense of fragmentation across the county. Bolas described this as a lack of coordination and shared voice, where "no one feels like they have any power or control" and "the people of San Bernardino don't feel like they have a voice."¹⁷⁶ He further explained that "everyone's speaking, but no one's listening...there's all this energy, but it's just chaotic."¹⁷⁷ This fragmentation reflects both a lack of coordination across organizations and a deeper sense of disconnection among community members, where efforts are not collectively structured.

¹⁷⁰ Mordechay, *supra*.

¹⁷¹ *Our Programs*, FAMILY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM, <https://familyassist.org/> (last visited Mar. 29, 2026).

¹⁷² *Our Story*, STOP THE HATE, *supra*.

¹⁷³ *CARE Funding*, CAL. DEP'T OF SOCIAL SERV'S, <https://cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/cdss-programs/civil-rights/care-funding> (last visited Mar. 29, 2026).

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Jim Bolas, *supra*.

¹⁷⁵ *Id.*

¹⁷⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷⁷ *Id.*

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These challenges were underscored by local incidents that highlighted the gap between lived experience and formal recognition. In 2023, a business owner in Lake Arrowhead, Laura Ann Carleton, was fatally shot after displaying a Pride flag outside her clothing store.¹⁷⁸ According to reports, the shooter made disparaging remarks about the flag before the killing. While many community members across San Bernardino County understood the incident as a hate crime, it was not formally classified as such.¹⁷⁹ As Bolas reflected, “Carleton’s murder in Lake Arrowhead was a hate crime, but it was never labeled as such, which we’re still pushing for, and it’s still not happening.”¹⁸⁰ For Bolas, this incident was not isolated. It reflected a broader gap between what community members are experiencing and what is captured in official data, particularly in a context where many people do not trust systems like law enforcement to respond.

3. Developing the Coalition Idea and Connecting to CCRU

Building on this initial assessment, Bolas began developing the idea of a county-wide coalition that could bring together community organizations and leaders to address gaps in coordination, reporting, and prevention. Drawing on over 25 years of experience in coalition building, he saw a coalition as a practical way to create structure across otherwise disconnected efforts and to support a more coordinated response to hate incidents.

As he began exploring how to move this idea forward, Bolas attended an Inland Empire Anti-Hate Forum in Riverside in June 2024. The forum, facilitated by Sabrina Gonzalez, Executive Director of the Civil Rights Institute of Inland Southern California, brought together individuals and organizations working on anti-hate efforts across the region.¹⁸¹ Gonzalez connected Bolas to Gustavo Guerra Vásquez, a mediator with the Department of Justice Community Relations Service who was also involved in organizing these anti-hate forums.¹⁸² In conversations with Vásquez, Bolas shared his early vision for a coalition in San Bernardino County. Vásquez then connected him to Marquez Equilibria, then Assistant Deputy Director of the California Civil Rights Department’s Community Conflict Resolution Unit. This connection to CCRU occurred through a network of individuals working in the anti-hate and civil rights space, playing an important role in establishing early alignment and trust.

4. Structuring the Coalition: CCRU as a Thought Partner

Following this initial connection, Marquez Equilibria began working with Bolas throughout the summer of 2024 to think through how the coalition could be structured. During

¹⁷⁸ Livia Albeck-Ripka, *Lake Arrowhead Shooting Raises Fears After Dispute Over Pride Flag*, NY TIMES (Aug. 20, 2023), <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/20/us/lake-arrowhead-california-pride-flag-shooting.html>.

¹⁷⁹ Alex Rozier, *Mother of 9 Killed After Pride Flag Dispute in Lake Arrowhead*, NBC LA (Aug. 21, 2023), <https://www.nbclosangeles.com/news/local/pride-flag-dispute-shooting-lake-arrowhead-studio-city/3210512>

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Jim Bolas, *supra*.

¹⁸¹ *Exec. Dir.*, CIV. RIGHTS INST. OF INLAND S. CAL., <https://www.inlandcivilrights.org/about/executive-director/> (last visited Mar. 29, 2026).

¹⁸² Gustavo (Adolfo) Guerra Vásquez, LINKEDIN, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/gagv/> (last visited Mar. 29, 2026).

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this period, Marquez also connected Bolas with additional members of CCRU team (Mann and Tanacea).

Planning for the San Bernardino County Human Rights Anti-Hate Coalition began to take shape in fall 2024, as CCRU worked more closely with the Family Assistance Program to translate early ideas into a more defined structure. In October, FAP convened an in-person coalition planning meeting in San Bernardino County with 14 participants in attendance.¹⁸³ CCRU played an active role both before and during the convening, helping to shape the framing of the meeting and guide discussion. During the meeting, CCRU supported participants in identifying key gaps, surfacing priorities, and beginning to outline potential next steps. At this stage, Bolas had already gathered extensive input from community members about priorities and goals for the coalition. As he described, “I had all this information from all my conversations with the communities...and I shared all that information with CCRU, and they would brainstorm. Basically, they were my thought partners to focus what the priorities were.”¹⁸⁴ He explained that CCRU helped him “filter out the noise...and then help to create a one year to two year plan strategy to then work off of and go forward.”¹⁸⁵ He further described this relationship as “almost like how I used to talk to my therapist,” underscoring CCRU’s role as a consistent thought partner that enhanced his capacity as a local leader.¹⁸⁶

Later that month, CCRU met again with FAP to reflect on the initial planning meeting and provide consultation on how to move the coalition forward. CCRU and FAP identified establishing an advisory committee as a critical step to support the coalition’s development. Importantly, they agreed that CCRU would not only support FAP in designing the advisory group but would also serve as a member, reflecting a longer-term role in supporting the coalition. Bolas described CCRU’s role during this period as helping translate broad ideas into a more actionable structure. As he noted, “they helped me focus my thinking...reframing so that it can be understood towards more tangible, actionable things,” and “focused my agenda planning with and helped me focus how I built the Advisory Committee and structure it.”¹⁸⁷ CCRU allowed him to step back from the day-to-day realities of the county and think more strategically about how to structure the most impactful coalition. He also emphasized the value of CCRU’s broader perspective, explaining:

[W]hat I just found so invaluable with CCRU is their level of knowledge. They brought in this knowledge of systems, this knowledge from almost like a Google Maps perspective, where you go back up and you see the big picture. Whereas I’m in it in the county, and they’re like, so, you know, in Humboldt County, they’re doing X, and in Fresno, they’re doing Y. So they’re giving me context that helped me frame a structure for an impact.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸³ Cal. Civ. Rights Dep’t, *CCRU Internal Records* (2025).

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Jim Bolas, *supra*.

¹⁸⁵ *Id.*

¹⁸⁶ *Id.*

¹⁸⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸⁸ *Id.*

5. From Planning to Implementation: Coalition Meetings and Engagement

By early 2025, these planning efforts began to expand into more visible coalition activity. In March, CCRU participated in a data-focused ad hoc meeting with partners, including FAP, the federal Community Relations Service, CSU San Bernardino, and community-based organizations, to discuss what types of data for hate crime reporting would be most relevant and where it could be obtained. Shortly after, on March 20, 2025, the coalition held its first official meeting at CSU San Bernardino with approximately 30 participants.¹⁸⁹ The meeting brought together a broader group of partners, included updates from ad hoc groups, and engaged participants in discussion of the coalition’s mission and vision. The meeting ended with a presentation from CSU San Bernardino’s Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism.¹⁹⁰ Following this convening, much of the coalition’s development continued through Advisory Committee meetings and related ad hoc spaces. In April 2025, these discussions focused on how the coalition would function in practice. Participants worked through concrete questions about data and coordination, including what information the coalition might collect, how organizations could share it, and what tools (communication platforms, etc.) could support coordination.

CCRU played an important role in shaping how Bolas approached coalition engagement. As he explained, “I think CCRU really helped focus me on what draws people to meetings. I wanted this to be a working coalition.”¹⁹¹ CCRU helped me understand how participants needed to “walk away with something they didn’t come in with...whether that’s information from a training, data for their research or their grants, or a tool that they can then use with their clients or their community, or resource or information about a program.”¹⁹² This perspective helped shape how coalition meetings were structured. As Bolas described, coalition agendas incorporated program announcements, trainings, and opportunities for resource-sharing, including trainings led by CCRU team members. These elements reflected a focus on making meetings useful and relevant for participants. As Bolas noted, this was something “I would probably have not gotten to for a while because I was spinning [with ideas], but I had CCRU as a thought partner to help me focus.”¹⁹³

Later in April, meetings with the full Advisory Committee focused on refining the coalition’s structure and planning future convenings. CCRU provided input draft agendas, contributed feedback on the coalition’s mission statement, and discussed the possible value of implementing working groups. By summer 2025, the coalition had begun to take on a more defined structure. At the July 2025 coalition meeting, participants organized into working groups focused on hate crimes and community engagement. These working groups created space for more focused discussion within the coalition’s broader priorities.

In the months that followed, coalition meetings continued alongside ongoing advisory conversations. At both the September and November coalition meetings, CCRU provided technical expertise related to hate crime reporting and data collection, responding to questions from participants and offering guidance on improving data collection across institutions,

¹⁸⁹ CCRU, *Internal Records*, *supra*.

¹⁹⁰ *Id.*

¹⁹¹ Interview with Jim Bolas, *supra*.

¹⁹² *Id.*

¹⁹³ *Id.*

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including universities and law enforcement agencies.¹⁹⁴ At the same time, CCRU remained actively involved in advisory meetings, continuing to refine the coalition’s structure and support the development of a hate crime reporting form.

This pattern of coordination continued into late 2025 and early 2026, with increasing attention to training and resource-sharing. In a December 2025 Advisory Group meeting, CCRU provided input on training content for general body meetings and offered edits on a rapid assessment hate incident reporting form. In January 2026, CCRU delivered a training at a general body meeting focused on recognizing hate incidents, reporting, and accessing available resources.¹⁹⁵ Subsequent meetings in February included consultation on bystander intervention trainings and participation in an advisory board meeting focused on future programming and increasing coalition participation. As of March 2026, CCRU remained actively involved in both the structure and ongoing design of the coalition, while continuing to provide expertise on hate crime data and training. Most recently, this has included working with the Advisory Committee to adapt the coalition’s structure to maintain momentum. For example, the coalition will implement a rotating facilitation model, where different organizations lead meetings while FAP continues to serve as a central hub. CCRU has supported efforts to maintain buy-in across the coalition and promote a sustainable, long-term preventive model.

6. Developing a Rapid Hate Incident Reporting Tool

This section focuses on a key outcome of the coalition: the creation of a rapid hate incident reporting tool. From early in the coalition’s work, improving hate crime reporting and data collection emerged as a priority. A key challenge in San Bernardino County was the gap between what community members were experiencing and what was captured in official data.

At the first coalition meeting in March of 2025, participants discussed existing reporting mechanisms, including the California Civil Rights Department’s “California vs. Hate” reporting form.¹⁹⁶ While coalition members viewed the tool as valuable, there was a clear consensus that it was difficult to use in practice, particularly due to its length. In response, Bolas proposed developing a shorter, more accessible tool that could better meet local needs. As he described, the goal was not to replace the CA vs. Hate form, but to create a version that could “get us our own immediate data in real time.”¹⁹⁷ He emphasized that this idea also responded to earlier community conversations about distrust of police and law enforcement as a barrier to reporting.

The coalition moved forward with developing a rapid hate incident reporting tool with 15 questions, compared to CA vs. Hate’s 40. CCRU played an active role throughout this process, providing feedback on both the design and content of the tool. This included helping to determine which elements of existing reporting systems were essential, ensuring that the tool reflected a range of protected characteristics, and refining what information was most necessary to collect in a shorter format. At the same time, Bolas incorporated feedback from community members and coalition participants as the tool was developed.

¹⁹⁴ CCRU, *Internal Records*, *supra*.

¹⁹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁹⁶ *Cal. vs Hate*, CAL. CIV. RIGHTS DEP’T, <https://www.cavshate.org/> (last visited Mar. 29, 2026).

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Jim Bolas, *supra*.

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A key feature of the tool was the intention to connect reporting with follow-up support. Rather than functioning as a standalone form, the tool was designed to allow for follow-up from member organizations within the coalition. At the time of writing, the coalition is working to launch the tool through the Family Assistance Program’s website. Bolas described the development of this tool as directly connected to CCRU’s influence on the coalition’s approach. As he noted, “I felt encouraged by CCRU to lean into the provision of something.”¹⁹⁸ When reflecting on moments of pride in the coalition’s development, he pointed to the reporting tool as a key example, noting that “people threw their support behind this.”¹⁹⁹

7. CCRU’s Impact and Counterfactual Reflection

Bolas was most direct about CCRU’s impact when reflecting on how the coalition would have developed without their involvement. As he explained, “without CCRU, [the] coalition process would’ve been much slower, much less focused, and more reactive in a negative way.”²⁰⁰ He defined negative to mean “reactive to individuals” and to potential polarization, especially given the broader context of fragmentation across the county.²⁰¹

This was, in part, because CCRU helped him better see and respond to dynamics within the coalition. As he described, “it would’ve been more difficult to see the polarization,” noting that with CCRU involved, “I have a fly on the wall, an observer, a vibes checker.”²⁰² This allowed him to identify tensions between different stakeholders more proactively and think more intentionally about how to respond, including recognizing warning signs for escalation. Bolas described CCRU’s role as especially important in a space with many leaders and strong opinions. As he put it, “with CCRU I have another adult in the room,” explaining that in these settings, “it’s pretty easy for people to fall into some of their worst habits.”²⁰³

Regarding his comment that the coalition would have been slower and less focused without CCRU, Bolas also connected their presence to the pace and momentum of the work. As he described, “I look at CCRU as a form of gasoline.”²⁰⁴ This was reflected in how the coalition moved from early community input to a more defined structure, how meetings became more focused around concrete outputs, and how the coalition was able to develop the rapid hate incident reporting tool.

8. CCRU’s Role in Building Local Capacity

What emerges from the San Bernardino County Human Rights Anti-Hate Coalition case study is CCRU’s role in enhancing Bolas’s capacity as a local leader, rather than directly

¹⁹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰⁰ *Id.*

²⁰¹ *Id.*

²⁰² *Id.*

²⁰³ *Id.*

²⁰⁴ *Id.*

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facilitating or leading the coalition itself. Across each stage of the coalition’s development, CCRU’s impact operated through strengthening Bolas’s ability to guide and sustain the work.

This capacity-building role was made possible through several key mechanisms: First, CCRU brought a broader, state-level systems perspective combined with design expertise. As described in earlier sections, CCRU helped translate a large volume of community input into a more defined coalition structure, including the development of the Advisory Committee and the overall agenda structure. This reflects what Bolas described as a Google Maps perspective, where CCRU could step back, identify patterns across regions, and help translate those insights into a clear, actionable structure.

Second, CCRU brought a well-developed set of tools and practices for facilitation and training. As Bolas noted, “they have a huge toolbox and it’s much more organized than my own.”²⁰⁵ This included supporting agenda design, providing trainings, and helping structure meetings in ways that kept participants engaged.

Third, CCRU’s position as a third-party actor allowed them to offer perspective in a way that was both credible and effective. Bolas described this as “gold,” emphasizing the value of having someone who could bring new ideas, ask questions he might not have considered, and help surface dynamics within the coalition.²⁰⁶ As he noted, “because I know people get sick of listening to me. I get sick of listening to me.”²⁰⁷ As described above, this perspective was particularly important in helping identify and navigate potential polarization within the coalition. CCRU’s role here is especially relevant in a broader context of increasing polarization in the U.S., where roughly 80 percent of adults believe Americans are greatly divided on the most important values.²⁰⁸

Finally, CCRU’s role as a state entity contributed to their impact in a more unexpected way. Bolas noted that in the county, “governmental representation tends to carry a negative weight to it.”²⁰⁹ In this context, CCRU’s presence disrupted those expectations. As he elaborated, when CCRU spoke in coalition spaces, participants would “hear from someone from the state, speaking authentically.”²¹⁰ This was surprising, and as a result, more engaging, helping to build trust and a sense of legitimacy. CCRU was “impacting the coalition without being seen as the state influencing it,” allowing them to shape discussions and decisions while maintaining that trust.²¹¹ By working as a thought partner to Bolas, CCRU strengthened a local leader’s ability to both build and guide the coalition, shape how meetings functioned, and respond to challenges as they emerged.

²⁰⁵ *Id.*

²⁰⁶ *Id.*

²⁰⁷ *Id.*

²⁰⁸ Louise Richardson, *Why Polarization is a Problem*, CARNEGIE CORP. OF NY (Feb. 19, 2025), <https://www.carnegie.org/our-work/article/why-polarization-is-a-problem/>.

²⁰⁹ Interview with Jim Bolas, *supra*.

²¹⁰ *Id.*

²¹¹ *Id.*