

Youth United for Community Action – Final Report

A. Project Profile

Project Name: Promoting Equity from the Bottom Up
Lead and Partner Organizations: Youth United for Community Action (lead), Peninsula Interfaith Action, San Mateo County Union Community Alliance, SPUR
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Sub-Grant Program: Equity Initiative
Project Type: Augmentation Sub-Grant
Total Grant Amount: \$30,000
Total Match (if any): N/A
Geographic Coverage of Project: East Palo Alto, San Mateo County, Peninsula Region
Brief Description: Youth United for Community Action galvanized East Palo Alto residents through leadership development, education, and organizing to determine the challenges faced by low-income residents and identify solutions that will allow all San Mateo County residents to achieve regional economic prosperity. The goal of this project was to mitigate the potential displacement of up to 6,400 low income residents of color, increase affordable housing opportunities, and open access to economic growth for all.

B. Project Description

1. Goals and Objectives

The project was expected to uplift the voices of the East Palo Alto (EPA) residents, a poverty-stricken community embedded in one of the richest areas in the state. A community that is 94% people of color, EPA has a median income far below the county's at \$50,137 (compared to the county at \$87,633), a poverty rate more than double than the county's (17%, compared to 7%) and a per capita money income nearly three times below the county's (\$18,014 vs. \$45,346.) Larger market forces are threatening to displace up to 6,400 low-income EPA residents out of the region entirely, and if these residents are not at the table in discussions of regional economic prosperity, then the EPA as we know it could be wiped out in 10 – 15 years. Our project articulates the challenges and needs of low-income residents and solutions identified by the community most left out of the region's economic prosperity. By bringing this information to the roundtables, YUCA helped push for the inclusion of these solutions in the regional dialogue.

2. Work Plan

The following describes our key tasks and deliverables:

- Task: Training Curriculum for Residents
- Deliverable: Memo outlining the training curriculum for residents to build capacity for outreach and participation in regional planning processes
- To train youth and residents to fully participate in the regional planning processes, YUCA staff designed a curriculum that drew from the connections between land use planning and environmental justice, and builds on skills to be able to empower residents to fully participate.
- Task: Multimedia Community Profiles
- Deliverables: Memo on the process for selecting 3 EPA families and 10 youth; Media production training materials for youth; Multimedia profiles of 3 EPA families
- To train youth to create the 3 multimedia profiles on EPA residents facing barriers to economic prosperity, Youth were split into 3 groups (three groups of 3 youth) and each group was assigned a family previously selected to interview. The following steps took place with each group:

1. Media Production Training
2. Storyline Development & Interviews
3. Editing & Video Production

All 3 videos have been completed and submitted to MTC.

- Task: Outreach to Residents
- Deliverable: Outreach materials and list of residents and organizations contacted; Survey instrument and memo stating the number of resident who participated in the survey; Memo on barriers, solutions and priorities identified by EPA residents
- Surveys were distributed to the community members by YUCA staff and youth via phone call outreach, door-to-door canvassing, outreach to attendants of 2 Community Planning fairs and workshops (events led by YUCA to encourage residents participation in the discussion of a planning process for EPA that addresses economic prosperity), email outreach (via constant contact) and an online survey (via survey monkey). More than 1,000 residents have been contacted through various forms of outreach.

The top 3 barriers to economic prosperity that residents identified via the survey's were:

- Inadequate language skills
- Lack of affordable housing near quality jobs
- Lack of money and time to access further education and training

The top 3 solutions they identified were:

- Increase affordable housing near jobs
- Make public transit more affordable and reliable
- Create incentives to hire local residents

- Task: Participation in Economic Strategy
- Deliverable: Memo outlining the number of YUCA staff and EPA residents who attended each of the 3 regional workshops, and summarizing feedback shared at the workshops
- At the first workshop, YUCA staff shared 2 beta-copies of multimedia profiles that we'd begun to develop, and we presented initial results of the survey we first collected on EPA residents' thoughts and concerns around economic prosperity.
- At the second roundtable workshop, 2 YUCA staff and 2 EPA community members (all of whom are longtime EPA residents) attended. Out of the 20 participants at the roundtable, YUCA brought the only representation from EPA to the event. The second regional equity workshop elaborated on the barriers to economic prosperity, particularly focusing on the challenges to the business sectors and touched slightly on solutions around workforce development.
- At the third roundtable, YUCA staff presented on the preliminary results of the survey on economic prosperity that we'd been conducting in the community. The survey was used to help residents identify the barriers and solutions to economic prosperity.
- Task: Community Forum on Economic Strategy
- Deliverables: Agenda, meeting materials, outreach materials, presentation and sign-in sheets from community forum; Memo summarizing feedback on the Draft Economic Strategy
- YUCA youth and staff held a Community Forum at St. Francis of Assisi in EPA to present the Draft Economic Strategies. Overall, the response to the Draft Economic Strategies was overwhelmingly positive. East Palo Alto's low-to-moderate income (LMI) residents sincerely believed that these strategies could work in our community. They did have concerns with how undocumented residents would benefit from the implementation of these strategies.

3. Role of Lead and Partners

YUCA was the main organization managing and implementing this project. As such, we provided the training, support, and supervision to the youth/ community organizers; produced the multimedia

profiles; coordinated and participated in community outreach; participated in economic prosperity roundtable discussions; and acted as liaison with the San Mateo County Union Community Alliance and SPUR. YUCA's Executive Director Isabel Loya and Co-Program Directors Tameeka Bennett and Braulio Gonzalez were the staff in charge of implementing all aspects of the project. YUCA also collaborated with Peninsula Interfaith Action to help identify core residents to be involved in different ways (multimedia profiles, resident leaders, survey participants, etc), reach community members in their congregations to become involved in these regional equity tables, and also helped advocate for EPA's needs and solutions in the larger regional discussions. SMCUCA's role was to help share information with us on the statistics they previously gathered that measure the economic state of the region. These statistics helped shape which profiles we used for the roundtables. We also relied on them to help keep us informed on the progress of the project so that we can actively participate.

C. Challenges and Outcomes

4. Challenges

A considerable challenge faced when implementing the project centered on communication and consensus on desired outcomes. EPA is very distinct. YUCA's grant was a sub-grant to collect data that would begin to shape solutions for the region to increase access to gainful employment for LMI workers. As mentioned in our application, EPA's AMI is less than that of the county, unemployment is higher than that of the county and the community if predominantly Latino. YUCA was directed to collect data from persons 18 and over, high school graduates, employable and possessed a social security number. This proved a challenge with one third of the City's population being under the age of 18, the City holding only a 60% high school graduation rate and one third of the City is undocumented. Addressing barriers for EPA LMI workers would require creativity, education and immigration reform.

Our data collection confirmed the distinction of this community – monolingual Spanish speakers, lack of access to technology (i.e. computers, internet) and a large unemployed population. Initially, YUCA youth collected data, in English, via online surveys through SurveyMonkey. The response was minimal. Furthermore, an unemployment filter was used during online collection that closed the survey if respondents answered they were currently unemployed. We were not able to engage a huge portion of our population due to these three factors. YUCA purchased tablets to take our online survey to residents, knocking on doors and setting up tables at community events. Youth verbally translated survey questions to allow for monolingual participation. YUCA discussed the concern of not looking at unemployment as a barrier and its implication for a community like ours. We were able to persuade our partners to later list unemployment as a barrier in hopes solutions could be developed to include the needs of this population.

5. Outcomes

YUCA believes those most affected should be at the leadership of change, thus this project brought the voices of EPA residents most directly impacted by poverty to the larger discussions on the Regional Economic Prosperity Plan organized by SPUR. Through multi-level components of leadership development, education, and community organizing, we were able to achieve the following outcomes:

- 35 youth & community core residents were trained to lead and represent East Palo Alto residents in voicing the needs and solutions around achieving regional economic prosperity
- 3 multimedia profiles were produced of East Palo Alto families describing the barriers to economic prosperity and identifying solutions.
- Approximately, 500 East Palo Alto residents got involved and engaged in regional discussions on economic prosperity in San Mateo County, helping to identify barriers and recommending solutions through surveys, door to door outreach, and/or participation in community meetings.

Based on initial strategies discussed during the Economic Prosperity Roundtables in San Mateo County, YUCA youth gauged residents on proposals discussed and how they felt the county could respond to barriers to gaining gainful employment. Overwhelmingly, 75% of respondents would like

the see the county allocate more resources to the construction of affordable housing. Regionally, families are experiencing a tight squeeze on their income due to rising housing costs. Parents are working multiple, minimum wage jobs to cover monthly rents and requiring of age youth to seek employment and share the household costs. Additionally, 65% of respondents thought the county could make public transportation more accessible to low-income neighborhoods and more affordable, and partner with industries to provide education/training to prepare the workforce for industry jobs. 60% of respondents felt the county should provide incentives for industries to hire locally and 50% of respondents would like to see childcare accessible and affordable. Affordability was a reoccurring theme. In San Mateo county, residents of East Palo Alto (AMI \$50,137) must compete with service catering to higher income families (AMI \$101,200) making core needs such as housing, transportation and education costly and out of reach. Such barriers must be addressed in order to allow families to gain training while simultaneously able to afford to stay in their home.

Upon completion of the survey, YUCA held an organization discussion to reveal results and compare barriers against YUCA's work asking ourselves "Does our campaign work address these issues?" Further compounded by the characteristics of the community (1/3 under 18, 1/3 undocumented, high unemployment, 60% HS graduation rate), YUCA youth felt the organization should consider a shift in our work to consider strategies that would address education and economic security. In turn, YUCA youth spent the 2014 summer researching institutional structure that impact these areas, barriers, weakness and opportunities to better support our community. Youth are currently in the process of sharing their research and developing plans of action.

D. Replicability and Dissemination

6. Replicability

This project has great potential to be replicated - particularly because it involved deep engagement with communities of concern, intentional leadership development of residents from EPA that will build their skills beyond the project timeframe, and result in the participation of these residents in regional discussions that we hope will result in the protection of low-income people against pending mass displacement. By working alongside other stakeholders participating in the Regional Economic Prosperity roundtable discussions, we hope to have meaningful discourse that can result in creating a shared direction for the region that is not done at the expense of the poor. YUCA believes this project successfully initiated the change in the pattern of displacement and begun addressing economic growth that uplifts those who have been excluded from it, which will not only create stability for hundreds of low-income people (in the long run), but we were able to create a coalition model template for other communities facing equally urgent situations (ie. Menlo Park, Redwood City, etc.)

7. Tools and Resources

The tools utilized for the project were:

- Survey Monkey
- Tablets
- Draft Economic Prosperity Solutions prepared by SPUR/SMCUCA.

YUCA held a forum in East Palo Alto, which was well attended. Overall, the reactions to the Draft Economic Strategies were overwhelmingly positive. We translated the power point presentation (see attached) that encompassed the Draft Economic Strategies into Spanish to ensure that what we presented was truly understood by the community members. There was genuine excitement in the room when we delved into the specifics of each goal.

Goal I: Improve career pathways from low and moderate wage jobs.

Goal II: Grow the economy in the Bay Area with a particular emphasis on growing middle-class jobs.

Goal III: Upgrade condition, particularly for workers in existing low-wage and moderate wage jobs.

In summary, our LMI residents sincerely believe that these strategies could work in the community that they live in. They definitely would like to know how the surrounding communities of Silicon Valley could partner in this effort of turning these strategies into realities. There was also the realization that to make these strategies work, we sincerely need a viable Immigration Reform. Again, the bulk of the LMI community is made up of those who are undocumented, and keeping their realities in alignment with these strategies, is the only way we can truly move forward.

8. Sharing and Dissemination

YUCA is using the information we obtain through this project to develop an Applied Legal Toolkit to identify barriers to promoting equity in affordable housing in EPA. The toolkit will also offer strategies proven to stop displacement of residents and increase opportunities for affordable housing, which can be adapted by other communities lacking equity in their affordable housing development policies and practices. The toolkit will fill a gap in the existing literature about equitable development by focusing on legal strategies for communities that are *not* part of PDA's or situated near mass-transit lines. We believe this subsequent project will lead to a more suitable venue for sharing and disseminating our finding

E. Recommendations and Next Steps

9. Recommendations

- i. Communications: Integrating technology with traditional engagement strategies; reducing technical, high-level discussions to increase the participation of LMI, mono-lingual speakers
- ii. Enlisting local organization to collect information/ could identify with respondents; clear communication and partnership expectations between local and regional partner agencies – partners should be willing to evaluate new information and correct efforts
- iii. Based on information collected around proposed strategies, residents would like to see programs that relieve the financial stress on families to attain core needs such as housing, transportation, education and childcare. Programs could help reduce costs or increase hourly wages that compliment living costs in the region.

10. Next Steps

After completing this project, YUCA tabulated *affordable housing near quality jobs* as one of the top three barriers among language and lack of access to education/training. But without a designated funding source, affordable housing mandates or recognition as a Priority Development Area (PDA), East Palo Alto, a safe-haven for LMI workers, are being left with little-to-no solution to find quality, affordable housing near gainful employment opportunities. With the close of the *Promoting Equity from the Bottom Up* project, we feel the time is ripe for our new project, *Promoting Equity in Affordable Housing*. Cities across San Mateo County are commencing strategies to update its corresponding Housing Element, a process known as, Twenty-one (21) Elements. As part of the update procedure, the City of EPA will reexamine a wide range of policies and land use strategies in order to address its housing concern that, at its worse, could change what EPA looks like twenty years from now. With a nineteen-year history of social justice organizing in EPA, and as one of the few grassroots organizing groups in San Mateo County, YUCA with the partnership of Community Legal Services (CLS), is poised to take a leadership role in galvanizing city-wide participation in this process to promote equity through affordable housing. The capacity to build the participation of LMI workers, as well as our organization's infrastructure to uplift those voices, is all the more critical now. Through public participation procedures built into the Housing Element update, LMI workers will have the opportunity to shape the housing policy choices that will directly impact their ability to continue living in EPA and work in the region.