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PolicyLink

Community Campaigns for Infrastructure Equity
A Review of Four Case Studies

Prepared for the Commission on San Diego Regional Infrastructure & Equity
July, 2012

Introduction

From sidewalks to sewers to parks and libraries, infrastructure is the backbone of our neighborhoods. But far too often, cities cannot or choose not to provide adequate funding to build, operate, and maintain these community assets. Parks are unsafe or nonexistent. Storm drains are insufficient and flood regularly. Streets are broken and riddled with potholes, creating hazardous conditions and causing unnecessary vehicle wear and tear.

These infrastructure deficits do not impact all communities equally. The legacy of housing discrimination in this country along with decades of inadequate affordable housing options has pushed many low-income families and people of color into older neighborhoods where infrastructure deficits are concentrated. Sparse revenue dollars cause city governments to push the cost of developing and maintaining infrastructure onto our neighborhoods directly, exacerbating existing inequalities as residents with higher incomes and greater home values have more resources to provide for their communities while leaving poorer neighborhoods behind.

However, there is a growing movement to overcome these deficits and promote equitable infrastructure investments in our communities. This report presents four case studies of community campaigns for infrastructure equity: Phoenix, AZ; Kansas City, MO; Washington, DC; and San Joaquin Valley, CA. We chose these four based on their diversity across regions, demographics, and history of development and infrastructure deficits. Though each case study describes a dramatically different approach to infrastructure equity, four main ingredients for campaign success emerged:

→ **Develop a commitment to infrastructure equity principles.** In the Phoenix example, the city developed a program that engaged a large number of local residents in establishing infrastructure priorities. However, there was no commitment to equity principles in the process to establish the resident committees, the criteria used to evaluate the various projects, or in the eventual outcomes. The Phoenix example highlights how resident participation alone without a commitment to equity principles is not likely to lead to improved outcomes for historically underinvested communities.

→ **Focus on resident capacity building to ensure community control.** In every case study, resident capacity building was seen as a key challenge to achieving equitable outcomes. Interviewees from Phoenix and Kansas City noted how difficult it was to bring underrepresented groups to the table. Frequently, the decision-making processes are long and opaque. And infrastructure issues in particular are often portrayed as a complex field requiring vast technical knowledge, creating barriers to participation. However, several of these case studies highlight the ability of community-based organizations to develop the capacity of community leaders from historically underrepresented communities. With this organizational support, these residents have been able to not only participate, but also lead their own campaigns, such as in Washington, DC, and the San Joaquin Valley.

→ **Develop buy-in from local government and other stakeholders.** In many cities, much of the infrastructure is still financed, operated, and maintained by the city. This means that ultimately a community campaign needs to win the buy-in of both elected officials and government staff in order to be successfully implemented. For example, in Washington, DC, a community-based organization was able to pull together strong political support for a new investment fund for disinvested neighborhoods, but when several of their supporters did not win re-election, the fund was not renewed.

In addition, a campaign needs to gain the support of a diverse pool of stakeholders in order to win voter approval at the polls. In California, for example , most new revenues for infrastructure investment requires 2/3 majority support of the voters. This supermajority can only be achieved through broad coalition building between different communities and interest groups. In Phoenix, the city has established residents' committees as a part of a strategy to build acceptance for new bond programs amongst different constituencies. The participation of residents in these committees played an important role in ultimately winning voter approval for the bond.

→ **Be prepared for long-term engagement.** It takes time to build local knowledge and buy-in, and communities need to be prepared for long-term engagement. Leadership development can take years. In both Phoenix and Kansas City, the programs have been around since the 1980s, and city staff and participants are still learning and developing new strategies to engage all residents in decision-making processes. In Washington, DC, and the San Joaquin Valley, the community-based organizations that initiated the campaigns have been engaged in those communities for decades, building leadership capacity and helping residents identify and win their campaigns.

The four case studies described in this report present a range of strategies for both raising new revenues and redirecting existing resources to promote infrastructure equity. The first two – Phoenix and Kansas City – describe city-led programs that engage local residents and community organizations in innovative ways to determine infrastructure funding priorities. Both of these programs were established in the 1980s by the city governments in order to appease voters and win new revenues for infrastructure projects, but have grown over the decades to involve greater levels of community participation. They have both been successful at winning new revenues for the cities, but with mixed results for neighborhoods with a high concentration of low-income people and people of color.

The Seven Principles of Infrastructure Equity

Infrastructure determines the landscape of economic opportunities and creates the conditions for social and physical wellbeing. At PolicyLink, we have developed seven principles that provide a framework for understanding infrastructure equity:

Principle 1: Regional Outcomes

Infrastructure decisions have widespread impacts on housing, development, investment patterns, and quality of life. For example, new infrastructure investment can support more low-density development on the urban fringe of a region, or smart growth and urban infill in the places where people already live. The outcomes of infrastructure decisions must be fair and beneficial to everyone throughout the region.

Principle 2: Attention to Community Infrastructure

Infrastructure plans should not have to compete with health, education, and human service needs but should be recognized as equally critical governmental and societal responsibilities.

Principle 3: Criteria for Infrastructure Priorities

Budget priorities within infrastructure areas (for example, repairing levees versus restoring wetlands to insure storm protection; more buses versus new rail systems to improve transportation options; building hospitals versus community clinics to address community health needs) should be thoroughly assessed using an equity lens.

Principle 4: Equitable Distribution

Services and opportunities created by infrastructure decisions should be available and accessible to everyone in all types of communities. The decisions of where to invest should reduce existing disparities between communities.

Principle 5: Economic Opportunities

Employment and economic benefits associated with infrastructure investments should be shared throughout the region. This includes both job opportunities building, operating, and maintaining infrastructure as well opportunities associated with access to new infrastructure.

Principle 6: Fair Financing Mechanisms

The means for collecting revenues to support infrastructure improvements should be determined and applied in ways that are fair and avoid disproportionally effecting residents with incomes below the average median income.

Principle 7: Community Engagement

Infrastructure decision-making should be transparent and include mechanisms for everyone to contribute effectively. Government bodies should be responsive to communities.

The last two case studies – Washington DC and the San Joaquin Valley – describe community-initiated campaigns to develop resident leadership and direct new resources to disinvested neighborhoods. Both of these programs came directly out of the experiences and frustrations of residents living in communities with severe infrastructure deficits. Both have developed strong community leadership and won important campaigns, but have struggled to win enough revenues and commitments to overcome the disinvestment their communities face from decades of neglect.

Despite the challenges, these case studies show that when local residents concerned about equity are engaged in the decision-making process, it can lead to a higher chance that new revenues for infrastructure will be approved by voters, and to better decisions about how and where to invest these scarce dollars. A description of each campaign follows.

Phoenix, Arizona: 2006 Citizens' Bond Committees

For the last 30 years, Phoenix has encouraged resident participation in establishing priorities for its bond programs. Phoenix's citizens' bond committees have been studied and replicated by many other cities around the country, from Scottsdale, AZ to Kirkland, WA. It is often described as a model of community participation in infrastructure investment decisions. Though this participation has been widely credited with getting bonds approved by voters, low participation by historically underrepresented communities and a lack of attention paid to equity concerns has led to inconsistent and mostly poor equity outcomes.

Located in the heart of the sunbelt, Phoenix is a former small, Western town that began to experience explosive growth after World War II. Between 1950 and 1980, the population grew from 100,000 to nearly 800,000 residents. By the 2010 census, there were nearly 1.5 million residents in Phoenix.[1]

According to one interview, ideas around participatory local democracy gained popularity within the city government at the same time as the area experienced this incredibly growth. The City Council changed from at-large representation to districts in 1983, and in 1984 the City adopted a village planning model to give communities more control over how their neighborhoods would develop. In the mid-1980s, when the City needed to go to the voters to get a general obligation bond approved for new infrastructure investments, it convened a small citizens' advisory council to assist in prioritizing projects. These citizens' committees have grown each decade since, and in 2006, over 700 residents participated in developing an $878.5 million bond program.

The citizens' bond committees are a city-created and city-controlled process that provides a venue for concerned residents to set the priorities for the City's bond programs. For the 2006 bond campaign, the Mayor appointed a 31-member Executive Committee less than a year before the bond program would appear on the ballot. Members of the Executive Committee chaired each of the 17 subcommittees, which were organized around topics such as parks, fire, economic development, and neighborhood revitalization. An original list of over $2 billion potential projects was divided among all the subcommittees, which were tasked with decided which projects to recommend for funding. The Executive Committee collected these recommendations and created a final list for the City Council, which established the final bond program. According to a review of public notes, the subcommittees' recommendations were ultimately adopted almost in their entirety by the City Council.

Any resident could join a subcommittee, and in 2006, over 700 of them did. Many residents were affiliated with a nonprofit organization, business, or other stakeholder in the process. The subcommittees had to comply with all ethics and public meeting laws, including recusing themselves if they had a conflict of interest. All meetings were open to the public and several of them had lively participation

Phoenix, Arizona

Population: 1.45 million
Metro Region: 4.2 million
Demographics: 46.5% white; 40.8% Latino; 6% African American; 3% Asian/Pacific Islander, 1.6% Native American; 2% other
Median Household Income: $42,260

Program: Citizens' Bond Program
Year Established: 1980s
Funding Mechanism: General Obligation Bond of existing property taxes (no increase)
Voter requirement: 50% +1
Community Engagement Strategy: Over 700 residents volunteered in committees to establish bond projects

Sources: 2010 Census, interviews

from residents advocating for projects in their neighborhoods. Although there was no money set aside to fund the subcommittees, each subcommittee was extensively supported with city staff, who put together the initial list of potential bond projects, organized and staffed subcommittee meetings, and answered questions and provided technical assistance between meetings. City staff also organized educational bus tours for subcommittee members in order to become familiar with the various project.

According to interviewees, the subcommittees had wide authority to determine the final bond projects independent of city staff recommendations. For example, the parks subcommittee had to hone down an initial list of $600 million potential projects to the final list of $80 million. Although the parks department staff had hoped for money to be spent on land acquisition for new parks and parks expansion, the subcommittee ultimately decided to prioritize funding for maintenance, American Disabilities Act compliance, and projects developed by nonprofits.

According to city staff, the parks subcommittee had weak participation from historically underrepresented communities, and because of this did not select many projects to be funded in the older neighborhoods that had a higher concentration of low-income people and people of color. Though the council districts with the oldest and poorest neighborhoods received the largest number of projects in the bond program overall, the vast majority of the funding was for new projects in the downtown area, and not necessarily to the immediate benefit of residents of those districts. For example, a significant portion of the bond was used to support the development of a downtown campus for Arizona State University (ASU). Though this campus was built near older, lower-income neighborhoods, it will not primarily benefit those communities directly.

Table 1 below provides a breakdown of both bond project funding and demographics by City Council District. Districts 4, 7, and 8 are in the urban core or southern portions of the city and have higher percentages of non-white residents, as well as lower average incomes. According to City documents, these districts received a large portion of project funding overall, as demonstrated in the first column. However, further analysis of these projects shows that the types of projects funded vary widely. The parks subcommittee, which had weak participation from underrepresented communities, allocated resources unevenly across districts; the three lower-income districts received less than average funding. On the other hand, these districts all received greater

Table 1. Bond Monies and Demographics, by Council District

City Council District	Bond $ for local projects	Bond $ for local Parks	Bond $ for local Streets	Non-white population, %	Avg. income
1	$31,906,310	$7,944,210	$1,400,000	20.4	$55,888
2	$36,192,490	$12,367,720	$6,079,590	18	$64,373
3	$11,351,340	$0	$0	23.4	$67,737
4	$22,672,730	$5,885,550	$6,439,620	70	$38,097
5	$14,920,840	$5,795,980	$2,640,000	51.5	$44,020
6	$44,192,020	$15,685,000	$4,549,030	19.9	$80,426
7	$41,947,337	$6,279,570	$4,523,880	73.9	$40,624
8	$97,179,557	$6,456,350	$8,001,080	75.2	$37,436
Average	**$37,545,328**	**$7,551,798**	**$4,204,150**	**50.1**	**$41,207**

Sources: City of Phoenix, US Census 2000, author calculations.

than average funding in the streets subcommittee, as the second and third columns in Table 1 demonstrates.

This disparity in infrastructure investments is not unique to the 2006 bond. A 1998 study of capital investments in Phoenix concluded that inner-city neighborhoods were receiving less capital improvements than newer suburban communities, even when controlling for home size and value.[2] The study estimated that newer, suburban homes were being subsidized at the rate of $14,000 to $15,000 per unit, and concluded that "in essence, there seems to be a cross-subsidization of suburban households by inner-city dollars."[3]

That study was published eight years before the 2006 bond, yet the infrastructure inequities it found were never explicitly raised in any of the over 70 meetings of the 2006 bond subcommittees. Although the subcommittees followed the same overall procedure, they each set their own criteria of how to prioritize the long list of potential projects. In some subcommittees, individuals did argue for ensuring that projects that benefited low-income communities and communities of color were prioritized. In the streets subcommittee, for example, pedestrian and transit improvements for a busy thoroughfare in a low-income neighborhood received $6 million dollars after subcommittee members noted that this was a largely transit dependent population that would greatly benefit from these investments. However, other subcommittees did not prioritize equity concerns at all. In the fire subcommittee, for example, the fire department requested funding for six critical new stations to be built in order to meet the department's minimum response time goal of four minutes. Two of these stations were in densely populated infill areas near lower-income neighborhoods, while four of them were in new, rapid growth areas.

Ultimately, the subcommittee decided to only recommend funding for the four stations outside the urban core area. While most subcommittees recognized the importance to have an even distribution of projects across city council districts, this was seen more as a strategy to gain voter approval at the polls, and not as an explicit commitment to fairness or equity.

In the interviews, interviewees raised several ideas of how equity could have been better addressed in the process. The single largest concern was that low-income communities and communities of color were underrepresented in nearly every subcommittee. Targeted outreach, or requirements to have equal representation on the subcommittees, could have partially addressed this issue. However, simply having a seat at the table does not necessarily mean that their needs will be prioritized. In a few subcommittee meetings, individuals would raise concerns that resources were not being directed to low-income families or to the Latino community, but very few subcommittees took that concern into consideration when prioritizing projects. This points to a larger issue that the subcommittees were given little guidance on which criteria to use to prioritize projects. If equity considerations were a part of the criteria from the beginning, it could have led to more projects for low-income communities being prioritized.

Equity Success: Participatory process was credited with the bond measure passing at the ballot.

Challenges: Low-income communities and communities of color were underrepresented on nearly all subcommittees. Also, a lack of equity framework or criteria made it easier for subcommittees to develop project priorities without considering the impacts on low-income communities and communities of color.

Kansas City, Missouri: Public Improvements Advisory Council

Over the last 30 years, Kansas City voters have approved over $2 billion in bonds and sales tax increases for infrastructure projects. Community organizers, city staff, and academic researchers all at least partially credit the Public Improvements Advisory Council (PIAC) with the city's success at winning new revenues at the ballot box. Although PIAC is an appointed committee of residents, it creates an access point for residents and community organizations to get infrastructure projects funded, particularly in older neighborhoods.

The City first established PIAC in the 1980s as a proposal by the Mayor and the City Manager's office: If voters approved a new sales tax for infrastructure projects, the city would establish a community advisory committee to recommend how the revenues from this tax would be spent. After three decades of modifications and some mistakes, PIAC now engages hundreds of local residents each year to develop their own set of recommendations on not only how the sales tax revenues will be spent, but also what the priorities for the 5-year capital program will be, as well as all bond projects.

PIAC consists of 13 residents, two per city council district and a chair, appointed by the mayor and city council. For six months out of every year, local residents and community organizations can submit a project request either online or at one of 16 neighborhood hearings for an infrastructure project in their neighborhood to be funded. PIAC controls roughly $60 million a year in sales tax revenues. Of this, 35 percent is dedicated to neighborhood projects proposed by residents, 15 percent is dedicated for maintenance, and 50 percent is for city-wide projects.

The process has strong buy-in from city councilmembers, who often attend the PIAC hearings and nearly always adopt the group's recommendations. There is one full-time staff person who supports PIAC, providing technical assistance to PIAC members, answering questions, and assisting with outreach to residents for the public hearings.

Kansas City, MO

City Population: 460,000
Metro Population: 2 million
Demographics: 54.9% white; 29.2% African American; 10% Latino; 2.7% Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.5% Native American; 7.7% other
Median Household Income: $36,680

Program: Public Improvements Advisory Committee
Year Established: 1980s
Funding Mechanism: ½ cent sales tax; general obligation bonds
Voter requirement: 50% +1 for sales tax; 4/7 or 2/3 approval for bonds, depending on election month and year
Community Engagement Strategy: Residents are appointed to serve on PIAC, conduct public hearings, and review online requests

Sources: 2010 Census, interviews

Although PIAC members are appointed, interviewees felt that they created an important point of access for local residents to raise concerns about their neighborhoods. For example, a local community-based organization – Congregations for Community Organizing – brought their members to their local PIAC hearings to successfully win funding to get a broken sidewalk repaired in front of a school, which the city had been neglecting to repair. Over the last 10 years, this organization has been able to use PIAC to win over $15 million in infrastructure improvements for the low-income neighborhoods where they organize.

Kansas City still faces some daunting infrastructure deficits, with the majority of the needs identified heavily underfunded. In 2011 alone, PIAC received over 700 requests for

Table 2. Active Projects and Population Demographics, by Council District

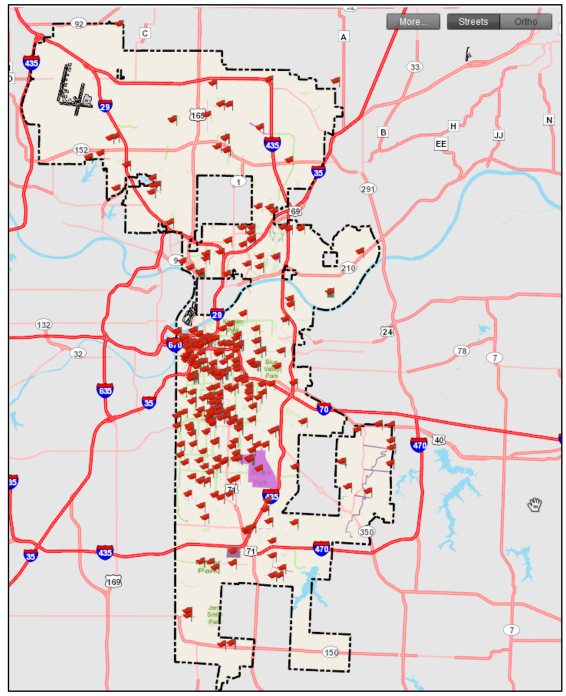
City Council District	No. of active projects	Non-white population, % est.
1	36	28.6
2	26	22.6
3	105	81.2
4	96	33.6
5	62	70.6
6	30	49.7
Total	**355**	65.1

Sources: City of Kansas City. Note the percent non-white population is an estimate based on data from the City of Kansas City and US Census 2000.

neighborhood projects. According to the City, capital backlog maintenance and improvements total nearly $4 billion dollars.[4] But several of the interviewees credited PIAC with creating an inclusive and transparent process to decide which projects get funded. Residents see immediate benefits, in both visible improvements and much-needed jobs in their communities. According to interviewees, city workforce programs assist in placing low-income people and people of color in jobs created by PIAC-funded projects. During the height of the economic recession, PIAC funds kept work crews busy in neighborhoods throughout the city.

PIAC creates an important opportunity for resident participation, but it does not guarantee a more equitable distribution of resources. The success of this program hinges on having community-based organizations serve as intermediaries to establish good relationships with the city and to facilitate participation in the process by their members. Also, PIAC is not the only process by which infrastructure investments get made. Table 2 shows that nearly 1 in 3 of all active projects in the city are in District 3, which is a historically African American area. However, many of these projects are a part of the Green Impact Zone or other programs to address infrastructure deficits in this area.

Figure 1.Map of Active Projects



Source: City of Kansas City.

PIAC facilitates a process that is accessible to wide range of residents, with strong buy-in from the city council, city staff, community organizations, and residents. The faith that residents have in the process can be seen at the ballot box. In 2010, the sales tax was renewed with 75 percent voter approval.

Equity Success: Community based organizations were able to use PIAC to raise awareness about deficits in their communities and win funding to fix them; Revenues were used to create job opportunities for low-income residents

Challenges: Because PIAC members are appointed by their councilmembers, they are not directly accountable to the local communities or residents. Also, the primary revenue source for neighborhood improvements is a sales tax, which disproportionately burdens low-income people.

Washington DC: Neighborhood Investment Fund

Washington DC began to experience an unprecedented economic boom in the early 2000s that led to significant new public and private investments in the downtown area. However, many low-income neighborhoods in the eastern and southeastern portion of the city were not benefiting from these new investments. This uneven growth came into stark relief when a resident of a higher-income neighborhood that had benefited from new development noticed that her sidewalk was being repaired, even though it seemed to be already in fairly good shape. Meanwhile, sidewalks in poorer neighborhoods nearby were crumbling. She went to her church and organized a press conference calling for a moratorium on sidewalk repairs in her neighborhood until the other sidewalks were fixed first.

This action helped to launch a multi-year, multi-million dollar campaign to bring new investments to disinvested neighborhoods. After years of fighting for new investments in their neighborhoods on a project-by-project basis, Washington Interfaith Network (WIN), a local community-based organization affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation, decided to develop a city-wide strategy for permanent revenues to connect development to disinvested communities. In the early 2000s, they campaigned for and won a new funding source of $100 million over a 10 year period for neighborhoods that had suffered from severe disinvestment and infrastructure deficits.

The Neighborhood Investment Fund (NIF) was funded through a 15 percent contribution from the personal property tax, and was unanimously approved by the city council and mayor in January 2004.[5] Although the fund was under the Office of the Mayor, WIN developed the core framework of how the fund would operate by working with their members and city councilmembers. To ensure the funding went to the communities that needed it most, WIN identified seven target neighborhoods where they had a strong member base and where there was a clear need for investment. These seven target neighborhoods were later expanded to 12 by city councilmembers in order to round out representation in their districts.

As a part of the fund, each neighborhood had to develop its own investment plan that outlines the priorities for each community. According to interviewees, WIN helped bring out hundreds of residents to public meetings in each neighborhood. The projects in the investment plans varied widely depending on the needs of local residents; projects included anything from more streetlights, public space upgrades and maintenance, streetscape improvements on commercial corridors, libraries, job training programs, affordable housing, and more.

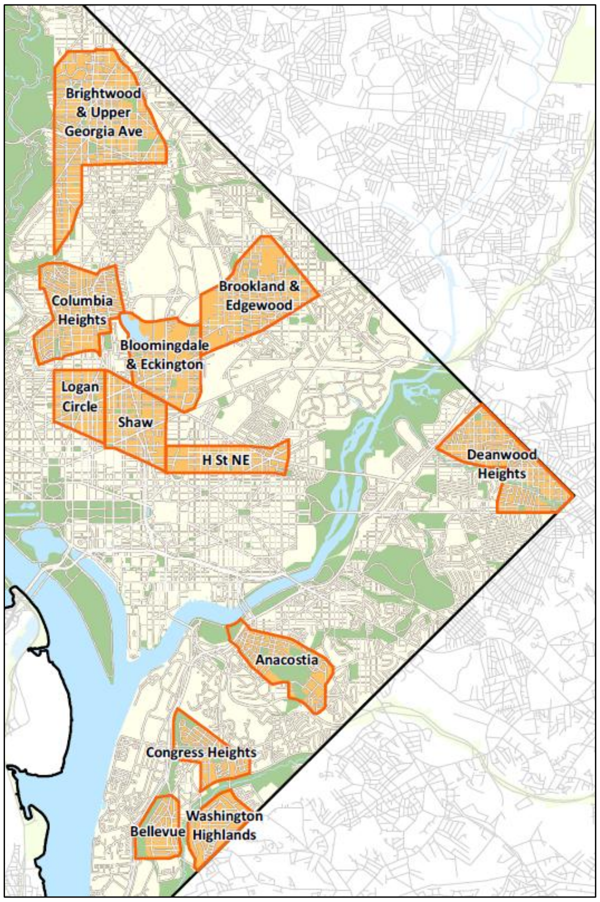
Washington, DC

City Population: 600,000
Metro Population: 5.6 million
Demographics: 50.7% African American; 34.8% white; 9.1% Latino; 3.5% Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.3% Native American; 7% other
Median Household Income: $60,900

Program: Neighborhood Investment Fund
Year Established: 2004
Funding Mechanism: 15 percent contribution from personal property tax
Voter requirement: none
Community Engagement Strategy: Program developed by community group; strong involvement in implementation

Sources: 2010 Census, interviews

Figure 2. Neighborhood Investment Fund Target Areas



Source: City of Washington, DC.

Through WIN's extensive organizing and community capacity building, they were able to drive a process that brought the benefits of Washington DC's economic boom to the neighborhoods that were getting left behind. WIN was able to create a process with deep community participation and leadership, at times to the frustration of a city government that wanted more control. WIN led the process every step of the way, including establishing the boundaries for the 12 neighborhoods and organizing hundreds of residents to participate in developing the Neighborhood Investment Plans. WIN worked with community leaders to give trainings to local residents so they could participate in determining how the fund's money would be spent. City staff noted that the projects and programs funded were more innovative than what many other traditional funding sources would have supported, and WIN staff felt that the fund provided new resources for their member institutions to do important work in the community.

However, the program fell short of the $100 million investment goal, and was not renewed after the first 10 years due to fiscal constraint and lack of support from both the city council and staff. Although the Neighborhood Investment Act was approved unanimously in 2004, by 2008 many of the councilmembers as well as the Mayor that had originally supported the bill had been voted out of office, undermining the original political support that WIN had built. According to interviewees, WIN and the city staff responsible for overseeing the fund had different ideas of how the money should be prioritized and never reconciled their differences or fully gained each other's trust. So when budget shortfalls and changes in the political leadership required tough decisions to be made, there was not a strong foundation to build on to ensure the outcomes served both local residents and the political and budgetary realities of city government. Though the elections and the recession were perhaps unavoidable, interviewees felt that the community organizations, city staff, elected officials, and other stakeholders needed to have worked better together.

Equity Success: WIN's campaign led to the creation of a new, non-regressive revenue targeting historically disinvested neighborhoods. Local residents had significant control in creating the program and establishing funding priorities.

Challenges: What began as a promising program eventually did not meet its potential because of loss of political will.

San Joaquin Valley, California: Community Equity Initiative

California's San Joaquin Valley has some of the most productive agricultural land in the country. It also has some of the deepest pockets of poverty in the West. Decades of poor planning has led to long-established communities that lack such basic infrastructure as paved roads, sewers, and safe drinking water. In 2007, California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA), the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation (CRLAF), and PolicyLink came together to create the Community Equity Initiative (CEI) to support local residents in their struggles for basic infrastructure.

CEI has a four-pronged approach: resident education and leadership; policy reform; legal support; and research. Although still fairly young, CEI has won several successful campaigns throughout the San Joaquin Valley. In Lanare, an unincorporated community near Fresno, residents approached CRLA because their drinking water was contaminated with arsenic, despite the fact that they had been paying fees into a special assessment district to remove the arsenic from the water. They

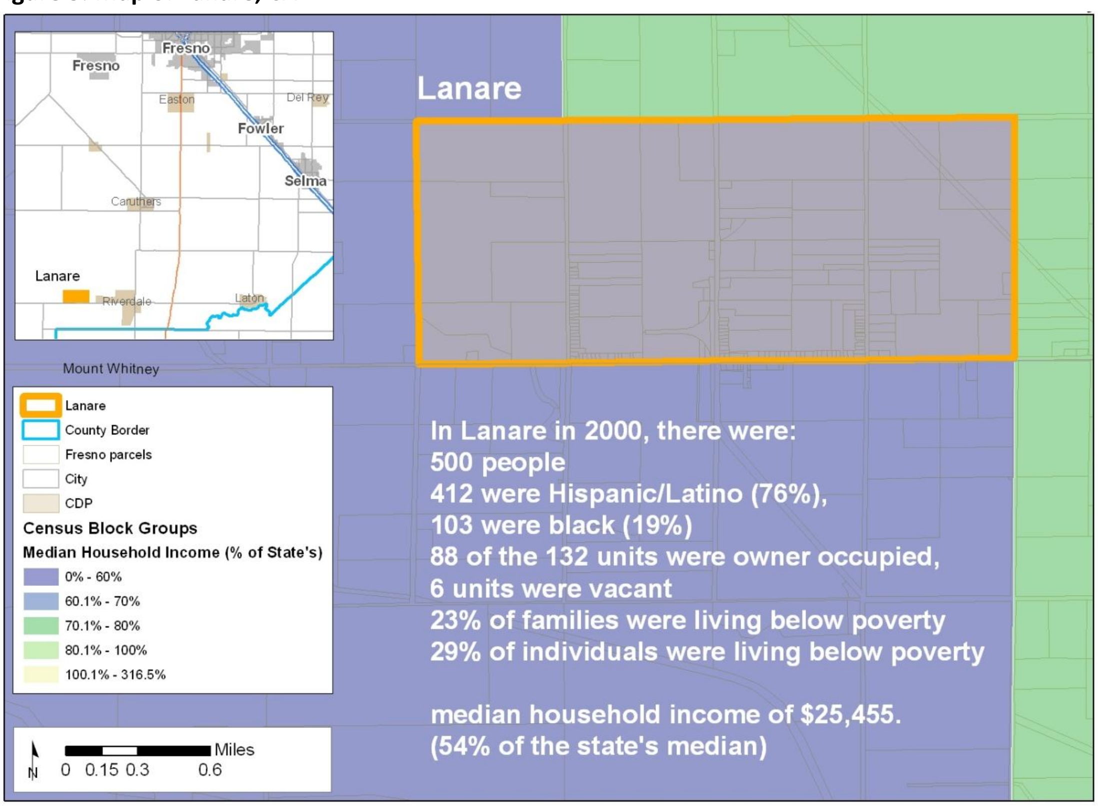
San Joaquin Valley, California

Population: Est. 500,000 in ~220 low-income, unincorporated communities
Demographics: Varies; Often 60-85% Latino
Median Household Income: Varies; 75% or more earn less than $25,000

Program: Community Equity Initiative
Year Established: 2007
Community Engagement Strategy: Resident education and leadership; policy reform; legal support; and research

Sources: Analysis by PolicyLink

Figure 3. Map of Lanare, CA



Source: Map created by PolicyLink for the Community Equity Initiative, 2010.

eventually won reimbursement of their fees and are now working with the state to permanently solve the arsenic contamination problem.

Many of the challenges that face these communities are consequences of structures and policies set at the state level governing municipal incorporation and service delivery. So CEI organizers are also active at the state level to change the rules that govern these communities. For example, CEI recently won passage of a state bill that requires cities and counties to direct more attention to disadvantaged unincorporated communities when planning for growth or annexation.

Key to the success of CEI has been leadership development. CEI staff work with local residents to conduct surveys, develop campaign strategies, and give testimonies at public hearings. For example, the public data about conditions and resources in these communities is often scattered and generally insufficient for assessment and planning. To address this, local residents have led efforts to conduct research and data-gathering directly through surveys and observations that document the existing resources and deficits in their community infrastructure. This provides the communities with their own data that often shows more egregious infrastructure deficits than what the public data captures. In addition, residents work with researchers on more technical GIS mapping and spatial analysis to compliment the direct data gathered by the residents, such as the map in Figure 3. The initiative brings residents from many small communities together, overcoming their isolation and helping them work on county-wide or region-wide issues together. Although CRLA and others have worked in these communities for decades, the extent of the existing deficits in the communities will take much longer to fully address.

Equity Success: Local residents and community leaders are deeply engaged in conduction research and establishing campaign priorities and strategies. Campaigns have won new investments in low-income neighborhoods where infrastructure was previously lacking.

Challenges: CEI works in unincorporated communities, where fractured jurisdictions oftentimes make it unclear which government agency is ultimately responsible for providing the necessary improvement or, once identified, to get them to act to secure all the available state and federal funds

Endnotes

[1] US Census, 1950 – 2010.

[2] Subhrajit Guhathakurta and Michele L. Wichert. “Who Pays for Growth in the City of Phoenix? An Equity-Based Perspective on Suburbanization.” *Urban Affairs Review* 1998. 33: 813

[3] Ibid, p 833.

[4] City of Kansas City, MO Infrastructure Report. March 2010. http://kcmo.org/idc/groups/captialimprovementsmgmt/documents/capitalimprovementsmgmtoffice/infrastructurereport10.pdf

[5] In Washington DC, the city council and the mayor have the authority to levy taxes with the approval of the US Congress, but without a public vote.

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San Antonio, Texas: Community Bond Committee

In both 2007 and 2012, San Antonio voters approved the largest bond measures the City had ever proposed – $540 million in 2007 and $596 million in 2012. Previous bond measures had been in the range of $100 - $140 million, which were not enough to cover all the infrastructure needs of the city. When a new City Manager joined the City in 2005, she decided to increase the size of the bonds nearly five-fold and to make changes to the bond process. Below is a step-by-step description of the 2012 bond program.

San Antonio, Texas

Population: 1.3 million
Metro Region: 2.2 million
Demographics: 63.2% Latino; 26.6% white; 6.9% African American; 2.4% Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.9% Native American
Median Household Income: $51,810

Program: Community Bond Committees
Year Established: 2007
Funding Mechanism: General Obligation Bond of existing property taxes (no increase)
Voter requirement: Simple majority
Community Engagement Strategy: City Council appointed residents to sit on committees and collect feedback from community members.

Sources: 2010 Census, interviews

Phase I: Needs assessment and staff development of project recommendations

San Antonio has ten city council districts. Historically, bonds were split evenly between each district, and each council member would decide on the projects to receive bond money. However, this process was inherently inequitable to older, poorer neighborhoods which usually had greater infrastructure needs but did not receive any more money than newer, richer neighborhoods.

To address this, the City decided to conduct a needs assessment and evaluate the entire city to see where the biggest infrastructure needs were, regardless of which council district they were in. They conducted the needs assessment in 2011, over a year before the 2012 bond measure went to voters. They did extensive outreach to city departments, the county, and the state to assess infrastructure needs, which they divided into four categories: streets, drainage, parks, and community facilities. For streets and drainage facilities, city staff used scoring criteria to rate projects. Parks and community facilities were assessed based on staff description of needs. This part of the process did not include community outreach or involvement.

Based on this staff input, the City developed an extensive list of infrastructure needs. They then had to decide how the bond money would be divided between the different categories. City staff decided to dedicate 80 percent ($470 million) of the bond to streets and drainage, leaving $126 million for parks and community facilities. City staff then came up with their final recommended list of projects to fund.

Phase II: Community Bond Committees

The community bond committees were convened in October 2011 to vet the staff recommended list of projects and take in resident input. Bond committee members were appointed by City Council members and met five times over a three month period.[i] The committees were presented with 12 guiding principles to help them determine their project priorities. One of those principles explicitly described the need to invest in areas with the greatest need.[ii]

Each of the four committees proceeded very differently. Both the streets and the drainage committees adopted nearly all of the projects recommended by staff. These two committees also had the largest allocations of money.

The parks and community facilities committees had very different experiences. The parks committee made changes to roughly half of the staff recommendation list. Most of the changes entailed switching which neighborhood parks were included or small changes to project funding amounts.

The community facilities committee was the most contentious. There were over $500 million in project requests, but only $65 million in available funding. Many community members and organizations came to the committee meetings with ideas for new projects to fund that were not on the original staff list. Out of 14 projects proposed by staff, only three made it through the committee. The committee removed most library projects and added funding for two senior centers, a community center, and several museums. The City Council then eliminated three of the committee's 14 proposed projects and added two additional ones. In the final bond package that went out to voters, the public safety facilities and the community facilities were broken into two separate measures.

Ultimately, the City's goal to invest in areas with greatest need did lead to increased investments in some of the older, poorer council districts, particularly in District 2, which has the largest concentration of African American residents. Importantly, projects located in the downtown area (which is in District 1) but which would benefit the entire city were classified as citywide projects. See Table 1 for a summary breakdown of the bond projects by council district.

Table 1. Bond Money and Demographics, by Council District

City Council District	2012 Bond Money	Non-white pop, %	Below poverty line, %
Citywide	$158,462,000	67.0	16.9
1	$36,683,000	74.7	16.9
2	$51,360,000	72.7	21.0
3	$42,241,000	82.3	21.9
4	$41,339,000	81.7	22.1
5	$42,640,000	96.0	29.6
6	$34,977,000	74.1	15.0
7	$49,633,000	65.8	12.9
8	$43,500,000	44.0	10.6
9	$41,929,000	32.6	5.9
10	$46,558,000	39.3	6.8
Average per district	**$43,086,000**	**67.0**	**16.9**

Sources: City of San Antonio, US Census 2000, author calculations.

Phase III: Voter approval

Once the bond package was put together, it needed to be approved by the voters. The City produced a 16-page voter guide in both English and Spanish that described the bond program, including detailed information on each project that would be funded.[iii]

The Mayor, the Chamber of Commerce, and other stakeholders created a Political Action Committee (PAC) called Build SA Now to support the bond measure. The organization was reportedly critical to getting the bond passed. They raised about $300,000 for the campaign largely from engineering and construction businesses. They paid for political advertisements and put together a speakers' bureau to do outreach to clubs, meetings, and neighborhood associations.

The City decided to hold the bond election in May of 2012 so that the bond measure would not compete with a sales tax measure on the November ballot to fund preschool education for low-income families. In a low turnout election (only 10 percent voted), each of the five bond measures passed with between 62 and 73 percent of the vote.[iv] And in November, the preschool sales tax passed with 54 percent of the vote.[v]

Phase IV: Implementation

With the bond measures approved, the City's focus has shifted to implementation. One goal for the City is to increase the participation of African American contractors and small businesses in city contracts. The City is working with local African American contractors on mentorship and business assistance, with the goal to establish contracts with five companies in the next five years.[vi] The City also encourages contractors to hire interns in order to promote youth employment and career development.

Strengthening Equity Outcomes

As perhaps expected, San Antonio's 2012 bond program has had mixed equity results. One way to evaluate the equity impacts of the program is to analyze how well it measures up to the seven equity principles. Table 2 on pages 5 and 6 gives a summary of the equity strengths and areas of improvement for the bond program based on these principles.

One of the crucial moments to advance equity came at the very beginning of the bond program process. The City of San Antonio correctly realized that an *even* distribution of bond money across each council district was not necessarily an *equitable* distribution. Some neighborhoods needed more investments than others. They took the important step to conduct a needs assessment to determine where the biggest infrastructure needs were. However, this needs assessment did not involve community members and the criteria they used was not made public. Below are some areas where the needs assessment could have been improved:

→ **Engage residents in determining which areas had the greatest needs.** The City missed a big opportunity by not including local residents and community leaders in the process of creating the needs assessment. Residents could have provided input on particular infrastructure deficits in their neighborhoods, as well as ideas for how they wanted these deficits addressed. By leaving out this key step, the City may have selected the wrong projects or areas to allocate investments; this seems to have been at least partially a factor in the parks committee, and possibly in the community facilities committee as well.

→ **Publish the scoring criteria used to determine needs.** City staff should have made available to the public all the information and scoring criteria used to determine which areas were in greatest need for investments, and how that translated into actual project recommendations. This information could have helped communities determine if areas of need were overlooked or not properly addressed through the city staff process.

A needs assessment should be conducted with the full involvement of local residents and community leaders, with transparency to allow for full monitoring of compliance in implementation. While it is admirable that San Antonio sought to target investments in areas with the greatest needs, this lack of community involvement and transparency undermined the potential impact of their efforts.

Endnotes

[i] Information about the 2012 bond program, including Community Bond Committee notes and information guides, are available at: http://www.sanantonio.gov/2012Bond.

[ii] The full list of the Guiding Principles is available at: http://www.sanantonio.gov/2012bond/guidingprinciples.aspx.

[iii] The voter guide is available at: http://www.sanantonio.gov/2012Bond/VotersGuide.aspx.

[iv] http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-05-14/san-antonio-voters-pass-record-596-million-in-bonds.html.

[v] http://www.mysanantonio.com/elections/article/Voters-approve-Castro-s-Pre-K-plan-4014635.php.

[vi] Author interview with Mike Frisbie, Director of Capital Improvements Management Services, December 2012.

Table 2. San Antonio Bond Program Equity Analysis

Equity Principles	Equity Strengths in Bond Program	Areas of Improvement
Principle 1: Regional Outcomes Infrastructure decisions have widespread impacts on housing, development, investment patterns, and quality of life. For example, new infrastructure investment can support more low-density development on the urban fringe of a region, or smart growth and urban infill in the places where people already live. The outcomes of infrastructure decisions must be fair and beneficial to everyone throughout the region.	The City made an attempt to focus investments in older neighborhoods with greater needs and the downtown area.	It is too early to tell how big of an impact this will have on regional outcomes.
Principle 2: Attention to Community Infrastructure Infrastructure plans should not have to compete with health, education, and human service needs but should be recognized as equally critical governmental and societal responsibilities.	The Mayor decided to hold the bond election in May (when voter turnout would be low, which often has a negative impact on the ability to pass bond measures) so it would not compete with a November sales tax measure to pay for free preschool for low-income families (which also passed).	Bonds are paid back from property tax revenue, which comes out of the general fund. The bond may have an impact on funding for other city services paid for with general fund revenues, such as library operations.
Principle 3: Criteria for Infrastructure Priorities Budget priorities within infrastructure areas (for example, repairing levees versus restoring wetlands to insure storm protection; more buses versus new rail systems to improve transportation options; building hospitals versus community clinics to address community health needs) should be thoroughly assessed using an equity lens.	The city did develop a list of guiding principles ahead of time, which included attention to complete streets, environmental sustainability, and investments in communities with the greatest needs.	The city determined ahead of time what types of projects would be funded (ie. street improvements, storm water drainage, etc.), and did not consider alternatives. For example, the City did not look into alternative storm water management systems, such as porous pavement or swales.

Principle 4: Equitable Distribution Services and opportunities created by infrastructure decisions should be available and accessible to everyone in all types of communities. The decisions of where to invest should reduce existing disparities between communities.	There was an intentional decision by the City to move away from EVEN distribution to every council district towards more FAIR distribution of projects throughout the city based on need.	The City did not publicly share the criteria they used in determining where the areas of greatest need were, which makes it difficult to determine if the distribution was truly equitable.
Principle 5: Economic Opportunities Employment and economic benefits associated with infrastructure investments should be shared throughout the region. This includes both job opportunities building, operating, and maintaining infrastructure as well opportunities associated with access to new infrastructure.	In the 2007 bond, Africa American contractors and businesses were underrepresented. For 2012, they have a goal to have 5 contractors within 5 years.	There is no local or targeted hire connected with the bond program, which minimizes the economic benefits of projects in neighborhoods with high unemployment or underemployment.
Principle 6: Fair Financing Mechanisms The means for collecting revenues to support infrastructure improvements should be determined and applied in ways that are fair and avoid disproportionally effecting residents with incomes below the average median income.	Property tax rates did not increase because of the bond, and property taxes are less regressive than other forms of revenue, such as sales taxes.	Alternative financing mechanisms such as fees or business taxes were not considered.
Principle 7: Community Engagement Infrastructure decision-making should be transparent and include mechanisms for everyone to contribute effectively. Government bodies should be responsive to communities.	Community bond committee meetings were well organized; members felt they had access to the information they needed to make informed decisions, according to city staff. The committees were very transparent, with public meetings and all materials and notes posted on the website.	Bond committee members were all appointed by the City Council, mostly based on their technical expertise and not necessarily to represent interests from that community. Also, the City could have engaged community members far earlier in the process, such as during the needs assessment.