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Publication Date

2025-05-28



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WHEN LABOR & COMMUNITY
COME TOGETHER

**LESSONS FROM THE OAKLAND
ARMY BASE REDEVELOPMENT**

May 2025
Andrew Jaeger

Introduction

This case study examines how Revive Oakland! (RO), a community-labor coalition, took a leading role in shaping the billion-dollar redevelopment of the Oakland Army Base (OAB) 25 years ago. The lessons from this experience provide an important model today for policymakers, communities, labor unions, and others as the California economy faces ongoing changes.

For 60 years, the OAB operated as a sprawling “city-within-a-city” situated between the San Francisco Bay and the predominantly Black neighborhood of West Oakland. Its 1999 decommissioning was the final stage in a prolonged deindustrialization process that disproportionately affected Oakland’s Black community. If redevelopment of the OAB had been left to market forces, it would have likely yielded more of the same (De Lara 2018). Instead, through a decade of organizing and negotiation, the community secured historic agreements with the city and developers to ensure redevelopment investments would generate high-quality jobs and would favor Oakland residents and others historically marginalized in the labor market. These efforts have largely achieved their intended goals, offering valuable lessons for similar initiatives elsewhere.

This report draws on multiple data sources, including 10 in-depth interviews with local officials, community organizers, union leaders, and workers involved in the redevelopment, complemented by employment data from the City and Port of Oakland. The analysis begins by examining the community organizing campaign that won these historic agreements and evaluates their implementation and policy outcomes. It concludes by offering recommendations for community groups, unions, and elected officials seeking to enhance democratic control over local development.

Revive Oakland!
coalition organizers
Shirley Burnell, Kate
O’Hara, and Nikki
Fortunato-Bas
celebrate the City’s
vote to adopt the
agreements alongside
Oakland City Council
Member Jane Brunner





Background

Oakland Deindustrialization

The late 1930s brought a “Second Gold Rush” to San Francisco’s East Bay as wartime production drew hundreds of thousands of migrants, primarily from the South and Midwest, seeking manufacturing jobs (Johnson 1993). Oakland’s Black population grew dramatically: from 8,462 (2.8% of the city’s total) in 1940, to 47,610 (12.4%) in 1950, and 83,104 (22.8%) in 1960 (Schwarzer 2021: 203). Redlining and cheap rents led the overwhelming majority of Oakland’s Black residents to concentrate in West Oakland. Racism, neglect by the City, and white flight created a “virtually all-black” neighborhood struggling with poverty (Rhomborg 2004: 120-121).

Military-industrial employment formed the backbone of Black economic opportunity. The Oakland Army Base (OAB), operating from 1941 to 1999, occupied 425 waterfront acres and ranked among “the nation’s busiest military ports” (Warburg 2015).¹ Before its decommissioning, the base provided roughly 2,000 jobs, many held by Oakland residents, including hundreds from West Oakland’s Black community. A non-military labor lawyer at the base noted that in the 1980s, approximately half of the 800-1000 civilian employees were Black—an unusually high percentage that was “absolutely, 100%” attributable to the base’s location in the heart of West Oakland (Meeker 2010:122). West Oakland residents primarily were members of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), which “connected with [West Oakland’s] social system” in the 1960s to find new workers (Meeker 2010:182-191).

The story of Oakland exemplifies how deindustrialization has fundamentally transformed U.S. economic development since World War II.² California’s automotive, steel, and aerospace industries experienced a “catastrophic” decline during the 1980s and 1990s, following reduced military spending after the Cold War (Glass 2016). This precipitous drop in investment reverberated through the economy, causing the closure of major factories and production

1 It was not just the Army, but a “joint military traffic management command” with Army, Navy, and Air Force officers onsite (Meeker 2010). Still, the vast majority of employees were civilians working with the Dept. of Defense or union contractors—primarily the ILWU, but also the teamsters (Meeker 2010 95-96).

2 Between 1950 and 2001, manufacturing fell from generating approximately 50% of corporate profits to 10%, and from accounting for 35% of employment to 15% (Krippner 2005).

Coalition organizers before speaking at an Oakland City Council meeting in April 2011, including Shirley Burnell (seated), the leader of Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment, and Rayna Smith (left), leader of Urban Peace Movement.



facilities as well as the small businesses they supported. Over a third of the 200,000 workers in California's largest manufacturing sector, aerospace, were laid off by the early 1990s (Ibid: 396). This represented a blow to the union movement that provided high-quality careers and reduced racial and gender inequality (Frymer and Grumbach 2021; Rosenfeld and Kleykamp 2012).³ The resulting economic crisis—exacerbated by Proposition 13's limits on California property taxes—devastated local tax revenues.⁴ Without a strong social safety net or commitment to protecting the wages of displaced workers—as is common in parts of Europe—manufacturing careers were replaced with low-road employment that paid as little as the market would bear and provided scant benefits (Zabin and Martin 1999).

Oakland's deindustrialization was severe and impacted Black workers disproportionately. Between 1954 and 1985, the city lost over 20,000 industrial jobs, with West Oakland and Black communities bearing the heaviest burden (Schwarzer 2021:210-212). Military base closures proved especially devastating: "By 1990, the city's three military bases employed roughly one-third of the black workforce in Oakland, and their subsequent closures capped off what had been a decades-long employment bloodbath" (Schwarzer 2021:212). In response, Oakland social movements, like many communities in the 1990s, successfully advocated for living wage laws to raise the wage floor and attract higher-quality employers (Zabin and Martin 1999). The OAB's closure and redevelopment presented a powerful opportunity for Oakland communities, particularly West Oakland, to demand a voice in setting the terms of development, rather than allowing private actors to dictate them.

3 Union density peaked at 40% in California before 1960 and fell to only 17% in 2000 (Glass 2016:416).

4 California Proposition 13, passed in 1978, imposes caps and limits property taxes and requires a two-thirds majority vote by the state legislature to raise taxes.



The Oakland Army Base and the Port of Oakland

The 1995 announcement of the OAB's decommissioning ignited a lengthy public process to determine the distribution and reuse of its land (Meeker 2010: 204-246). The federal government ultimately split the base's acreage equally between the City and the Port, an independent city department with a governing board appointed by the mayor. While several potential uses were considered, including hotels, housing, and entertainment complexes, legal restrictions on the use of the land and its proximity to water treatment facilities and the Port itself rendered most non-industrial projects untenable. Community groups, unions, and officials ultimately advocated for a major modernization project at the Port of Oakland, primarily expanding warehouse space and transportation connections. This was not the first choice of all community groups in West Oakland, particularly those that had been organized around opposition to the environmental damage caused by the Port.⁵ The chief community benefit of the proposal was the creation of high-quality blue-collar jobs, though it was also expected to reduce diesel traffic through West Oakland neighborhoods.

Oakland's Port, encompassing airport, seaport, and commercial real estate operations, has consistently been one of the city's largest employers (Martin Associates 2023:11-12; Parkin 2004).⁶ In 2021, over 24 thousand workers were on site, earning an average of about \$65k/year (Martin Associates 2023). Roughly a quarter of those jobs went to Oakland residents in careers that "employ a relatively large share of minority workers nationwide" (Martin Associates 2023:15).⁷ Since 1999, all construction work at the Port has been governed by a project labor aAgreement (PLA), a collective bargaining contract signed before a construction project breaks ground.

5 The OAB's considerable land footprint beyond the docks also served as a non-industrial buffer between West Oakland and much of the Port's operations.

6 The Port stands as the "exception that proves the rule" of deindustrialization—expanding and modernizing through the postwar period to become the "town's main industrial engine, [with] each container offloaded representing products that were no longer manufactured stateside" (Schneider 2021). It also serves as the preferred export hub for agricultural products from California's Central Valley and the Midwest (Port of Oakland).

7 Accounting for indirect and induced economic impacts at the Port (spending in the region by firms and employees at the Port) brings the total jobs supported across the region to 98,345 (Martin Associates 2023 p.11)

PLAs generally aim to ensure that construction is high-quality and completed on schedule. The Port's agreement was innovative in that it created "a new kind of local-hire regime," including a department of social justice aimed at increasing Black residents' access to construction jobs (Parkin, 2004, 390).⁸

"Oakland's deindustrialization was severe and impacted Black workers disproportionately."

This agreement was won by many future Revive Oakland! members before the coalition came together. A legal analysis of the Port's commitment to local hiring in its first PLA argued that "collaboration between the community, the unions, and the Port has been the driving force for the entire Oakland approach" (Parkin, 2004, p. 391).⁹

Despite this previous success by community and labor groups winning commitments in Port policies, the proposed OAB projects risked undermining coalition goals. While developers estimated at least 1,500 construction jobs and 1,800 permanent logistics positions would be created, warehouse work had become notoriously exploitative low-road employment, and construction jobs without PLAs and equity commitments historically excluded workers of color (De Lara 2018, Parkin 2004).¹⁰

8 As race is a prohibited category for making hiring decisions in California, local hire has emerged as a key tool for opening construction careers to historically marginalized groups.

9 This analysis also found some significant problems with the implementation of local hire goals, and identified the lack of a centralized, transparent accounting system as a necessary improvement (Parkin 2004).

10 The worst period of exclusion was before the second World War. However, de facto discrimination continued for decades after the Civil Rights Act. Racial diversity in construction unions has improved considerably since then, thanks in part to social movement pressure and creative local hire provisions such as reviewed here (BLS 2022).



Organizing and Winning

The East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy (EBASE) convened a powerful progressive coalition, Revive Oakland! (RO) to address this danger and ensure the creation of high-quality jobs benefiting local communities. The coalition grew to include 30 community, faith, and labor organizations, guided by a 12-member steering committee.¹¹ RO fought two extensive campaigns, targeting the Army base's divided owners. The first, between 2007 and 2012, addressed the City-owned site developed by Prologis and California Capital and Investment Group. The second, between 2015-2017, focused on the Port's section, developed by CenterPoint.¹² Both campaigns proved remarkably successful in achieving their demands.

The campaign for community and labor input on the Oakland Army Base redevelopment benefited from favorable structural conditions. California has a reputation as a laboratory for policy innovations that later spread nationwide (Pastor 2018; Schrag 2006; Vogel 2018). The Bay Area, in particular, has long served as an incubator for progressive policies and social movements. The Port had responded to community and worker campaigns in the past. While these factors contributed to the campaign's success, the victory hinged on effective popular collective action. We look at what contributed to the coalition's success and argue that similar victories can be achieved elsewhere, even under less favorable conditions.

Coalition building is essential for developing and wielding political power. While this might seem self-evident in any nominally democratic system, it is worth examining the specific means by which coalition-building generates power for social movements. First, coalitions that effectively represent diverse social groups demonstrate that they serve a broad collective interest rather than a narrow agenda. This ability to frame movement goals as widely beneficial proves crucial for building support, particularly in local development projects that promise community benefits. Second, broad coalitions reassure elected officials that potential conflicts between key constituents—conflicts that could threaten elections or administrative positions—have been “pre-negotiated” or at least reduced to manageable differences. Third, broad coalitions increase opportunities for resource sharing and fundraising. While there are certainly examples of grassroots movements with shoestring budgets finding success, more resources increase the likelihood of success. All these mechanisms played vital roles in this case.

11 Membership is listed in Appendix A.

12 Coinciding with negotiations for the Port's PLA renewal in 2016.

The fundamental task of Revive Oakland! was to organize and align its coalition with community interests. This took several key forms. First, organizations with mass memberships integrated the campaign into their regular activities. Groups like the Oakland Community Organization went door to door to talk to hundreds of residents about their commitment to the coalition demands. Staff worked with members to envision the potential redevelopment of the Oakland Army Base, plan outreach to other community members, and develop political strategies. Second, the coalition held town halls at neighborhood churches featuring testimony about the importance of good jobs. City officials were asked to commit to supporting an agreement to support good jobs for the community. Third, large-scale events were organized to unite coalition members, extend the base of supporters, garner media attention, and pressure city council members. For example, the Urban Peace Movement led the organization of a youth concert and rally—"Swagn 4 Justice"—held in front of Oakland City Hall shortly before a key city council vote. Speakers and performers supported the campaign by connecting the violence affecting Black and Latino youth in Oakland neighborhoods to the lack of quality job opportunities.

Finally, coalition members engaged in direct action, staging a sit-in at the headquarters of the developer Prologis. They sang songs, shared testimony on the community vision for the project, and delivered a letter inviting the CEO to meet with coalition leaders. Community organizing and public actions continued throughout the campaign, even after the city council voted on the final "deal."

As convener of the Revive coalition, EBASE contributed crucial resources, most notably dedicated full-time organizers and researchers. This staffing proved vital for coalition management, with organizers emphasizing the importance of building trust among participants. A formal working agreement—essentially a coalition constitution—facilitated this trust by outlining goals, values, rules, and consequences. The agreement's key provisions aimed to create a united front: they mandated open information sharing and prohibited individual meetings with the city or developers to prevent the

**URBAN PEACE MOVEMENT IN PARTNERSHIP
WITH REVIVE OAKLAND PRESENTS**

SWAGN 4 JUSTICE

JOIN US AS WE DEMAND QUALITY JOBS, LOCAL HIRE, AND BAN THE BOX FOR THE THOUSANDS OF
NEW JOBS PROJECTED TO COME FROM THE REDEVELOPMENT OF THE FORMER OAKLAND ARMY BASE

TUES. NOV 1
OAKLAND CITY HALL PLAZA
14th & Broadway
4:30 til 6:00PM

CONCERT & RALLY FOR QUALITY JOBS
FOR MORE INFO CALL XIOMARRA AT 510-444-5400/WWW.URBANPEACEMOVEMENT.ORG




appearance of “side deals.” The agreement emphasized fundamental elements of interpersonal trust: honesty, follow-through in member dealings, and cross-coalition education. This foundation helped build support for potentially unfamiliar issues like “fair chance” policies, which aim to reduce hiring discrimination against people with past criminal convictions.¹³ EBASE and coalition members also conducted extensive research on the developers and logistics industry, helping them anticipate and address emerging challenges like worker misclassification and the abuse of temporary workers.

“Coalition building is essential for developing and wielding political power.”

EBASE’s second vital resource was its connection to PowerSwitch Action (PSA, formerly the Partnership for Working Families), which provided crucial policy and legal support. The community benefits agreement model that Revive sought to replicate originated with one of PSA’s

network partners, The Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (cf. Gross et al. 2005). The coalition drew legal expertise from PSA’s Community Benefits Law Center and the National Employment Law Project. This wealth of experience proved invaluable during challenging negotiations, such as when the project developer initially refused direct dialogue with community groups. It also helped Revive win innovative agreement provisions, including language limiting the use of temporary workers and “up-the-chain” liability clauses making commercial tenants ultimately responsible for contractor and subcontractor compliance.

The Revive coalition drew strength from its ties to building and construction trade unions and the broader labor movement. These unions wield considerable political influence in California and across the United States, bringing significant resources to political fights, including government relations staff with established local relationships. (As noted earlier, a Project Labor Agreement was already in place at the Port.) The participation of the trades strengthened the coalition’s demands, as these unions had a proven track record of creating skilled, high-wage careers. From local officials’ perspective, the coalition had not only negotiated community conflicts in advance but had also secured unity with the unions responsible for high-quality construction jobs. This arrangement required meaningful

¹³ These policies prevent employers from asking about criminal history to some degree. “Ban the box” policies restrict inquiries before a job offer is extended. The agreements won by RO extend those protections beyond the point of hire in most cases.

compromise from union members and political risk-taking by the local building trades leadership, since incorporating local hiring requirements into the union hall hiring system violated established rules by allowing local workers to “jump the queue.” However, this concession was essential for building an effective local hire system and represented a small step toward remedying decades of Black worker exclusion from the trades. While this initially created some tension, interviewees report it has gained broad acceptance in the decade since.

The Revive coalition framed its demands as benefiting all Oaklanders, with particular attention to marginalized community members. The campaign emphasized that local taxpayers, who would be invested tens of millions of dollars in the Port project, deserved a “return on [their] investment.” This framing positioned their “contract with the community” as essential for ensuring local priorities. Through media outreach, the coalition transformed the narrative from “jobs at any cost” to “GOOD jobs, not just any jobs,” while their slogan “good jobs, safe streets” connected quality employment to community safety. The campaign reinforced these connections by sharing personal stories of young Oaklanders who had experienced violence and poverty.

The coalition argued that reserving jobs for Oakland residents and reducing employment barriers would create social and economic multiplier effects: communities like West Oakland would benefit from increased local spending, reduced crime, and improved quality of life. Research on local and targeted hire programs has consistently demonstrated these benefits, particularly the economic impacts of keeping construction wages within communities (Herrera et al. 2014). The fiscal benefits for the city were clearly articulated by the coalition. As one Oakland resident quoted in campaign literature argued, “People wouldn’t need government healthcare; they’d be paying more taxes which goes into the schools; and they’d be too busy working to be on the street.” By bridging the needs of excluded communities to broader economic benefits, Revive’s messaging embodied the democratic ideal of collective interest. It also worked to reshape public expectations about what communities could and should demand from private developers.

The Revive coalition effectively conveyed this message to community members, city leaders, and developers, operating both inside and outside the halls of power. During the City-side campaign, their “contract with the community” emerged through two phases of negotiation: first, a year-long process between the coalition, additional community groups, including Oakland Works, and the City to build consensus on general terms; second, direct negotiations among the coalition, City, and project developers. During the initial phase, Oakland Works, a community alliance led by long-time

Coalition leaders
Nikki Fortunato Bas
(above) and Shirley
Burnell (below)
speak at a RO press
conference in front
of City Hall. Photo
credits: Matthew
Hardy



environmental justice advocate Margaret Gordon, brought forward demands for reduced pollution and improved air quality. RO engaged with Oakland Works to identify points of agreement, including local hiring opportunities, and to work together on shared goals.

Throughout both phases, the coalition benefited from relationships with supportive city officials, particularly Assistant City Administrator Fred Blackwell, who served under Mayor Jean Quan and

brought relevant experience implementing similar policies in San Francisco, and City Councilmember Jane Brunner, an attorney who helped align city, coalition, and developer perspectives. The coalition's breadth multiplied its lobbying opportunities with city officials. Working with Oakland Rising, a civic engagement collaborative founded by EBASE and community allies, they strengthened their negotiating position by presenting officials with compelling data: a survey of 5,000 local voters showed that 80% supported their demands for living wages, local hire requirements, and fair chance hiring policies. These results reinforced their legitimacy in representing broad community interests.

The subsequent "Port-side" campaign largely followed the original campaign blueprint, though with two significant differences. First, the key groundwork was already laid—the Port had both a Project Labor Agreement governing construction and a commitment to local hiring in place. Second, the developer, CenterPoint, was owned by the California Public Employee Retirement System (CalPERS), creating a unique leverage point. The Revive coalition capitalized on this by attending a CalPERS board meeting and applying pressure. Coalition members testified that while CenterPoint deserved credit for engaging in community negotiations, more action was

needed to address local needs. This tactic, which caught CenterPoint off guard, proved effective according to interviewees. CenterPoint's public ownership provided the crucial leverage needed to secure even stronger protections for formerly incarcerated workers in the Port-side agreement.

“The coalition transformed the narrative from ‘jobs at any cost’ to ‘GOOD jobs, not just any jobs.’”

In short, Revive Oakland!'s success stemmed from three key elements: its broad coalition, skilled community organizing, and a solid foundation of dedicated staff with access to financial and legal resources. Without these resources, the long, technical process of winning major changes to local economic development policies is difficult to imagine. The coalition's success also reflected strategic decisions that bolstered its legitimacy. Its messaging effectively connected West Oakland's specific needs to the city's broader interests; while its deep collaboration with the labor movement—particularly the influential building and construction trades—lent credibility to its promises of quality jobs. For City and Port officials seeking to avoid conflict and appear responsive to popular will, this created an ideal scenario—a strong, broad coalition that had resolved its internal tensions and articulated its interests as those of the city at large.



Implementation and Impacts

The coalition won nearly all its demands.¹⁴ They included:

- A living wage for all workers¹⁵
- A 50% local area target for construction and long-term operations work
- A 20% apprentice target for construction work
- A 25% “disadvantaged” worker target for apprentices and operations jobs¹⁶
- Restrictions on the use of temporary workers for warehouse jobs
- Anti-discrimination fair chance hiring policies
- Use of an independent employment agency to facilitate local hire success (the West Oakland Job Resource Center)¹⁷
- Independent oversight committees

A review of employer data submitted to oversight committees indicates broad policy compliance. The majority of work completed so far has been in construction. On the City’s portion of infrastructure construction, Oakland residents accounted for 45.1% of work hours, generating \$12,584,859 in wages.¹⁸ New apprentices performed 19.9% of those work hours, with over 80% of those hours worked by Oakland residents. The Port side showed similar results: Oakland area residents performed 65.9% of work hours, with

14 The terms for redevelopment were spelled out in separate bilateral agreements between the City/Port of Oakland and the developers (the “jobs policy”) and the City/Port and the community coalition (the “cooperation agreement”).

15 As defined by the city of Oakland’s Living Wage Ordinance.

16 For the City side, “disadvantaged” was defined as workers living in certain (lower-income) parts of Oakland. For the Port-side, “disadvantaged” workers were defined to include single parents, the long-term unemployed, those recently emancipated from foster care, welfare recipients, and those convicted of felonies.

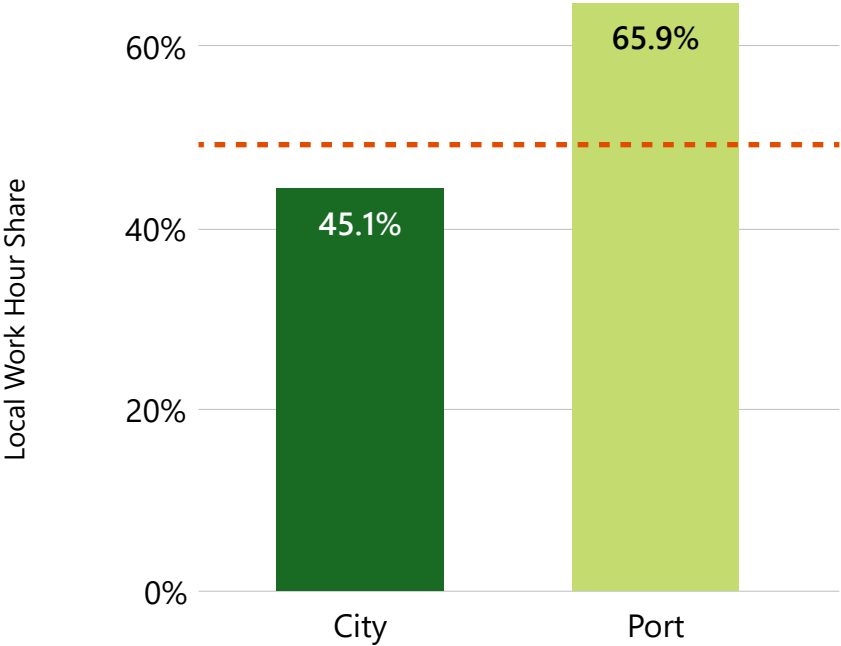
17 WOJRC would serve as a liaison and conveyance system between the community and Port jobs.

18 This is an understatement of the total construction wages on the City’s side. The great majority of construction work on this project was infrastructural, and data provided to the author on that work was of high quality. The remaining “vertical” construction data (buildings) was of lesser equality and has not been included in this analysis.

new apprentices accounting for 23.7% (81% of those hours by Oakland area apprentices).¹⁹ Both jurisdictions greatly exceeded their targets for hiring local apprentices from marginalized communities, with 64.5% and 58.1% of apprentice work hours on the City and Port side, respectively, meeting the criteria. The City also reported collected damages from construction contractors for the 4.9% local hiring shortfall at \$20 per hour, yielding over a quarter million dollars.²⁰

Local Hiring by Jurisdiction

Aggregate Across Trades. Goal 50%



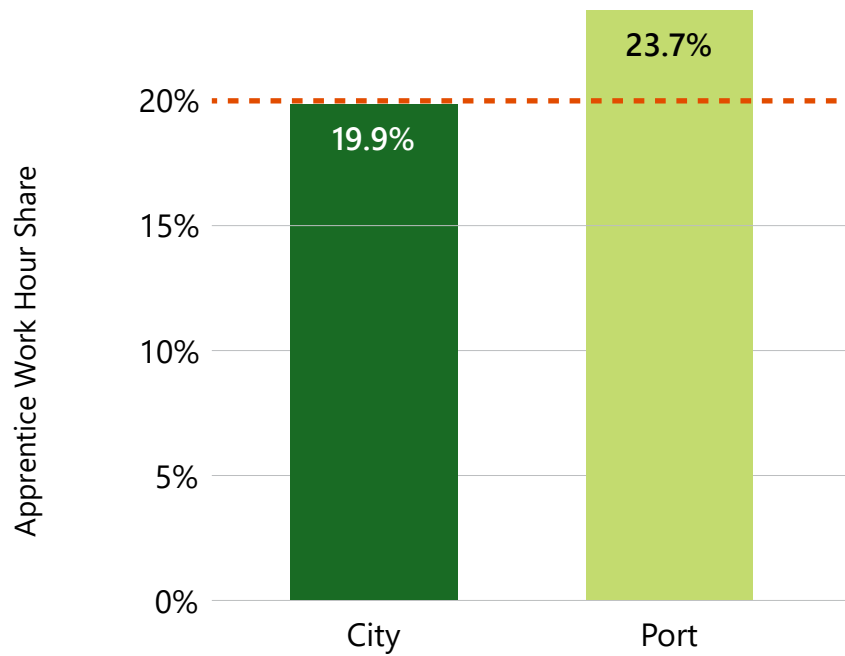
Data sources: City and Port of Oakland

19 The Port side construction jobs, governed by the pre-existing PLA, allows for employees from a broader geographic area than Oakland city proper to count for local-hire compliance.

20 These funds are required by the Jobs Policy to be used “solely to support training, referral, monitoring, or technical assistance to advance the purposes of this Policy.”

Apprentice Hiring by Jurisdiction

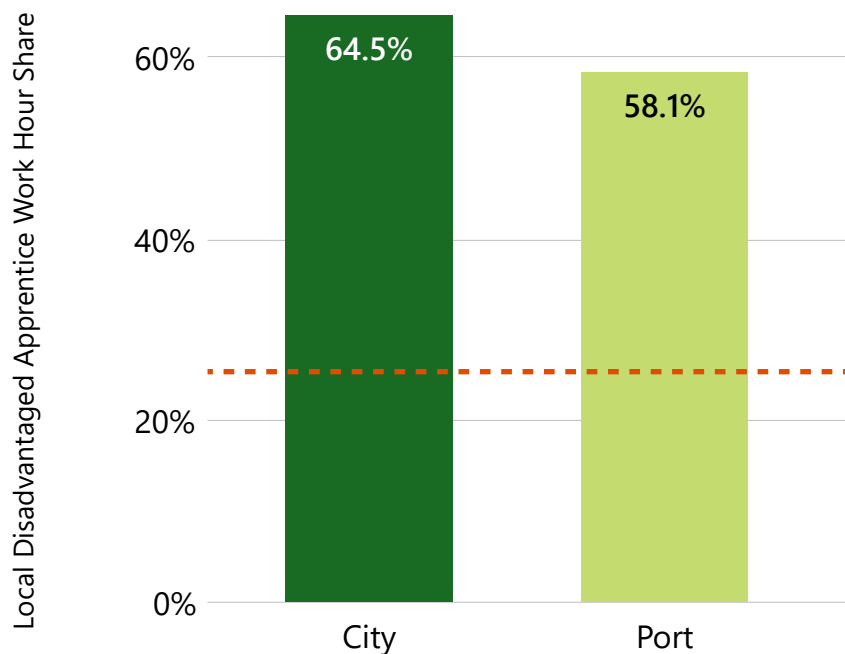
Aggregate Across Trades. Goal 20%



Data sources: City and Port of Oakland

Local Disadvantaged Apprentice Hiring

Aggregate Across Trades. Goal 25%



Data sources: City and Port of Oakland

These results demonstrate remarkable success in the construction phase, with over 400 new Oakland area apprentices hired. One such hire, Sadakao Whittington, exemplifies the program's impact. Starting with the Laborers' Union doing basic demolition work at the former OAB site, Whittington utilized voluntary training courses through his union Local to develop crucial skills like welding, advancing quickly through the ranks. He later completed an apprenticeship with the Sprinkler Fitters, one of the more lucrative "skilled" trades. Despite having spent 15 years in prison, he is now a service foreman monitoring building safety equipment, earning \$88 per hour plus extensive benefits. In an interview, Whittington described his union relationship as that of "an extended family," a vital "support system" that advocated for him while providing deeper meaning to his work life as part of an "international brother (and sister) hood."

Permanent operations jobs at the new facilities have been slower to materialize. The City-side complex has had only one employer large enough to fall under the good jobs policy: Good Eggs, a grocery and meal-kit delivery service.²¹ Currently, the company has 300 permanent employees at its warehouse, though this number peaked at 500 at the height of the pandemic. It began operations in 2019, and for the latest year that data is available, 2022, Good Eggs met the 50% local hiring goal, with 82 of the 164 new hires residing in Oakland. They also complied with temporary worker limitations, with temps accounting for only 15% of total hours. About one-quarter of these new hires were Black. The company fell short of its disadvantaged worker hiring goal by six workers, paying over \$30,000 in damages to the City.

The Port developer leased its new warehouse to a major logistics firm in mid-2022, but thus far new jobs there have reportedly been scant. A Port official interviewed estimated that about 250 workers are employed full-time at the warehouse. In total, approximately 500 permanent operations jobs have been created so far across the redeveloped OAB site—significantly below the 1,800 projected by developers and the city.

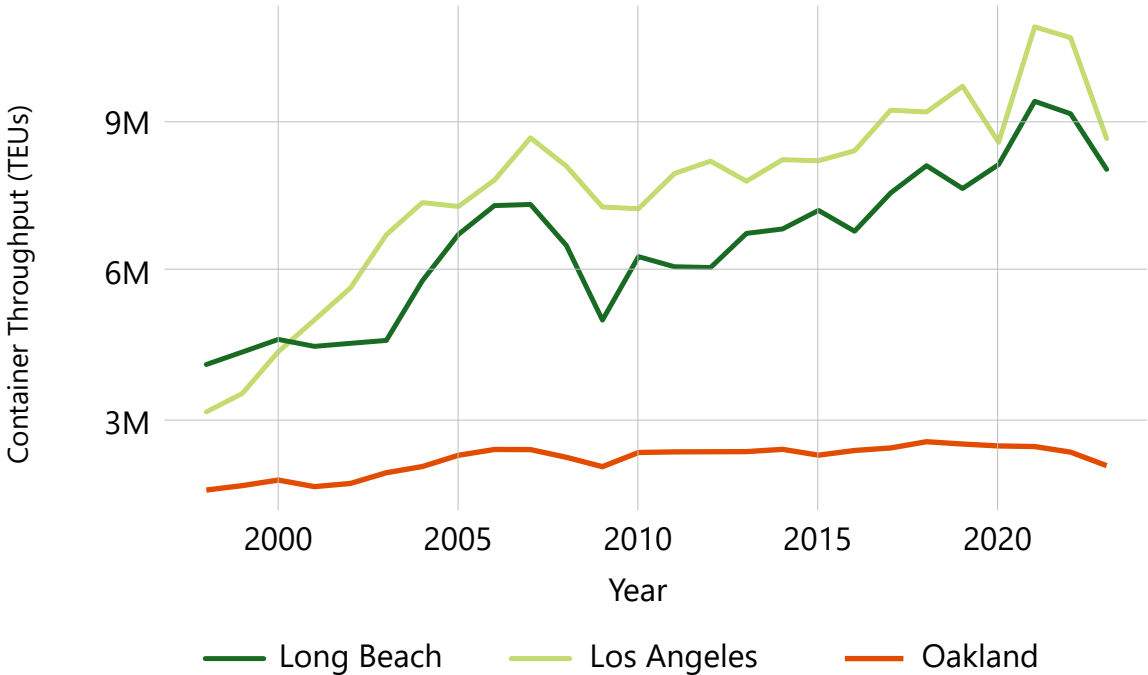
Port officials interviewed for this study attribute the shortfall in operations jobs not to any deterrent effect of the good jobs policies, but rather to slower-than-expected growth at the Oakland Port. The data supports this assessment: The Los Angeles/Long Beach Port complex, which dwarfs Oakland's facility, has seen accelerating growth since 2000 while Oakland's growth has slowed. Multiple factors explain this divergence, including LA's

21 Employers with >40 employees at the City side or >20 at the Port side are required to comply.

larger customer base, superior rail connections to the East, and compounding economies of scale (Warburg 2015). This trend could reverse with time, and Port officials have noted a recent uptick in container volume. The policies won by the coalition should ensure that any future jobs on these sites will pay a living wage and benefit local, disadvantaged workers.

U.S. Port Container Throughput

Annual TEU volumes for major California ports (1998-2023)



Data source: Port Authorities | TEU = Twenty-foot Equivalent Unit

According to interviewees, the successful local hiring record is largely due to the impact of the West Oakland Job Resources Center (WOJRC), created under the agreement. Under two executive directors with deep ties to both West Oakland and the union movement, the Center has successfully bridged community organizations, unions, and employers. The current Executive Director, Joyce Guy, is a former Journeyman ironworker. In an interview, she described the early days of implementation as very difficult and credited her ability to placate skeptical, resistant employers and union members with an empathetic “Hey, I’m one of y’all” approach. Guy also related a key turning point in the project. When one contractor openly flouted local hire goals during early demolition work, she contacted the developer, with whom she had built a relationship. The contractor was removed from the project within two days. This action set a powerful precedent, and as Guy noted, it was “amazing to watch everybody fall into shape regarding all of it.”

The WOJRC also conducts site visits for the operations jobs. In an interview with Good Eggs, it was noted that Joyce “was such a regular at Good Eggs that we had a desk for her...they could come in and walk the warehouse floor with a badge and see how candidates were doing.” The Center has expanded beyond its original scope, incorporating as a nonprofit to raise additional funding and designing programs that connect local workers to logistics careers beyond the OAB sites. Hundreds of Oakland residents have gone through WOJRC’s orientations, which introduce potential workers to the nature of construction work and refer them to pre-apprenticeship programs. WOJRC also provides supportive services to new hires—crucial material things to help new apprentices get on their feet, like prepaid gas cards, work boots, and tools.

Whittington also credited WOJRC with changing his life, describing such institutions as,

“a lighthouse in a dark place. These communities are impoverished, not just in a financial way, but they’re impoverished with a knowledge of their value and their potential...and so, as with a beacon, as with a lighthouse that has that light turn around, it’s illuminating the path to your change, illuminating the path to you being able to exact your full potential because you’re given access,” he said. “Ability without opportunity is nothing.”

Two oversight groups with distinct institutional structures have been in charge of policy compliance. While both have overseen strong compliance outcomes, the City’s oversight commission received more substantial resources, including dedicated staff support, and met more frequently than the Port’s relatively informal, under-resourced body. The City’s commission also maintained stakeholder engagement through its eleven-member board, reserving seats for nominees from RO, the West Oakland community, and organized labor.²² For these reasons, the City has exercised stronger oversight and facilitated greater data transparency than the Port. Both oversight groups found that union construction contractors provided consistent, systematic data reporting, likely due to their experience with requirements built into PLAs and prevailing wage projects. For those employers, compliance tracking merely required adding parameters for zip codes and disadvantaged status to those pre-existing systems. In contrast, operations employers, lacking previous experience with such requirements, needed more support from city, port, and WOJRC staff to establish effective data gathering and reporting systems.

22 The City’s commission is staffed by the Department of Workplace & Enforcement Standards, a new department created as a result of the advocacy of EBASE and its partners.



Conclusion

Oakland, like many U.S. cities, saw its economic core hollowed out by decades of deindustrialization over the second half of the 20th century. Relatively well-paying, often unionized blue-collar jobs vanished, and private firms and market forces were allowed to determine what took their place. While the 1999 closure of the Oakland Army Base initially appeared to continue this devastating pattern, its redevelopment marked a historic shift. Community and worker power asserted itself against private developers. A coalition of community and labor groups, working through the City, succeeded in bringing one of the world's most powerful logistics firms, Prologis, to the table to negotiate and agree to job standards and community benefit policies. This is real leadership. Similar policies have since multiplied nationwide, with labor standards and community benefits increasingly embedded in state and federal policies aimed at “reshoring” manufacturing and advancing the energy transition.

The material benefits for Oakland have been substantial. The construction phase alone generated tens of millions in direct wages for Oakland workers through union-protected jobs offering benefits and career advancement opportunities. Through targeted investments, hiring practices, and the removal of barriers facing marginalized workers, these policies have begun to address the racial injustice and economic loss experienced by West Oakland residents.

Analysis of policy implementation and the feedback given by interviewees suggests several areas for improvement in future campaigns, particularly regarding implementation:

1. Oversight and enforcement need to be strengthened
 - Oversight committees need rules and resources to function properly. Permanent government agency staff time should be dedicated to supporting regular, required public meetings.
 - To ease oversight, standardized accounting structures should be created for employers to follow, such as certified electronic payroll. Compliance data should be digitally sent to oversight groups and compiled by a staff member.
 - Committee members should be given some enforcement abilities, or else a dedicated liaison at a city department that can address non-compliance. Community organizations could also be given resources to support co-enforcement strategies.

2. Systems for monitoring and publicizing results should be improved
 - Compliance should be made public at as granular a level as possible—for example, by individual contractors—to recognize good actors and bad.
 - Overall progress on local hire activity, wages earned, and new apprentices should be summarized and publicized as widely as possible, in real-time or near-time, through a web dashboard.
 - Long-term progress of new hires should be tracked, especially for new apprentices. Achieving the underlying goals of this policy depends on converting these apprentices to journey workers. If this is not happening, the community needs to know.
3. Strategies should be developed to address a shortfall in expected jobs
 - Beyond the shortfall in long-term benefits to the community, a large gap between promised permanent jobs and reality is a potential threat to the reputation of the coalition members, the City, and the entire policy approach.
 - Campaigns should be imaginative and bold here: Could idle capacity be penalized? Could absolute employment targets be written into contracts? Could public enterprises be created to occupy these same spaces?

Coalition supporters hold signs in front of City Hall before the April 2011 meeting.
Photo credit: Marilyn Bechte



4. Strategies should be developed to address pitfalls of “local hire” policies
- The gentrification of targeted areas can undermine policy goals of addressing historical discrimination with geographic targets. Similarly, workers hired from the target area who subsequently move out to wealthier locales skew compliance metrics.
 - Both scenarios should be planned for. Oakland’s integration of “disadvantaged” status as a target metric is one way of addressing this.

Revive Oakland!’s success stemmed from three key elements: its broad coalition, skilled community organizing, and a solid foundation of dedicated staff with access to financial and legal resources.

5. Environmental impacts and justice should be integral to “community benefits”
- The same communities that have suffered the most from deindustrialization, racism, and economic marginalization have often suffered the worst environmental injustices. Compounding these barriers in the name of “jobs,” or even worse, “public benefits” must be avoided.
 - Banning the use of project land for highly polluting activities, preferential recruitment of low-environmental-impact tenants, and requiring “green” construction policies should all be table stakes for publicly beneficial development projects.

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Appendix A: Revive Oakland!

Coalition Membership

(**Bold** indicates steering committee)

- Alameda County Public Health Department
- **Alameda County Building & Construction Trades Council**
- **Alameda Labor Council, AFL-CIO**
- All of Us or None
- **Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment**
- Asian Pacific Environmental Network
- Black Women Organized for Political Action
- Block by Block Organizing Network
- Causa Justa/Just Cause
- **Center for Third World Organizing**
- **Coalition of Black Trade Unionists**
- **East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy (EBASE)**
- East Bay Community Law Center
- Ella Baker Center for Human Rights
- Filipino Advocates for Justice
- Greenlining Institute
- Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice
- **Int'l Assoc. of Machinists & Aerospace Workers Local 1546 & 1414**
- **Int'l Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 6**
- National Employment Law Project
- **Oakland Community Organizations**
- Oakland Rising
- PolicyLink
- Street Level Health Clinic
- **Teamsters Joint Council 7 (& Int'l Brotherhood of Teamsters)**
- **The Workforce Collaborative**
- **UNITE HERE 2850**
- **Urban Peace Movement**
- Urban Habitat
- Urban Strategies Council
- Youth Uprising

Appendix B: Interviewees

- Fred Blackwell, CEO, The San Francisco Foundation
- Julina Bonilla, Workforce Development Manager (retired), The Port of Oakland
- Andreas Cluver, Secretary-Treasurer Alameda County Building Trades Council and Port of Oakland Commissioner
- Nikki Fortunato Bas, Member, Alameda County Board of Supervisors
- Joyce Guy, Executive Director, West Oakland Job Resource Center
- Jahmese Myres, Chief of Staff, California Calls, and Port of Oakland Commissioner
- Kate O'Hara, Executive Director, EBASE
- Sue Sami, Senior Director of Human Resources, Good Eggs
- Amy Tharpe, Director of Social Responsibility, Port of Oakland
- Sadakao Whittington, Foreman, Sprinkler Fitters UA Local 483

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Acknowledgments

Thanks to Pamela Egan, Brenda Muñoz, Stasia Hansen, and Kate O'Hara for their insightful comments and suggestions for this report, to Julie Light for her careful editing, and to all those who generously shared their time and experiences in interviews. Any remaining errors or omissions are my own.

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Suggested citation

Jaeger, Andrew. "When Labor and Community Come Together: Lessons from the Oakland Army Base Redevelopment." UC Berkeley Labor Center. May 2025. <https://laborcenter.berkeley.edu/when-labor-and-community-come-together/>.

The analyses, interpretations, conclusions, and views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the UC Berkeley Labor Center, the Regents of the University of California, or collaborating organizations or funders.