Report prepared by:

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Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Those of you who have followed Sierra Health Foundation’s work over the past several years are aware of the significant investments we have made in efforts that promote the healthy development of youth. The board of directors and staff decided to pursue this grantmaking direction after a lengthy review that deepened our collective understanding of the influence that social, economic and environmental conditions have on youth and their long-term health and well-being. More commonly known as the Social Determinants of Health (SDH), this area of study and learning has long been the centerpiece of the foundation’s program investment philosophy. More recently, interest in SDH has grown rapidly across a broad range of institutions that are beginning to look beyond the necessary provision of health coverage and clinical care for strategies that more equitably distribute wellness and prosperity.

Accordingly, we believe we have reached a critical point in our youth investment timeline, where better understanding public perception about the importance of youth development – where it ranks in relation to other approaches, as well as its standing in relation to other important social issues – is essential for determining how best to move forward. Thus, the following report was commissioned by Sierra Health Foundation as a means of informing the future direction of its youth-focused grantmaking. Moreover, as we engaged stakeholders in the work that produced this report, we came to appreciate that other public and private institutions assessing similar and/or related policy questions would be interested in its results. In this regard, we plan to share its results broadly, with the hope that others will put this report’s findings to the highest and best use possible.

Finally, it’s fair to ask why we would undertake this type of research effort when near-term prospects for increasing public and private investment in youth-oriented programming seem unlikely. Although we admit that at first blush it may seem counterintuitive, our assessment of the current fiscal environment is what led us to conclude this type of inquiry was timely and relevant. We would argue that it is critically important during such periods that local and state policy-makers and public and private funders understand where the public believes available resources would best be deployed, as well as their willingness, or not, to increase the availability of resources, and the outcomes they want their investments to achieve. We believe it is precisely during these times that rigorously developed, nonpartisan information on these questions adds extraordinary value to public debate and action.

We hope that you, our colleagues, find this information as compelling and informative as we have. We look forward to continuing our community’s dialogue about how we can best ensure that our youth are well prepared for a healthy and productive future.

Chet Hewitt
President and CEO
Sierra Health Foundation
INTRODUCTION

Sierra Health Foundation is a private philanthropy investing in and serving as a catalyst for ideas, partnerships and programs that improve health and the quality of life in Northern California through convening, educating and strategic grantmaking. Since it began grant funding in 1985, Sierra Health has awarded more than $76 million in cash grants to 776 nonprofit organizations. The foundation also provides in-kind meeting and event space for nonprofit organizations through its Conference and Convening Program. Each year, approximately 15,000 people attend meetings held at Sierra Health facilities. The foundation's funding region includes 26 counties in northeast California.

One of Sierra Health Foundation’s most important undertakings has been its investments in youth and youth development. Sierra Health programs, such as the REACH initiative, provide financial and capacity-building support to organizations and collaboratives working to dramatically improve the quality, efficacy, and accessibility of youth programming in our region. REACH, in particular, focuses on the critical time—primarily between 10 and 15 years of age—when youth are increasingly independent. An outcome of their growing independence is their ability to significantly influence—through behavior, decision making and attitude—long-term education, health and well-being outcomes. It is during this period that connections to caring relationships and positive opportunities to develop, test, and apply the skills, knowledge, and behaviors necessary to become healthy and productive adults are essential. Sierra Health believes that all youth should have access to the range of support required for them to successfully navigate their path to adulthood, and that the long-term prospects for the region, state, and nation are inextricably tied to ensuring they do so.

MOTIVATION FOR RESEARCH

The primary goal of this study was to measure public perceptions, opinions and priorities as they pertain to youth issues in Sacramento for the purposes of further developing public and private youth programming and public policy in the Sacramento region. By presenting a statistically reliable profile of public opinion on youth issues, the survey results and analyses presented in this report will provide Sierra Health with information that can be used to make sound, strategic decisions in a variety of areas, including program development and enhancements, community outreach, marketing, budgeting, policy-making, advocacy and planning.

In brief, the survey was designed to:

- Measure the importance that Sacramento voters assign to various local issues, as well as their perceptions of how well these issues are being addressed by government agencies and community groups.
- Profile their support for two different frames for addressing youth from alternative approaches—one focusing on enforcement, the other focusing on youth development.
- Identify the specific programs and services they would most favor funding.
- And evaluate how public debate about youth issues may shape the public's support for funding youth-related initiatives.
OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGY  In brief, a total of 600 randomly selected registered voters in the City of Sacramento participated in the survey between June 24 and July 1, 2009. The interviews were administered by telephone, and the average interview lasted 16 minutes.

One of the objectives of the study was to determine whether Sacramento voters generally favor an enforcement approach to addressing youth issues, or a youth development approach that focuses on providing leadership and community service opportunities, skills development, and support services. To reliably estimate support for both types of proposals, a split-sample methodology was employed such that 300 respondents received a proposal that focused on enforcement, whereas 300 received a proposal that focused on youth development. All 600 respondents received generic questions that applied to both types of proposals. The maximum margin of error is ± 3.99% for questions answered by all 600 respondents, and ± 5.65% for questions answered by each subsample of 300 respondents.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS  True North thanks Sierra Health Foundation and Tramutola LLC for the opportunity to conduct the survey, as well as for their contributions to the design of the survey. Their collective expertise, local knowledge, and insight improved the overall quality of the research presented here.

DISCLAIMER  The statements and conclusions in this report are those of the authors (Dr. Timothy McLarney and Richard Sarles) at True North Research, Inc. and not necessarily those of Sierra Health Foundation. Any errors and omissions are the responsibility of the authors.

ABOUT TRUE NORTH  True North is a full-service survey research firm that is dedicated to providing public and not-for-profit agencies with a clear understanding of the values, opinions, perceptions, priorities and concerns of their constituents and communities. Through designing and implementing scientific surveys, focus groups and one-on-one interviews, as well as expert interpretation of the findings, True North helps its clients to move with confidence when making strategic decisions in a variety of areas—such as planning, policy evaluation, performance management, establishing fiscal priorities, program development and evaluation, and developing effective public information campaigns. During their careers, Dr. McLarney and Mr. Sarles have designed and conducted over 500 survey research studies for public and not-for-profit organizations.
JUST THE FACTS

The following is an outline of the main factual findings from the survey. For the reader’s convenience, we have organized the findings according to the section titles used in the body of the full-report.

LOCAL ISSUES & NEEDS

- When asked in an open-ended manner to identify the most important issue facing Sacramento that they would like local leaders to address, by far the most salient issue was addressing the fiscal crisis and budget issues, as it was mentioned by 44% of respondents. Among the remaining issues, improving public safety (9%), attracting local jobs/addressing unemployment (9%), improving education (7%), and improving the governmental process (6%) were all mentioned by at least five percent of respondents.

- When provided with a list of six specific issues and asked to rate the importance of each, providing a quality education in local schools received the highest percentage of respondents indicating that the issue was either extremely or very important (87%), followed by providing fire protection services (86%), maintaining public safety (86%), and providing youth with positive alternatives to gangs, drugs and crime (69%).

- For the same list of issues, voters perceived there to be large differences in how well community needs are being met in each of the areas. At the top of the list, 78% of respondents indicated that public agencies and other groups are doing an excellent or good job in providing fire protection, followed by maintaining public safety (56%), and maintaining local streets and roads (47%).

- At the other end of the spectrum, just one-quarter (25%) of respondents felt that public agencies and groups are doing an excellent or good job in providing youth with positive alternatives to gangs, drugs and crime, and just one-third of respondents (33%) used excellent or good to describe how well school districts are doing in providing a quality education in local schools.

BASELINE OPINIONS

- With only a brief description of the proposal that focused on Enforcement, 73% of respondents initially indicated that they would definitely or probably support the proposal, whereas 16% stated that they would oppose the proposal and 10% were unsure or unwilling to share their vote choice.

- Initial support for the proposal that focused on Youth Development was considerably stronger, with 81% of respondents indicating that they would definitely or probably support the proposal, 11% opposed, and 8% unsure or unwilling to share their vote choice.
TAX THRESHOLD

When asked if they would support a parcel tax to fund the aforementioned proposals, support varied depending on the tax rate.

- At the highest tax rate tested ($59 per year per property), 58% of voters surveyed indicated they would vote in favor of the Enforcement proposal, with support being somewhat higher (62%) for the Youth Development proposal at the same rate.

- Incremental reductions in the tax rate resulted in incremental increases in support for the parcel tax, with 68% of those surveyed for the Enforcement proposal and 70% of those surveyed for the Youth Development proposal indicating they would support a parcel tax at an annual rate of $29 per property to fund the proposal.

PROJECTS & SERVICES

- Among the projects and services that could be funded by the Enforcement proposal, respondents most favored providing job skills, training and first-hand work experience for young people (86% strongly or somewhat favor), followed by providing after-school, weekend and summer recreation programs so that kids have a safe place to go with supervised activities (82%), and opening schools as community centers in the evenings to offer social services and academic support for youth and families (81%).

- The projects that received the least amount of support in the Enforcement proposal were the enforcement and public safety-related programs, including increasing the presence of law enforcement at local schools (61%), hiring additional fire fighters to improve fire protection services and emergency response (66%), hiring juvenile probation officers to increase intervention programs (67%), and hiring additional police officers for neighborhood oriented policing (70%).

- Overall, respondents who received the Youth Development version of the proposal most strongly favored providing job skills, training and first-hand work experience for young people (86% strongly or somewhat favor), followed by providing outreach and tutoring programs that keep kids from skipping school or dropping-out altogether (84%), and providing counseling, intervention, and educational programs that keep kids from joining gangs (84%).

POSITIVE ASPECTS

When presented with positive statements about the Enforcement proposal, respondents found the following to be the most compelling:

- It costs taxpayers 170,000 dollars per year to put a kid in juvenile detention or in prison. It is much less expensive to provide kids with the education and support services they need to avoid gangs and crime in the first place. This proposal will help save money and save lives.

- This proposal will fund programs that are proven to reduce school drop-out rates and increase the number of young people who are prepared for the job market.

- This proposal will protect our kids and give them positive alternatives to gangs, drugs and violence.
When presented with positive statements about the **Youth Development** proposal, respondents found the following to be the most compelling:

- It costs taxpayers $170,000 dollars per year to put a kid in juvenile detention or in prison. It is much less expensive to provide kids with the education and support services they need to avoid gangs and crime in the first place. This proposal will help save money and save lives.
- This proposal will fund programs that are proven to reduce school drop-out rates and increase the number of young people who are prepared for the job market.
- This proposal is a small price to pay to ensure that all kids get an education, can compete in the job market, and become productive members of our community. Investing in our youth will benefit our entire community.

**INTERIM MEASURE OF OPINION**

After providing more details regarding the types of programs and services envisioned for the proposals, exposing respondents to the types of positive statements they may encounter during future public discussions, as well as introducing the possibility of a parcel tax to fund the proposals:

- Support for the **Enforcement** proposal at this point was found among 68% of respondents, with 25% of respondents opposed to the proposal and an additional 7% unsure or unwilling to state their vote choice.
- Support for the **Youth Development** proposal was considerably stronger at 79%, with 17% of respondents opposed to the proposal and an additional 4% unsure or unwilling to state their vote choice.

**NEGATIVE ASPECTS**

When presented with negative statements about the **Enforcement** proposal, respondents found the following to be the most compelling:

- The City government can't be trusted with an additional tax. They will mismanage the money or spend it on their own pet projects.
- People are having a hard time making ends meet with the housing crisis, financial crisis, and the economy in recession. Now is NOT the time to be raising taxes.
- Taking a “get tough” law enforcement approach to the gang problem will not work. This proposal is treating the symptom, not the problem. If we want to solve the gang problem, we need to provide social programs that prevent kids from joining gangs in the first place.

When presented with negative statements about the **Youth Development** proposal, respondents found the following to be the most compelling:

- People are having a hard time making ends meet with the housing crisis, financial crisis, and the economy in recession. Now is NOT the time to be raising taxes.
- The City government can't be trusted with an additional tax. They will mismanage the money or spend it on their own pet projects.
- Experts say that raising taxes during a recession will hurt the economy even more.
FINAL MEASURE OF OPINION

By this point in the survey, respondents had learned a lot about the Enforcement and Youth Development proposals—including the projects and services that could be funded, the possibility of funding the proposals with a parcel tax, as well as positive and negative statements about the proposals.

- At this point in the survey, support for the Enforcement proposal was found among 67% of respondents, with 27% opposed to the proposal and 6% unsure or unwilling to state their vote choice.
- Support for the Youth Development proposal remained substantially higher at 76%, with 20% opposed to the proposal and 3% unsure or unwilling to state their vote choice.

PERCEIVED SAFETY

- Respondents' feelings of safety varied considerably depending on the setting. Nearly all residents (95%) stated that they feel safe walking alone in their neighborhoods during the day. After dark, however, the proportion who indicated that they feel safe walking alone in their neighborhood declined to 72%, and fewer still (56%) indicated that they feel safe walking alone in business areas after dark.
Conclusions

As noted in the Introduction, this study was designed to measure public perceptions, opinions and priorities as they pertain to youth issues in Sacramento for the purposes of further developing public and private youth development and youth programming in the Sacramento region. By presenting a statistically reliable profile of public opinion on youth issues, the survey results and analyses presented in this report will provide Sierra Health, as well as other public and private institutions, with information that can be used to make sound, strategic decisions in a variety of areas, including program development and enhancements, community outreach, marketing, budgeting, policy-making, advocacy and planning. Whereas subsequent sections of this report are devoted to conveying the detailed results of the survey, in this section we attempt to 'see the forest through the trees' and note how the collective results of the survey answer some of the key questions that motivated the research.

The following conclusions are based on the True North’s and Tramutola’s interpretations of the results, as well as the firms’ collective experience conducting similar studies for public and not-for-profit agencies throughout the State.

To what extent does the public perceive a need to address youth issues?

Although the need to resolve the budget crisis that grips the City of Sacramento and the State is the most salient issue with Sacramento voters, voters clearly identified youth issues as being the area that the City, school districts and other groups have the greatest opportunity to better meet the needs of their community.

More than two-thirds of voters cited providing a quality education in local schools and providing youth with positive alternatives to gangs, drugs and crime as being extremely or very important issues. Yet, when compared to other important services such as providing fire protection and maintaining public safety, voters were far less positive in their assessment of how well youth issues are being addressed by public agencies and other groups. For example, whereas 78% of voters indicated that agencies are doing an excellent or good job providing fire protection services, just one-quarter (25%) felt that public agencies and groups are doing an excellent or good job in providing youth with positive alternatives to gangs, drugs and crime—and just one-third (33%) used excellent or good to describe how well school districts are doing in providing a quality education in local schools.

Does the public favor an enforcement or youth development approach?

One of the key objectives of the study was to determine whether Sacramento voters generally favor an enforcement approach to addressing youth issues, or a youth development approach that focuses on providing leadership opportunities, skills development, and support services. On this question, the survey results were unequivocal: Sacramento voters favor a youth development approach.

The evidence for this conclusion can be found throughout the study. At each point that it was tested, voter support for the Youth Development
proposal was approximately 10% higher than support for the alternative Enforcement proposal that focused on reducing crime, expanding neighborhood policing, and gang prevention programs. Projects and services that were consistent with a youth development approach topped the list of programs that voters strongly favored funding, including providing job skills, training and first-hand work experience for young people, providing after-school, weekend and summer recreation programs so that kids have a safe place to go with supervised activities, and opening schools as community centers in the evenings to offer social services and academic support for youth and families. In contrast, voters ranked many of the enforcement-oriented services at the bottom of their priority list for funding.

Statements about the need for—and benefits of—the Youth Development proposal also resonated to a greater degree with Sacramento voters than statements about the merits of an enforcement approach (see below for more on messaging).

**What specific programs does the public most strongly favor funding?**

All of the programs and services tested in this study were generally popular with Sacramento voters. Nevertheless, certain programs were given priority status for funding, including: providing job skills, training and first-hand work experience for young people, providing after-school, weekend and summer recreation programs so that kids have a safe place to go with supervised activities, opening schools as community centers in the evenings to offer social services and academic support for youth and families, providing outreach and tutoring programs that keep kids from skipping school or dropping-out, providing counseling, intervention, and educational programs that keep kids from joining gangs, and providing support services to underprivileged youth so that all kids have an equal chance to succeed in school.

**How will public debate alter support for youth-related proposals?**

As noted in the body of this report, individuals’ opinions about issues are often not rigid, especially when the amount of information presented to the public on an issue has been limited. Thus, in addition to measuring current support for the Enforcement and Youth Development proposals, one of the goals of this study was to explore how voters’ opinions about the proposals may be shaped by the additional information they could encounter as these issues enjoy greater public discussion and debate in the future.

It is clear from the survey results that voters’ opinions about the proposals are somewhat sensitive to the nature—and amount—of information that they have about the proposals. Information about the specific programs and services that could be funded, as well as positive statements about the proposals, were found by many respondents to be compelling reasons to support the proposals. Moreover, this information played an important role in preventing a significant erosion of support for the pro-
posals once respondents were exposed to the types of negative state-
ments they will likely encounter as youth issues experience greater
public debate.

Accordingly, one of the keys to building and *sustaining* public support
for addressing youth development issues will be the presence of an
effective public education effort that focuses on the need for—and ben-
efits of—youth development approaches.