



After Two Decades, a Big Leadership Change Is Underway at the Weingart Foundation

After 22 years under CEO Fred Ali, one of the city's leading philanthropic organizations will be led by former City Administrative Officer Miguel Santana

By [Jon Regardie](#)

September 29, 2020

A big change is taking place at one of Los Angeles' leading philanthropic organizations.

On Tuesday morning, [the Weingart Foundation](#) will announce that President and CEO Fred J. Ali will step down after more than two decades at the helm of the nonprofit that each year hands out tens of millions of dollars in the effort to address racial equity and social justice in Southern California.

“I will be forever grateful to our nonprofit and community partners, as well as our board and staff for their unwavering commitment to making Southern California more equitable,” Ali said. “Working together for justice, we have helped build a more inclusive region and touched many lives.”

The foundation has distributed more than \$745 million to nonprofits in the last two decades. Ali will depart in January.

He will be succeeded by Miguel Santana, who for the past four years served as President and CEO of Fairplex, the nonprofit that operates the 485-acre Pomona campus that hosts the L.A. County Fair (canceled this year due to the coronavirus) and other events. During that period, he also spent two years helming the citizens committee that oversees the performance of the homeless housing bond measure Proposition HHH.

Before Fairplex, Santana was the City Administrative Officer of Los Angeles, where he played a key role in ensuring the city’s fiscal health, including assembling a more-than \$8 billion annual budget. He gained notice in part for using the position to address homelessness in the city, issuing sharp-edged reports criticizing local government’s response to the crisis.

Santana had been a member of the Weingart Foundation’s nine-person board. During the summer [he announced that he would not renew his contract at Fairplex](#) when it expires at the end of the year, and that he was seeking to focus on addressing equity issues in the region.

The Weingart board unanimously selected him to succeed Ali and guide the Foundation as it moves into a future where the coronavirus has ripped through the region, wreaking significant health and economic damage in low-income communities of color.

“Fred Ali is one of the most respected civic leaders in Southern California, not just in philanthropy, but on a broad array of issues, from homelessness to adequate healthcare to education, and he was thinking about the next stage in his life,” Santana told *Los Angeles*. “As a board we were also thinking about what comes next for the Foundation. What does the future look like for Weingart?”

Ali began his career more than 40 years ago as a volunteer teacher and counselor in a small Alaskan village. In 1991 he became executive director of Los Angeles’ [Covenant House](#), which provides support to homeless and at-risk youth. He has been president of the Weingart Foundation since 1999.

Ali has garnered praise for his approach to philanthropy, with broader initiatives including guiding the formation of the California Executive Roundtable. That brought together 16 foundation leaders from throughout the state to partner on equity issues.

“The philanthropic sector owes an incredible debt to Fred Ali,” said Antonia Hernández, president and CEO of the L.A.-based California Community Foundation. “Fred not only built the Weingart into a powerful social change organization, he also brought community leaders together across sectors to work on big issues collaboratively.”

Founded in 1951 by Ben and Stella Weingart, the Foundation is based on Figueroa Street in downtown, and over its seven decades has given out more than \$1 billion. It has total assets worth nearly \$831 million, according to publicly available financial disclosures. Tax records reveal that it made more than \$32 million in grants and other payments in 2018.

Much of its aid comes in the form of multi-year “Unrestricted Operating Support” grants given to local organizations. In July, Ali announced a program to dispense \$20 million worth of the grants as a response to the coronavirus pandemic.

The foundation’s list of grantees for the current fiscal year reveals scores of awardees in categories including Health, Education, and Human Services. Many grants hit six figures. Some of the largest include \$200,000 each to the Central American Resource Center of California and the Inner City Law Center. Another \$500,000 went to the Mayor’s Fund for Los Angeles for programs helping people impacted by COVID-19.

Santana and Ali were also part of the leadership team of [the Committee for Greater L.A.](#), which this month released the “No Going Back” report. The voluminous study takes a deep dive into equity issues and systemic racism in Los Angeles, and goes on to offer a prescription to alter the status quo and improve the lives of marginalized individuals. It presents a deep and varied plan for change via ten guiding principles including anti-racism efforts, housing unsheltered individuals, and strengthening the nonprofit sector.

Santana said his focus at the Weingart Foundation will be on addressing many of those same issues.

“The foundation is interested in being part of the movement that is looking not only to respond to the gaps in our system, but really eliminate those gaps altogether and strengthen the system as a whole,” he said.

Santana’s contract at Fairplex runs through the end of the year and he will take some time off after that, “Something I’ve never done in my life,” he said with a laugh. He’ll start at the Foundation on January 25.