

SALINAS YOUTH INITIATIVE CAPITAL GRANTS 2012 - 2013



The David & Lucile Packard Foundation

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OVERVIEW

This report documents a series of reflections on the built environment and space in the City of Salinas with three of four capital grant recipients funded by The David & Lucile Packard Foundation in 2012. Interviews for this report were conducted with Gary Petersen, Director of Public Works, City of Salinas (Cesar Chavez Park and Cesar Chavez Library); Juan Uranga, Executive Director and Joel Hernandez, Lead Organizer, Center for Community Advocacy (CCA), Acosta Plaza; and Alfred Diaz-Infante, President/CEO, Community Housing Improvement Systems & Planning Association, Inc. (CHISPA), Acosta Plaza.



The Acosta Plaza Basketball Project was an investment made at a 304-unit housing complex in East Salinas. More than one-third (39%) of residents are under 18 years of age. More than one third (40%) of units are renter-occupied. At the time of the investment, there were no playgrounds, sports fields, or recreational facilities onsite. Since 2010, the “Salinas Acosta Plaza” gang has the highest number of shooting suspects of any gang in Salinas.



The Cesar Chavez Park Improvement investment involved playground and park equipment purchase and installation for the East Salinas park, the second largest in the city of Salinas. Situated close to a community center, the Hebbbron Family Center, the park hosts numerous cultural and sporting events. However, families assessed prior to the investment shared that they tended to remain in their cars versus enjoying the park due to the lack of engaging outdoor space.



The Salinas Public Library investment was granted to expand the overall capacity by double and renovate the interior for the highly utilized community resource located in East Salinas. Since reopening in late 2012, the library received an average of 1,000 residents per day.



The Salinas Municipal Stadium Renovation involved the transformation of a rundown old minor league baseball park into a football and soccer facility situated in North Salinas.

BACKGROUND



The David & Lucile Packard Foundation supported four capital projects in 2012 as a precursor to the comprehensive Salinas Youth Initiative.

“Capital opportunities seemed like a good place to start. Space was voiced as a constant need.”

The David & Lucile Packard Foundation

East Salinas (Alisal) was incorporated into Salinas in 1963. Development in the neighborhood followed a high-density design resulting in a **crowded built environment with no central gathering place for families and neighbors**. Social isolation and a number of social problems are consequences of poor planning in East Salinas.

“East Salinas has many examples of poor planning. **Rows and rows of housing, there is nowhere for kids to play but driveways, no green space, all asphalt.**”

Alfred Diaz-Infante, CHISPA

WHY IS THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT IMPORTANT?

“It is important to design the right kind of space for families to come together.... central places.”

Alfred Diaz-Infante, CHISPA



“The built environment and spaces **build community**. They form the place for communities and families to come together, to connect, and to celebrate. That is very important. ‘Health’ must be considered when designing the built environment. Space needs to be created for sports, for neighbors to get to know each other, for parents to talk about the pressures they are feeling, as a family, and as a community.”

Interviewed Grantees

WHAT ROLE DOES SPACE PLAY IN THE NARRATIVE FOR YOUTH AND FAMILIES?

“Residents are saying, ‘I feel part of something, not just isolated in my house. In a place where there was nothing, now we are families outside. **A community developed as a result.**’”

Acosta Plaza Residents



The Acosta Plaza capital project was a tool for community organizing and leadership development. Youth and adult neighbors came together to create significant community change for the first time. Now every table has families out eating, kids are playing on swings, and basketball games are going on.



For many, it was the first time to receive good news about their neighborhood. The media needs to shift from an old narrative, a historical narrative of Acosta Plaza. Rather than what is happening in front of them, they instead only represent a negative impression...always referring to shootings.



Building infrastructure gives hope to the community. Demonstrates to everyone outside of Acosta Plaza something positive, something that gave them hope, something that they can change.



Residents engaged at every level of land use processes. Resident leadership develops an understanding of power and systems and “makes the ask”, instead of government deciding the outcome for the community.



Community engagement, community needs, and community priorities means residents determine where the money goes. Residents take back their neighborhoods and parks. Local government engages, listens, and responds to residents, the experts that live there.

“Changed how people felt about themselves and their community... to be part of a major capital improvement.”

Joel Hernandez
Center for Community Advocacy

HOW DO SPACES EMPOWER COMMUNITIES?



“The value of grit.
Ganas (desire).”

Alfred Diaz-Infante, CHISPA

“Many of our residents are immigrant farmworkers from rural Mexico. Value for the outdoors comes from experience with the *Zócalo* (plaza), walking together along the *alameda* (promenade) with its gardens and green space. **These life experiences bring tremendous strength, to overcome obstacles, to overcome the odds.** We have so many strong, amazing young leaders. We must continue finding opportunities for them to grow and develop.”

Alfred Diaz-Infante, CHISPA

“Projects are responding to community needs. This is particularly visible in the urban arts. People creating, enjoying, and seeing it. *Ciclovía*, community gardens, and The Paletero Program at the Cesar Chavez Library with people picking up and returning books are others. It is working. Many resources to come together as a collaborative with residents and create their vision of the Alisal.”

Juan Uranga, Center for Community Advocacy

“Strength is our community asking for programming.”

Gary Petersen, City of Salinas

WHAT ARE CHALLENGES RELATED TO SPACE IN THE COMMUNITY?

How to make the built environment and space a priority for families that are in survival mode?



Families lack time, they are working, so when to engage them?

How to invite them to talk about a building or a park, when they are trying to pay rent, they need food, and have a sick child?

A lot relates to high rent, high home prices, and economic opportunities.

Youth need opportunities to see what other communities have and come back to advocate for that at home.



Youth need exposure to “outside learning experience” instead of learning “inside the prisons.”

The experience must be relevant.

The permit process is cumbersome and totally divorced from people.



It is centered around regulations.

It will be a monster of a challenge whenever capital improvements are used to organize people.

Once you do get space, who governs?



This is critical. In the end, who is going to own and manage it?

WHAT ARE CHALLENGES RELATED TO SPACE IN THE COMMUNITY?



“Kids don’t have a place, the place becomes a street, **the street becomes their playground**, unfortunately.

Youth are in the streets. The nearest park is too far to walk. The schools are closed. They have no other place to spend their time.

Both parents struggle...where their kids can go after school and on weekends.”

Alfred Diaz-Infante, CHISPA

“Salinas woefully lacks open space.”

Gary Petersen, City of Salinas

Open spaces are so valuable, and Salinas has very few large parks.

The city has small spaces, limited places with natural features where people can walk.

Play equipment is overused and in need of replacement.

It is important for kids and families to have open spaces in their community.

They should not have to go to places to find open spaces with walking and biking paths.

Open space offers youth an alternative to the streets, to interact with each other differently.

The narrative of how we come together as a healthier community...those things happen in parks and green spaces.

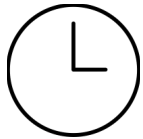
The challenge is to convert existing development into park space. It may have agricultural value, and taking down an old, run down apartment complex is expensive because of the high cost of rent and real estate.

WHAT ARE KEY LEARNINGS ABOUT CAPITAL INVESTMENTS?



“Few funders understand that community engagement is critical. Resident engagement is the beginning, is a tool, not to build something.”

Juan Uranga, Center for Community Advocacy



Participatory capital projects take time and patience.

Communities have a history of not trusting institutions.
Organizations require time to develop trust and credibility.
Developing sustainable resident leadership takes time.



Things are not set in stone with authentic resident participation.

An investment only for a completed design affords no community role in deciding.
Community will be distrustful if funding is only for the design process.
How will community believe that their design will be built without the money to build it?



Setbacks are met with small victories to sustain resident leadership.

This is especially true in a jaded community.
The expectation is an organization will say they will fix a problem and then they leave.



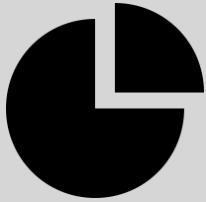
Media coverage encourages resident engagement and ownership.

Residents interviewed on TV and for the newspaper illustrate their leadership.
Press coverage offers residents the opportunity to self identify as a community leader.

“We thought we would need one year. It took three.”

Juan Uranga
Center for Community Advocacy

WHAT ARE KEY LEARNINGS ABOUT CAPITAL INVESTMENTS?



“When sixty-five percent of the budget goes to public safety, no matter what, parks and recreation takes a hit.”

Gary Petersen, City of Salinas



Money is a challenge.

It is expensive.

It takes big bucks, big dollars.



Foundations don't like to fund capital projects.

They prefer to fund service provision.



Government and philanthropy need to understand it is a long term investment.

Returns are usually desired in a shorter timeframe.

For government, elections may lead to shorter term decision making.

For philanthropy, donors may want to see dollars make an impact now, a fast return.



The push and pull of district politics.

There is a struggle over priorities and plans.

To be data driven would democratize resource distribution based on use and need.

“We are not talking \$20,000 for a capital investment, we are talking \$20,000,000.”

Alfred Diaz-Infante, CHISPA

WHAT ARE FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCING SPACES IN THE COMMUNITY?

“Spaces that do exist offer great opportunities to create central gathering places for people to come together. One acre in East Salinas is hard to come by.”

Gary Petersen, City of Salinas

Carr Lake is a gem among high-density housing, the cultural core of the city.

It is huge, for everybody, really important.

A complete package for open space, pedestrian, bicycle, greening, reparation, water, and wildlife.

Sanborn Ranch House is a tremendous opportunity.

The community will be transformed.

People will feel like their leadership capacity is immense.

That will seep out of Acosta Plaza and out into the community, a milestone.

Alisal Vibrancy Plan

Rebuild and revitalize where people live, where businesses exist

Natividad Creek and Cesar Chavez Parks

Renovate and enhance

Schools

Open to the community

Research

Other opportunities



HOW DO YOU MEASURE SUCCESS FOR CAPITAL INVESTMENTS?



Leadership Capacity



Transformed and Reclaimed Space



Community Vision



Quality Infrastructure and Maintenance

