

Redefining Redevelopment

Participatory Research for Equity in the Los Angeles Figueroa Corridor
by Andrea Gibbons & Gilda Haas



je participe
tu participes
il participe
nous participons
vous participez
ils profitent



Figueroa Corridor
Coalition for
Economic Justice

September 2002



**Redefining Redevelopment:
Participatory Research for Equity in the Los Angeles Figueroa Corridor**

*Gilda Haas, Principal Investigator
Andrea Gibbons, Researcher*

*Department of Urban Planning
School of Public Policy and Social Research
University of California, Los Angeles*

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Introduction

People, Power, and Possibilities in the Figueroa Corridor

People need to know that this is a constant struggle. It is not for one day – one has to keep at it constantly, working on strategies all of the time to see what we need to do to win. The most important thing is to increase the consciousness of all of our neighbors that we have to struggle to win. There is no victory without struggle.

Gloria Serrano
30-year resident of
the Figueroa Corridor

To downtown boosters and developers, the Figueroa Corridor is a narrow, forty block commercial strip that extends from the Staples Center in downtown Los Angeles to the University of Southern California in South Central L.A.

The area has been targeted by corporate investors and public redevelopment officials for high-end development associated with sports and entertainment ventures as well as expansion of the university into the community.

But people like Pastor Samuel Nieva, of St. Mark's Lutheran Church; Ron Garcia, of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union; and Gloria Serrano, a 30-year area resident, see a different picture.

Their congregation, members, and neighbors are among the 200,000 poor and working-class people of color who live in the patchwork of diverse neighborhoods which com-

prise the Corridor. Over the past thirty years they have launched many struggles for community improvement – for long-term affordable housing, for local supermarkets, for fair wages, for good jobs. While some of these efforts have been successful, the community's larger vision of people-based development has, until now, been consistently derailed or overshadowed by narrow real estate interests and public redevelopment policy that favors property over people.

In 1999, to buck this trend and to build a long-term foundation of unity, 30 labor and community organizations along with hundreds of local residents joined forces under the banner of the Figueroa Corridor Coalition for Economic Justice, whose purpose is to promote community economic development, prevent displacement, and to serve as a vehicle for grassroots economic development planning.

On May 31, 2001, the Coalition made national headlines when it negotiated a watershed package of community benefits with the L.A. Arena Land Company, a corporation owned by two of the richest men in the world – Phillip Anschutz and Rupert Murdoch. The agreement requires the developer's proposed one billion dollar, one million square foot "Sports and Entertainment District" to include living wage and union jobs, local hir-

ing, affordable housing, parks, and other community amenities. The agreement has been acclaimed as the most comprehensive of its kind in the country.

In the wake of this historic agreement, Coalition members are now faced with two new and formidable challenges.

The first consists of the myriad of new responsibilities related to the oversight and implementation of the agreement with a clear understanding that the devil is indeed in the details. The primary focus here is to build an effective local infrastructure within two years that can connect the project's permanent jobs -- estimated at 5,500 -- to a local workforce which includes a large Spanish-speaking immigrant population, underemployed African-Americans, and many people who have received inadequate formal education and training in the past.

The second, more daunting challenge is to generate effective ways to manage the tension between the investment that produces needed jobs and the very real and immediate threat that this same investment will ultimately gentrify the area and displace local residents.

The approval of the Sports and Entertainment District by the City Council — coupled with widely publicized plans by the same developer to recruit an NFL team and build a stadium in the same area and a high unmet need for student housing at the ever-expanding University of Southern California — has sent a powerful signal to property owners and investors that the Figueroa Corridor is ripe for a tremendous jump in value.

The market response to this signal has been immediate, hyperbolic and pervasive, throwing the community into turmoil and instability. Within months of the project's approval, real estate activity in the area increased and the Coalition's tenant organizers were besieged with situations related to displacement including illegal evictions, harassment, and discrimination – all geared towards pushing working-class tenants out and moving higher-paying renters in.

In this case, the Coalition's challenge is to organize a powerful campaign that can build a wall of resistance to displacement -- and at the same time, develop a constituency for local policy that can effectively address the problem over the long-term.

The challenge of simultaneously producing a local hiring program and an anti-gentrification campaign at the necessary scale could easily overwhelm any community organization -- not to mention a coalition that is barely three years old. While the need for research, learning and planning was immediately apparent, the urgency posed by the objective conditions in the community placed tremendous time pressures on any such effort. It was clear that to be effective, any research process would have to contribute to building the Coalition's organization and leadership, would have to operate in the context of real-time problem-solving, and would have to support the democratic culture of the organization.

Redefining Redevelopment

describes the process and results of such a participatory research process. Although the effort is still a work-in-progress, our first steps may nevertheless be useful to others who share similar values and face similar challenges.

It is offered in the same spirit of sharing, solidarity, and social change that others have offered to us throughout our inquiry of “best practices” from around the country that are discussed in this report.

Chapter One

Overview of the Research Process

Engaging diverse people in a united front of action to accomplish a people-based development agenda is a primary goal of the Figueroa Corridor Coalition for Economic Justice.

Imbedded in that goal is what local resident Gloria Serrano refers to as the need to “work on strategies all of the time to see what we need to do to win.” The purpose of the *Redefining Redevelopment* research project was to contribute to this objective by identifying “best practices” from around the country that could both inform and inspire the Coalition’s efforts towards self-determination, — and, to do so in a manner that captures the results within the organization’s leadership and within the organization itself. The steps involved in the research from inception to application are outlined below and summarized in the chart entitled *Redefining Redevelopment: Participation, Roles, & Research Process* on the following page.

Step 1 Creating a Research Team

The research team was comprised of people from UCLA as well as members of the Jobs and Housing Committees of the Figueroa Corridor Coalition for Economic Justice who referred to themselves as the *Travel Team*.

The UCLA Research Team

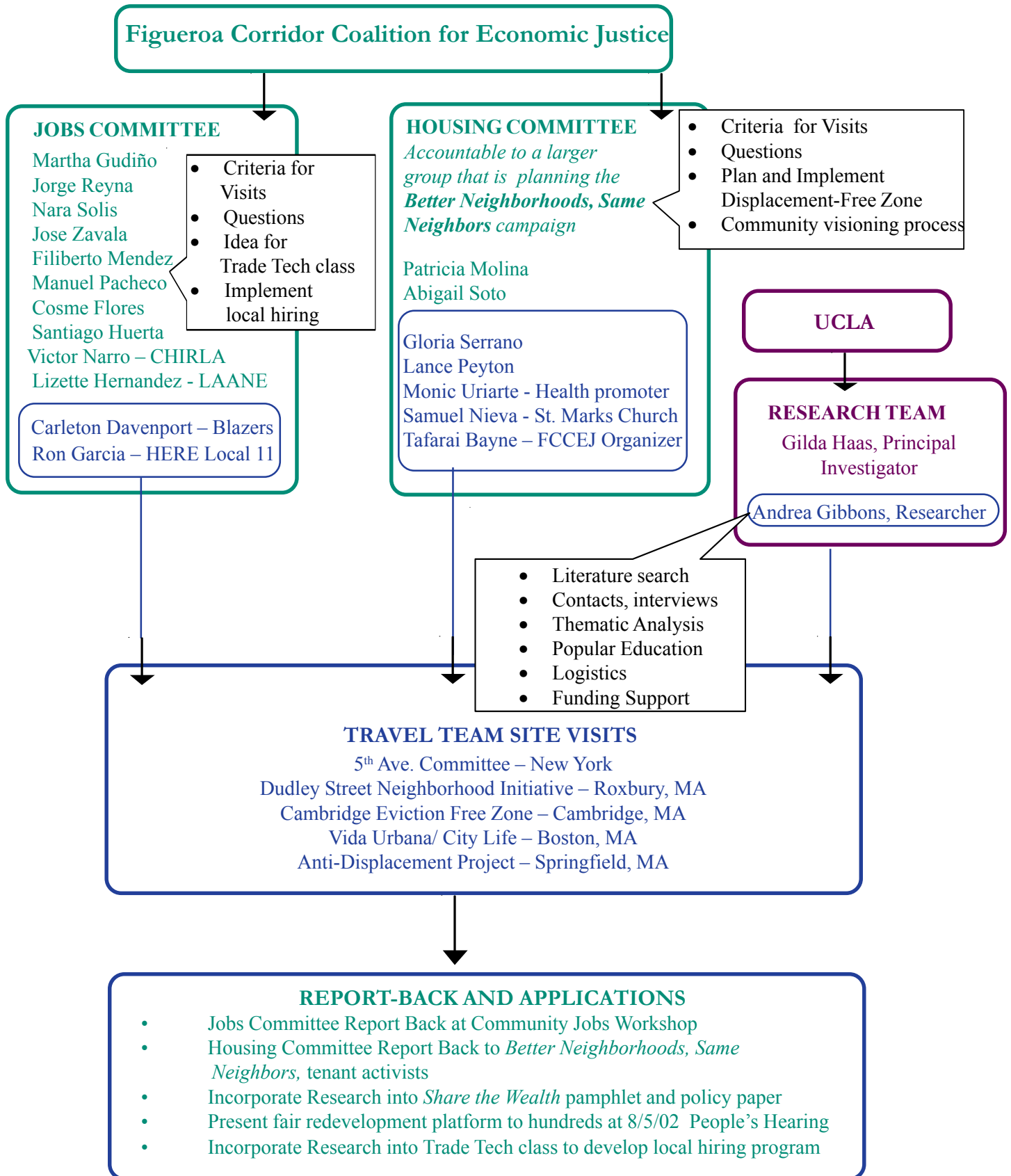
Gilda Haas is a lecturer in the Urban Planning Department of the UCLA School of Public Policy and Social Research, an author of this report, and the principle investigator for the project which was funded by the University of California Institute for Labor and Employment.

Ms. Haas is also the Executive Director of Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE) which is the founder, convener, and primary staffing resource of the Figueroa Corridor Coalition for Economic Justice. She was also the lead negotiator for the agreement with the L.A. Arena Land Company.

Clearly, these prior experiences and relationships greatly influenced our ability to move a research process in concert with the daily efforts of a complex coalition.

Andrea Gibbons is a graduate student researcher and an author of this report. She conducted most of the research included in the report and led the study tour and site visits for Coalition members. She presently works as the Coordinator of the Figueroa Corridor Coalition’s Displacement-Free Zone campaign — a direct result of the research effort and her role in it.

Redefining Redevelopment Participation, Roles & Research Process



The Figueroa Corridor Coalition for Economic Justice

Jobs and Housing Committees

The participatory structure of the research project accompanied the structure of the Coalition itself – that is, research activities were incorporated into the regular meetings of two Coalition committees – the Jobs Committee and the Housing Committee.

Jobs Committee

The Coalition’s Jobs Committee is comprised of eight people who are individual members of the Coalition and four members who represent organizations. It is an example of the Coalition’s efforts to integrate new grassroots leaders that emerge from campaigns into a coalition that was originally established by representatives of existing organizations.

The Jobs Committee was originally formed as one of several designed to capture the leadership and energy of the largely monolingual Spanish-speaking residents who had been active in the Coalition through the L.A. Arena Land Company campaign. Its first participants were recruited from about 150 people who attended a meeting to celebrate the Community Benefits Program agreement. These volunteers included people who live around the development site (which consists of the Staples Center’s large surface parking lots) as well as people who had been displaced from the site to accommodate the construction of the Staples Center.

At around the same time, a separate committee comprised of organizational representatives was formed to discuss the current capacity of the Coalition to implement the job training and placement components of the agreement. The two committees were soon merged into one and charged with the responsibility to research and analyze alternative strategies that can effectively connect local residents to the jobs that will result from the Sports and Entertainment District development.

Housing Committee

The Housing Committee is actually a research sub-committee that was created by a group of about 30 Coalition activists who came together out of concern for the rising number of evictions in the neighborhoods — including people who are facing eviction themselves. This committee, which is comprised of both individual and organizational members of the Coalition, focuses on preparation for a long-term campaign to combat gentrification and displacement in the Figueroa Corridor. They call this campaign, *Better Neighborhoods, Same Neighbors*.

Step 2

Grounding the Research in the Objective Conditions of the Community

A primary research interest of both Coalition Committees was to learn from the experience of other organizations that had successfully tackled similar problems — the “best practices” from around the country. To accomplish this, the Committees needed to generate criteria, grounded in the context of the Figueroa Corridor, that could be used to discriminate between examples that were merely interesting and those that were useful to the current effort.

Jobs Committee Criteria

To get to their criteria, the Jobs Committee went through three steps:

1. They first juxtaposed their current situation against their goals in the following manner:

| What We Have Now | What We Need |
|---|--|
| <p>300 area residents who are active in the Coalition.</p> | <p>2,250 promised jobs.</p> <p>A system to educate and train thousands of local residents.</p> |
| <p>Over 30 organizations including churches, community organizations, and unions that support our efforts and also have members.</p> | <p>A system to refer local residents to good jobs.</p> |
| <p>An agreement with the L.A. Arena Land Company for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50% of 5,500 jobs for local residents • 70% of the jobs will be living wage and/or union • \$100,000 to start a jobs program | <p>A system to monitor success.</p> |

2. Committee members identified some of the barriers that currently prevent local residents from obtaining good jobs, which include:

- Lack of English language skills.
- Lack of previous formal employment history (i.e. youth, immigrants, street vendors, day-laborers).
- Discrimination (age, gender, race)
- Lack of transportation.
- Lack of child-care, immigration status.
- Prior arrests, incarceration, gang affiliations.

3. Finally, Committee members identified their long-term organizational goals for a Figueroa Corridor Jobs Program, including:

- To build an infrastructure that not only supports the Community Benefits Program, but which can link residents to jobs with all major businesses in the Figueroa Corridor through training, job placement, and support services.*
- To partner with and supplement existing employment resources, rather than starting a new program from scratch.*
- To overcome barriers in order to provide access to jobs, particularly for undocumented immigrants and youth with criminal records.*
- To create a pipeline between Figueroa Corridor Coalition members and the unions by getting union jobs for our members, involving our members in union campaigns, and getting unions involved in future local hiring negotiations.*
- To develop the jobs program in a manner that builds the leadership capacity of Figueroa Corridor Coalition members.*

Step 3 Scanning for Best Practices

The UCLA researchers conducted a literature and reference search for examples of job training/placement and anti-displacement programs and efforts from around the country that could be relevant to the above context, concerns and criteria established by the Figueroa Corridor Coalition. Methods included:

- Literature search (lexis-nexis, internet, articles).
- Interviews with national community development intermediaries and policy organizations including Policy Link and Center for Community Change.

The results of this research are compiled in the following documents included in this report:

- Annotated Job Training and Placement bibliography (*Appendix A*).
- Annotated Gentrification and Displacement bibliography (*Appendix B*).

Step 4 Narrowing the Field

Following this initial scan, the Jobs and Housing Committees of the Coalition established additional criteria to further narrow the field of relevant best practices:

Jobs Committee

The Jobs Committee was interested in further investigation of jobs programs which met as many of the following criteria as possible:

- a. Formed through an organizing effort.*
- b. Structured as a tool for further organizing efforts.*
- c. Successfully placed residents who faced barriers similar to those confronted by the Figueroa Corridor into jobs.*
- d. Maintained strong connections with unions.*
- e. Were connected to a first source or local hiring agreement.*

Housing Committee

The Housing Committee was interested in further investigation of anti-gentrification efforts which met as many of the following criteria as possible:

- a. Work done primarily through organizing.*
- b. Success in preventing resident evictions.*

OR

- c. Success in creating a truly community-owned vision for development.*
- d. Similar pressures from developers and/or a university.*

Through this process, the committees selected organizations for further study and as candidates for the site visits.

SVOC's "alumni association" keeps job training graduates involved in organizing campaigns for worker rights and benefits.

Milwaukee-based Esperanza Unida provides on-the-job training through "training businesses" that are run by a non-profit, provide real business services, and earn 70% of their operating income from transactions with customers.

Jobs Committee

The jobs committee selected the following five organizations for further research:

QUEST

San Antonio, Texas

Established as the result of a campaign by two Industrial Area Foundation (IAF) organizations, QUEST offers an intensive two-year training program with a job upon graduation. A high school diploma or GED is a prerequisite for entering the program and jobs are solicited through local hiring organizing campaigns. Although the training program has been spun off into the separate QUEST organization, the IAF still retains oversight and IAF members play a fundamental role in the process by interviewing, educating, and screening community members who wish to participate.

Esperanza Unida

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

This innovative programs provides on-the-job training through "training businesses" that are run by a non-profit, provide real business services, and earn 70% of their operating income from transactions with customers. Through this arrangement, participants obtain job experience and training at the same time while instructors and supervisors cultivate contacts with local industry to place students after graduation. Esperanza Unida also has a program that places residents in construction unions.

Campaign for a Sustainable Milwaukee Milwaukee, Wisconsin

This was an enormous coalition of 200 organizations and unions in Milwaukee that came together to promote long-term change on a broad number of issues. The Figueroa Corridor Coalition was interested in finding out more about the Workers' Center that they had created. However, little information was available because the Coalition has disbanded prior to this research project.

Sacramento Valley Organizing Community, Sacramento, CA

Following a sectoral analysis of the industry base in Sacramento, SVOC decided to focus on training community members for hospital-based health sector jobs. SVOC has since established a training program in partnership with local hospitals, unions, government training agencies, and local community colleges. Grounded in organizing, the program offers graduates an opportunity to join SVOC's "alumni association" which supports organizing campaigns that fight for increased benefits for future program participants.

Hartford Areas Rally Together (HART) Hartford, Connecticut

HART is a coalition of community-based organizations and neighborhood groups very similar to the Figueroa Corridor Coalition in mission and structure. Founded in 1975, HART has also led campaigns related to Trinity University and other development pressures in the neighborhood. Following a

5th Avenue Committee's Displacement Free Zone protects renters from evictions through an intensive program that combines legal and organizing strategies.

campaign that won a local hiring agreement with the university and its partner institutions in the area, the organization established the HART Jobs Center to help prepare residents and place them in jobs covered by the agreement.

Alameda Corridor Jobs Coalition

Los Angeles, California

This coalition effort, spearheaded by the Center for Community Change, negotiated a substantial local hiring program for the jobs that result from the Alameda Corridor Transportation Authority, which is managing the nation's largest public works project.

Housing Committee

Based on recommendations and research, the following organizations were identified for further investigation:

5th Avenue Committee

Brooklyn, New York

5th Avenue Committee is a community organization that has been active in Brooklyn since 1975. 5th Avenue has established a "Displacement Free Zone" — an intensive effort to protect renters within a designated area marked by posters and fliers through legal and community organizing efforts that put pressure on landlords. They also offer innovative job training and placement programs.

Cambridge Eviction Free Zone

Cambridge, Massachusetts

Similar to 5th Avenue's Displacement Free Zone, the Cambridge Eviction-Free Zone was a response to the end of rent control in Cambridge. The project emerged out of a campaign to save 2,000 area families from eviction.

Vida Urbana/City Life

Boston, Massachusetts

This organization focuses on tenant issues, building tenant associations that are strong enough negotiate better housing conditions and leases with landlords.

Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative,

Boston, Massachusetts

Dudley Street is one of the better known community based organizations in the country and is the subject of a book and a documentary. They are best known for their unique campaign that won the power of eminent domain for the community and then used it to rebuild their neighborhood following a community-based visioning process.

Anti-Displacement Project

Springfield, Massachusetts

This resourceful group has organized the residents of eight project-based Section 8 developments to become owners of their buildings, formed a worker-owned company to do the building maintenance work, and won community-control over Springfield's previously unresponsive employment One-Stop.

Mission Anti-Displacement Coalition

San Francisco, California

This coalition was formed to prevent displacement in San Francisco's Mission District and is organizing for a moratorium on evictions and other protective policies.

Just Cause Oakland

Oakland, California

This group is fighting for a just-cause eviction law in Oakland.

The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative won the power of eminent domain and used it to rebuild their community.

Examples of job training and placement programs with strong links to organizing were few and far between. The Coalition's secondary focus on programs related to local or first source hiring agreements narrowed this field even further.

Community Alliance of Tenants

Portland, Oregon

This coalition successfully organizes tenants to prevent evictions and to have an impact on policy in the city of Portland and in surrounding areas. They have organized at-risk tenants as well as a group of allies from community-based and advocacy organizations to support the tenants' struggles.

Humboldt Park Empowerment Program

Chicago, Illinois

This organization focuses on development issues and have completed a community visioning process in their neighborhood that lays out a plan for future development that will benefit people who live in their community.

Step 5

Analyzing the Results

The information described above was organized to support the ability of the Figueroa Corridor Coalition committees to analyze the programs and decide which ones they would ultimately visit.

Jobs Committee

To better compare programs and make information more accessible, research staff created a matrix based upon questions raised by the Jobs Committee (*Appendix C*). It contains comprehensive information on the history, organization, partners, and special challenges and successes of each program, as well as relevance to the barriers to employment

faced by workers in the Figueroa Corridor.

In addition, one page handouts were created in English and Spanish which summarized each program in a more visual format. (*See Appendix D*)

The research on locating relevant job training programs was difficult on a variety of levels. For example, the Figueroa Corridor Coalition was specifically looking for job training and placement programs that had strong ties to organizing, and these were few and far between — both in the literature and as examples offered by practitioners and community economic development intermediaries, networks, and think tanks. The Coalition's secondary focus on programs which were related to local or first source hiring agreements narrowed this field even further.

In addition, the culture of organizations that did offer impressive and relevant job programs were not very conducive to community-based inquiry. Organizational directors were difficult to contact and it was difficult to arrange phone interviews with them. Once contacted, although staff provided useful information, they were reticent to supplement their success stories with frank discussions about the challenges and obstacles faced in the work — issues that are second nature for community organizers and important to the development of a strategy.

Finally, none of the organizations contacted had developed concrete strategies for addressing the issues presented by large undocumented immigrant populations.

None of the jobs programs contacted had developed concrete strategies for addressing the issues presented by large, undocumented immigrant populations.

In addition to these general constraints were issues particular to the individual organizations. QUEST, an impressive program located in San Antonio refused to grant a site visit and interview for political reasons – they did not want to share information with non-IAF affiliated organizations. The Campaign for a Sustainable Milwaukee had dissolved and thus had no one available to discuss their programs in detail. Although HART’s experience and context was very close to that of the Figueroa Corridor Coalition, at the time of this research, the organization was undergoing a major restructuring and thus only a very limited interview with staff was available.

Initial phone calls to anti-displacement organizations were received with enthusiasm and interest by staff who quickly regarded the Figueroa Corridor Coalition as a sister organization involved in similar struggles.

Housing Committee

In contrast, information and organizational relationships relevant to the issues of gentrification and displacement were much more accessible. Literature on the subject includes both academic studies of the phenomenon and its causes as well as pieces geared towards organizers on how to prevent displacement.

Initial phone calls to anti-displacement organizations were received with enthusiasm and interest by staff who quickly regarded FCCEJ as a sister organization involved in similar struggles.

Research staff and Coalition organizers were also invited to present at a conference held by Policy Link in Kansas City March 13-15, 2002 on the topic of “equitable development,” at which organizers from the 5th Avenue Committee, Vida Urbana, and the Community Alliance of Tenants were also present. Informal interviews with these groups were initiated over dinner in Kansas City, with follow-up and additional interviews with other organizations conducted over the phone.

In Kansas City, the Coalition and the other community organizations discussed creating their own informal network of organizers who were working against displacement around the country, and have remained in touch by phone and e-mail.

A comparative matrix (*Appendix E*) and hand-made posters that described relevant anti-displacement projects were also developed by research staff to facilitate discussion within the Housing Committee.

Step 6 Selecting the Sites

Information from the matrices, the one-page organization summaries, and telephone and e-mail contact with organizations were discussed in meetings of the Housing and Jobs Committees of the Figueroa Corridor Coalition. As a result of these discussions, the following decisions were made:

The events of September 11, 2001 complicated the planning of the site visits by increasing fear of flying as well as barriers to travel for immigrants, who comprise a large portion of the Figueroa Corridor Coalition's membership.

- To consolidate the site visits into a one-week trip for representatives from both Committees. The goal here was to take as many people as possible to as many sites as possible in order to provide the research effort with a broad range of experience and perspective.
- To focus on anti-displacement groups, including organizations that, like the Coalition, were engaged in both housing and jobs efforts. The goal here was to take advantage of the warm reception, shared values, and interest in the Coalition that these groups presented and the potential that existed for building long-term relationships.
- To focus on East Coast organizations where there was a high concentration of organizations doing this work.

Based on these decisions, arrangements were made to visit the following organizations: Hartford Areas Rally Together (HART); 5th Avenue Committee; Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative; Vida Urbana/City Life; and the Anti-Displacement Project.

Step 7

Building the Travel Team

The events of September 11, 2001 complicated the planning of the site visits by increasing fear of flying as well as barriers to travel for immigrants, who comprise a large portion of the Figueroa Corridor Coalition's membership. Once it was decided to combine the committees into a one-week visit, we asked for volunteers from the Committees who were committed to the work for the long-term, who were not worried about flying, and who could take a week off from work to participate in the site visits. The "Travel Team" was then formed of the following people:

- **Tafarai Bayne**
Figueroa Corridor Coalition staff
- **Carleton Davenport**
Blazers
- **Ron Garcia**
Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union, Local 11
- **Andrea Gibbons**
UCLA, Dept. of Urban Planning
- **Haleemah Henderson**
SAJE, Banking Rights Project
- **Samuel Nieva**
Pastor, St. Marks Lutheran Church
- **Lance Peyton**
Figueroa Corridor resident
- **Gloria Serrano**
Figueroa Corridor resident
- **Monic Uriarte**
Community Health Promoter,
Esperanza Community Housing

Questions from the Jobs Committee**Questions from the Housing Committee**

Jobs Committee members were interested in learning how other organizations balanced the tension between service and organizing.

- Where did you get funding?
- How did you build working relationships with different partners (such as the Building Trades)?
- How do you negotiate with employers to place people after graduation from their program?
- How do you enforce agreements with employers?
- What tracking systems do you use? How successful are people over the long term and how long do you stay in contact with them?

- How do you make contact with community members?
- How have you organized to defend the community -- what techniques and methods do you use?
- What is the most effective way that you gain the community's attention and let them know what is happening?
- What has worked and what hasn't worked?
- How long has it taken you to get where you are?

Housing Committee members wanted to learn about the specific strategies that other organizations used to defend their neighborhoods. They also wanted to learn how to combat the enemy within -- prejudice among and between members -- issues of gender, race, and identity.

- Challenges: What was the hardest to start? To maintain? What should we never do?
- How much organizing do you do? Are the programs still linked to the community? How do you structure the division between organizing and service?
- Do you work with youth?

- Who are your partners?
- How have you worked with the media to pressure politicians to change policies and laws?
- How have you dealt with issues of gender, race, and identity?
- Do you charge any fees?

The team met over pizza on March 16, 2002, to get to know each other and prepare for their trip. They talked about each of the organizations that they would be visiting, logistics, and what kind of weather to expect.

Firmly integrated into a campaign to redefine redevelopment in Los Angeles, the results of the research found an immediate home in the business of local grassroots policy-making in which Travel Team members are key players.

Step 8 The Site Visits

The site visits occurred April 22 to April 26, 2002. At the last minute, the visit to HART was cancelled due to issues internal to the organization – the Jobs Center which constitutes their local hiring and training program had just been transferred from HART to Southside Institutional Neighborhood Alliance (SINA) – the employer alliance with whom they originally negotiated their first-source hiring agreement. It was agreed that a visit during this the transition, which was going on at the same time as the trip, would place an unrealistic burden on the organization’s staff.

A detailed account of the site visits is provided in Chapter Two, *Reality Check: The Travel Team Visits Selected “Best Practice” Sites*.

Step 9 Reporting Back

The Jobs Committee and Housing Committee of the Figueroa Corridor Coalition each hosted meetings where the Travel Team was asked to report back what they learned from their visits, to get feedback on the new ideas that came up in the course of the trip, and to fire people up with the energy, enthusiasm and optimism that the visits generated. The results of these meetings are provided in Chapter Three of this report, *Bringing it All Back Home*.

Step 10 Applying the Research Results

The results of the research were immediately applied to the organizing and grassroots policy work of the Figueroa Corridor Coalition for Economic Justice to “redefine redevelopment.” Summarized briefly here, these applications are further elaborated in Chapter Four, *From Research to Action*, and related materials have been included in the Appendices.

Share the Wealth:

A People’s Platform for Fair Redevelopment

Barely two months after the Travel Team’s return, the Los Angeles City Council gave a fast-track approval to a new downtown redevelopment plan. The plan area includes the homes of many Figueroa Corridor Coalition members, however the planning process did not include their participation.

Buoyed by the possibilities presented by the Community Benefits Program, and beleaguered by mounting evictions and displacement in the community, the Coalition joined others in a consolidated campaign to amend the plan. A platform was quickly developed along with a policy pamphlet and paper entitled *Share the Wealth* which combine the experience of local victories with those of the organizations visited by the Travel Team. Firmly integrated into the campaign effort, the results of this research found an immediate home in the business of local grassroots policy-making.

***Planning a Local Hiring Program
from the Grassroots***

On September 5, 2002, the first session of a class entitled *Community Jobs Program Planning Workshop* held at Los Angeles Trade Technical College was attended by 40 students recruited by the Figueroa Corridor Coalition for Economic Justice. The 16-week class is being taught by Sandra McNeill, lead organizer of the Figueroa Corridor Coalition for Economic Justice, and Andrea Gibbons, researcher, Travel Team leader, and co-author of this report.

The purpose of the class, which was initiated as a first step in a long-term relationship between the Coalition and the community college, is to design a local hiring and training program for the Figueroa Corridor that will effectively connect the 2,500 jobs designated by the Community Benefits Program's local hiring provisions for local residents – as well as to other opportunities and employers in the Figueroa Corridor. Results and materials developed through the *Redefining Redevelopment* research project have been integrated into the course and planning process; Travel Team members are guest speakers in the course; and course participants are being developed as the newly expanded Jobs Committee of the Figueroa Corridor Coalition.

Chapter Two

Reality Check: The Travel Team Visits Selected “Best Practice” Sites

Meet the Travel Team

The Travel Team was made up of diverse and committed individuals who reflect the character of the Figueroa Corridor Coalition for Economic Justice. Presented below is a brief introduction to its members.



Ron Garcia
vice- President
HERE Local 11

I was born and raised in Los Angeles California, worked at the Western Bonaventure Hotel in downtown Los Angeles for 18 years. I was a steward for about seven years, an organizer for about 5 years, and then was elected to Vice President of HERE Local 11.

When I was 11 I took care of my mother. I couldn't tell anyone — the social worker told her if you get sick one more time I'll take away your kid. So for years I took care of her and my five-year-old sister. I gave my mother her medicine until she was better. Ever since then I have been taking care of my mom. I am married and have two kids.



Tafarai Bayne
organizer
Figueroa Corridor Coalition for Economic Justice

I was born in Los Angeles. I am twenty years old and have worked as an organizer for two years. I grew up in Inglewood and now live in the Figueroa Corridor. I plan to be a teacher one day.

Carlton Davenport
associate director
Blazers Youth Services



I was born in Los Angeles, and I went to school at Santa Barbara. I now work as the Associate Director and fund developer at Blazers Youth Services, an organization in South Central founded by my father, and I am also doing part-time substitute teaching.



**Andrea
Gibbons**
UCLA
Researcher

I grew up in the desert on the south side of Tucson, Arizona. After college I moved to Los Angeles to work for three years as a paralegal at CARECEN, helping Central American refugees win their green cards, I then interned for a short time at the Garment Worker's Center. I now work as a researcher and organizer with the Figueroa Corridor Coalition for Economic Justice, while getting my masters at UCLA.



**Lance
Peyton**
Long-time
Figueroa Corridor
resident and
activist

I am originally from Chicago. I have done many things in my life: I served three years in the military, attended several colleges including the University of Chicago, and I have worked as electrical designer and graphic artist. I have been a resident in this neighborhood since 1974, when I moved to 28th and Budlong. Everyone on the lot was evicted in July of 1999 to build student housing.

I like to think of myself as a futurist, a prognosticator, not quite in the vein of Zarathustra, but someone who looks forward to the future. I don't know who said it first, but a quote I like is, "I love the future because that is where I'm going to spend the rest of my life."

**Samuel
Nieva**

**Pastor
St. Mark's
Lutheran
Church**



I was born in Peru 42 years ago. I now live in Los Angeles where I am a Lutheran Pastor at St. Mark's Church in South Central. My profession before the church was as a photo-journalist in Peru. I am married with two children.

Gloria Serrano

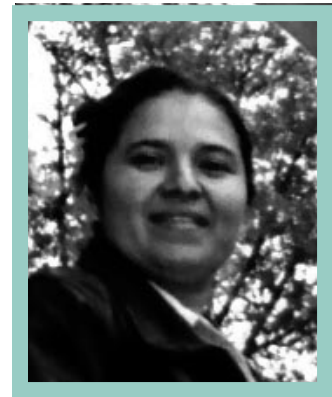
**Figueroa
Corridor
resident and
tenant leader**



I was born in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, and came to this country in 1976. I am a single mother with two children and three grandchildren. I have lived in the University Park neighborhood since I came here 26 years ago, and for 22 of those years I have worked in the garment industry downtown. I have lived in my current building for five years, but now my neighbors and I are organizing to fight eviction, as the owner is trying to opt out of his section 8 contract and rent to students.

Monic Uriarte

**Community Health Promoter
Esperanza Community
Housing Corporation**



I am from Sinaloa, Mexico, and I was a teacher there for ten years, teaching both preschool and high school. I have now lived in the United States for 10 years, and I work as a Community Health Promoter with the Healthy Homes Project at Esperanza Housing Corporation. I am a single mother with 4 beautiful, marvelous children.

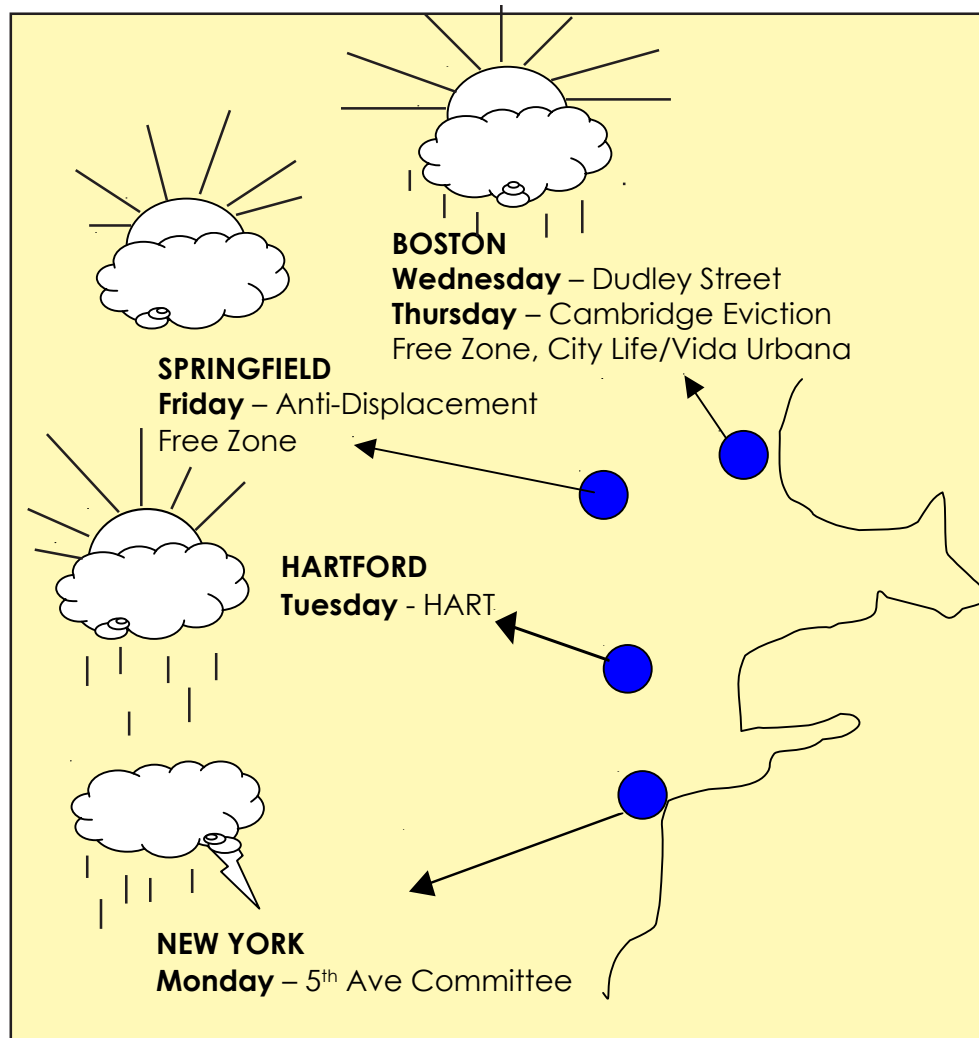
Haleemah Henderson

SAJE Banking Rights Project



I was born and raised in Oakland and originally moved to Southern California to go to college. It is here in Los Angeles that I was sidetracked by life and ended up on welfare. LA is also where I found my passion for community organizing, through an innovative program at Los Angeles Trade Technical College that offered an AA degree program in Community Planning/ Economic Development, the first of its kind in the country. I am currently an organizer with SAJE around banking rights and economic access issues for welfare recipients as well as other economically disenfranchised populations, while working on my master's degree from UCLA.

The Site Visits



Andrea Gibbons recounts the itinerary.

We left Los Angeles with high spirits and beating hearts. Here is what happened:

Monday, April 22 We arrived into New York late, and after finding our hotel we embarked on our first adventure in the metro system. Tired and under stress from being in

a new city we were running late, got lost, and did not make it to 5th Ave to meet with the resident leaders they had waiting for us! Then, due to the complications related to the restructuring of HART's jobs program, the prospects of a productive meeting with their organization seemed unlikely. We quickly consulted with HART, mutually agreed to cancel, and then rescheduled our meeting with the 5th Avenue Committee for Tuesday.

We had a lot of discussion within our group about what might have happened at HART, an organization that seemed very similar to the Figueroa Corridor Coalition, but 25 years older. Looking for lessons, some of thoughts were:

- It is obviously a strain on an organization focused on organizing to run a job center itself.
- We wondered whether it would have been better for HART to spin off the center earlier rather than later? Our discussions with HART indicated that they had considered this — their construction jobs initiative was definitely spun off early.
- Now that SINA, an employer-based entity, is running the job center rather than a community-based organization — will the jobs program still be able to truly serve the community?

The basic concept is to be an effective voice, a mover and shaker as opposed to a pipsqueak noise maker.

Lance Peyton

and then we took the subway from Manhattan to Brooklyn (this time without getting lost) and arrived at 5th Ave Committee.

Their offices are in an old store-front, where they have gradually expanded to occupy the entire first floor -- a series of connected store-fronts. We met for several hours with their organizers, one of whom was a former tenant whose case had been taken up and lost by their Displacement Free Zone program. We also heard more about their two job training programs, and a newly negotiated collaboration with construction trade unions. In this effort 5th Avenue and the unions are organizing together to win rehabilitation of Section 8 housing, with the assurance that these jobs will be union and that local residents will be offered spots in apprenticeship programs when the rehabilitation occurs.

After the meeting we walked around Brooklyn to get a feel for the neighborhood, saw some of the Displacement Free Zone newspaper boxes which were made of plastic and located on several street-corners. We were impressed with how the news-boxes made 5th Avenue Committee so visible in the community -- a more permanent visibility than campaign signs that are ultimately removed by landlords.

Tuesday, April 23 In the morning, our entire group met with two potential funders



Later that evening we all acknowledged the important accomplishments of the 5th Avenue Committee and made the following observations about how it relates to our own challenges in the Figueroa Corridor:

On fighting displacement

- Fifth Avenue does not focus on “healthy homes” and slum housing the way we do in the Figueroa Corridor. They only focus on evictions.

- Fifth Avenue effectively uses shame as a tool – they pressure smaller landlords by showing them how they are not being responsible to their community. In Los Angeles we are focusing on bigger absentee landlords and even bigger management companies and may need to use different tactics.

We were impressed with how the news-boxes made 5th Avenue Committee so visible in the community.

- In their experience, taking on small landlords and very big ones were easiest for Fifth Avenue Committee. They had the greatest difficulty taking on mid-sized landlords — self-made business people who would fight to the bitter end.

- We observed that this Brooklyn neighborhood seemed to be more homogeneous than the Figueroa Corridor and had a stronger sense of community. We felt that in L.A. we have greater diversity and less unity.

- We need to carefully analyze the two foundations of 5th Avenue’s anti-displacement strategy – their use of legal methods and their use of the media.

- The Displacement Free Zone is something that we need to do in the Figueroa Corridor, and we shouldn’t wait too long before we set it up. 5th Avenue just jumped into it and it has worked very well for them.



The Displacement Free Zone is something that we need to do in the Figueroa Corridor, and we shouldn't wait too long before we set it up.

On jobs, training, and local hiring

- 5th Avenue Committee's close cooperation with the unions was very impressive. This was evident in both their job training programs and the political battle for union contracts in Section 8 housing.
- 5th Avenue has developed good partnerships with community colleges.

Some general observations

- It really feels like 5th Avenue is part of this community. They have been here for a long time, and have really grown along with the community.
- They really made their organizing *FUN!*



Wednesday, April 24 We got up early and drove up to Boston, and headed over to the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, where we were provided with a tour of the neighborhood. We then sat down with two of the Dudley Street organizers to talk about their work.

What most impressed the Travel Team, as it does those who came before us, was the way that Dudley Street was able to harness the power of eminent domain for the community. We spent some time discussing the political circumstances that had made this unique accomplishment possible.

We were also very interested in the way that Dudley Street had involved the community in their planning process, creating a true vision for their community, which they then turned into a reality. Visiting Dudley Street, we had a tangible sense of their accomplishments – we could see the houses they had built, we experienced the kind of neighborhood they had created, and while we were on the tour we saw that the residents on the street really knew the organizers.

The objective conditions confronting Dudley Street had some important differences from those in the Figueroa Corridor. They began with issues related to disinvestment and abandonment. In contrast, in the Figueroa Corridor, we are up against gentrification and displacement.



We also discussed Dudley Street's current efforts towards intensive leadership development of a group of 30 committed residents, an area of work that is also a high priority for the Figueroa Corridor Coalition.

During our evening debriefing, people brought up the following observations:

- It was an amazing success to have won eminent domain for the community.
- Dudley Street really got the community organized and then transcended common beliefs of what was possible.
- Dudley Street demonstrates an ability to bring a real sense of ownership of the neighborhood to the residents living there.
- The objective conditions confronting Dudley Street had some important differences from those in the Figueroa Corridor. They

began with issues related to disinvestment and abandonment. In contrast, in the Figueroa Corridor, we are up against gentrification and displacement.

- Dudley Street was able to build other facilities -- like playgrounds and gardens -- besides housing for the community.
- Dudley Street's leadership development program is really exciting and something we should try to do in the Figueroa Corridor.

- Dudley Street built two impressive (and huge) models of their neighborhood. These really help people in creating concrete plans -- they can visualize the area and what they want to bring in.
- Dudley Street's support of organic gardening and food cooperatives impressed the Travel Team.



Thursday, April 25 In the morning we visited the **Cambridge Eviction Free Zone**, located in a tiny office in the basement of a church right next to Harvard. Sitting and talking with the organizer in such a small space made all of their accomplishments that much more impressive. In light of our continuing struggles with the University of Southern California in the Figueroa Corridor, we were particularly impressed with the way in which they had taken on the university and showed them that they had a responsibility to the community.

Cambridge Eviction Free Zone has been successful in getting the university to acknowledge the role that university students play in the displacement of the community and the need for the university to provide housing resources to the community to counteract this impact.

On some buildings tenants hung sheets from building windows that proclaimed “We Shall Not Be Moved” – a clear and prominent warning to prospective property buyers.

We all loved the idea of the Eviction Free Zone and were most impressed with:

- Cambridge Eviction Free Zone’s success in pulling resources from the university to provide housing to residents;

- Cambridge Eviction Free Zone’s broader vision – it was clear that their work was broader than the eviction free zone, and that they were continually looking for other strategies and resources.

In the evening we visited **Vida Urbana/ City Life**, and met with several resident leaders from tenant associations that were organized in Jamaica Plain. This was perhaps one of the most rewarding visits of the trip, and the one generating the most energy. Each of the residents there talked about some of their struggles and the specific strategies they had used to resist displacement. On some buildings tenants hung sheets from building windows that proclaimed “We Shall Not Be Moved” – a clear and prominent warning to prospective property buyers. In a situation where the landlord had refused to meet with tenants during the two years that they had been organizing, Vida Urbana organized a sit-in at his office. Fourteen people were arrested in this successful effort to engage the landlord in dialogue -- for the first time in their two years of struggle.

The Travel Team spent time with organizers and activists going over the steps they take to organize a tenant association and how they integrate legal strategies with organizing work. Radiating energy and enthusiasm from the meeting, we made the following observations in our evening debriefing:

- Vida Urbana showed us how to escalate pressure — how to start small but always know our strength.
- Figueroa Corridor Coalition needs posters and visual signs that let everyone in the neighborhood know what is happening and to frighten away buyers.
- Vida Urbana is completely absent of fear and that is what makes them strong.
- Vida Urbana has used publicity very effectively.
- Vida Urbana has identified a group of progressive lawyers which really helped their organizing efforts.
- Vida Urbana emphasized how important it was to document everything we do, and provided tools for every-day documentation.
- There is an amazing family spirit in the Vida Urbana organization, where organizers and tenants seem like family, similar to what we felt at Dudley Street. We need to bring that feeling to our organizing in the Figueroa Corridor.
- Vida Urbana has been really effective in hard and soft tactics — an iron fist in a velvet glove. They move between the two very well.
- Vida Urbana has formed internal discussion groups to talk about politics, and have educated people about important issues like racism and sexism. They are really trying to break through those barriers in their work rather than just maneuvering around them.

Friday, April 26 Our last visit was to the **Anti-Displacement Project** in Springfield. We spent half the day with them, beginning in their offices, discussing our respective work. They were extremely helpful in providing the Travel Team with materials and showing us step-by-step, the methods they use to accomplish their work.

One of the most interesting and useful methods they shared was how they helped tenants assess building problems themselves and then create a report on rats, leaking pipes, peeling paint, etc. This was a key piece in the struggle to win control of the building and become the owners.

After talking about the process we visited one of their largest projects – 239 units of project-based section 8 housing that the tenants now own. The people who showed us around the building were workers/owners of the maintenance cooperative that had been formed by the residents, who were busy rehabilitating and cleaning apartments. The building was beautiful – tenants had been able to choose carpets and countertops and had access to a community center complete with a computer lab and media center on site. The Travel Team was very impressed with the Anti-Displacement Project's transformation of a tenant struggle into resident ownership, maintenance, and management.

Some of what we brought back from this visit was:

- The Anti-Displacement Project visit reinforced the importance of documenting everything.
- Tenants are capable not only of winning control of their building, but also retaining ownership and management themselves, rather than turning it over to a non-profit.
- It is very important to gain a broad base of support in the community, and to get their support in letter-writing campaigns.
- It is important to deal with race and class issues in your organizing – in one project, where half of the tenants were elderly white people and the other half African-American families, a small group of elderly white tenants gained control of the tenants' association. They invited another management company to come in, and conditions began to revert back to where they had been before.
- Grassroots people have the capacity to do a lot of the organizing and detail work themselves, and this level of participation strengthens campaigns. And, after the campaign is won, they also have the capacity to own and manage the buildings.

Travel Team members talked about their expectations prior to their trip, how the visits affected their thinking, and what most impressed them.

Gloria

I didn't have any idea of what I was going to see, what I was going to learn, the great things that other people are doing. But I wanted to go to see if I could learn something to help my community in the situation we are facing now.

Now I have really found the will to fight! I have found the will to be useful to my neighbors, teach them about their rights, that they should not be afraid and they should learn all they can about the rights they have as tenants.

We learned something in each place we visited, but for me the most impressive thing was when Caroline from the Anti-Displacement Project took us to see the 237 units the tenants had made themselves owners of, and they told us how they fought and won. And how they organized their own neighbors, and that it was they themselves who did the work. And here? I know we can do the same or better!

Monic

As a community worker, I found myself very worried about what was happening here in the community, and I felt the need to learn something about it to help people. That is why I decided to go and learn from other organizations and become part of the organizing committee.

What I really learned was that these problems aren't just happening in the area. It was exciting to see the victories that other people had won on the East Coast, and now I know that it is possible to do the same thing here in this place. WE CAN DO IT! SI SE PUEDE!

For me, the most impressive things was to be able to go to so many different places and see them fighting for the same things – in this way we were able to capture the best of each organization to create our own single strategy.

Lance

My predictions of what we were going to see close to reality, to see other people engaged in our community as we are in our community, problems somewhat the same, but not the same because communities are unique like individuals, there are many approaches they can take.

The one thing that pumped me up, and confirmed what long suspected, is that community residents can be a far more powerful force. I saw City Life residents not totally in control but having portions of control and influence in decision-making. Community people can take charge.

To me, Vida Urbana was the most impressive organization, just seeing how residents had so much say over the organizing.

Carlton

Before the trip, I was curious about what I would see, how this could be put together.

I was most impressed with the way the community had banded together.

I think it might be a bigger task than I had imagined, back East there was more of a feeling of community, a little more togetherness. That absence here in Los Angeles will make our work more difficult.

Ron

How did I think before? I thought it was going to be a trip where people weren't really going to get to know each other. But it was very different. We got to meet people and hear stories on how they lived and who they are. We took care of each other and learned about each other.

The most impressive thing to me was that we went as a group and were representing the Figueroa Corridor Coalition for Economic Justice -- but the fact that we all came from different parts, different organizations, really stood out.

Samuel

Before we left, I was a little sad, thinking that popular organizations had failed the community, and were not really working.

I was affected by the marvelous things that we saw on the East Coast, the groups we saw who were organizing successfully to defend their rights. I saw that the people united and organized really could overcome the difficulties in front of them.

Andrea

I was very excited to actually see the organizations I had done so much research on, get to know their neighborhoods, and see how the reality compared with my own perceptions from my research.

I think the different organizations were even more impressive than I had thought, but being there and talking to organizers really made it feel that we had the ability to do everything they had done. I also felt how our group came away with a tremendous amount of energy and excitement, as well as knowledge, to continue our work in our own neighborhoods.

What impressed me most was the feeling that we were all part of the same movement, we were all working towards the same goal. Everyone was so happy to meet with us, and spend hours talking about our work.

Tafarai

I thought this work was going to be hard. Now I know this work will be very, very, very hard, but necessary, and if we put the work into it, victory is possible.

The most impressive thing was the people we talked to. They were all hopeful, positive, and very happy to see us.

Haleemah

I saw all of the problems in this community, especially gentrification and the displacement of poor folks as a problem that was just here in California.

After being on this trip it became clear that the problems of gentrification and displacement are a national trend. It really broadened how I look at my work in terms of banking rights and financial literacy, and how these things relate to housing and the stability of housing in poor communities.

To me what was most impressive were the different strategies that the different organizations used. 5th Ave. going landlord by landlord by landlord, making small impacts, and then Dudley Street, who was able to do this huge thing winning the power of eminent domain that really impacted their neighborhood on a lot of different levels.

Another thing that really impressed me was 5th Ave. relating their work around construction unions - helping the unions get their contract and getting residents into the union - how they related this back to the Figueroa Corridor Coalition. It is really great how organizations can learn from other people's strategies - and improve and adapt the strategies for their own areas.

The last thing was just how creative people are, the really creative strategies that organizations use to leverage power for their communities.

Chapter Three

Bringing It All Back Home

We held two large community meetings upon our return to Los Angeles -- one hosted by the Jobs Committee and the other by the Housing Committee -- to share our experiences from the trip, to get feedback on some of our new thoughts and ideas, and to fire people up with the hope and enthusiasm that we brought back with us.

Jobs Committee

The Saturday immediately following our return, the Travel Team met with the Jobs Committee to plan a larger call to the entire Coalition to hear the results of our trip. The goal of the meeting was to give Figueroa Corridor Coalition members a vision of what was possible, borrowing from the struggles and successes of other working class people and communities. To set the stage, we combined our report back with a labor poster exhibit entitled *Solidarity Forever*, curated by the Center for the Study of Political Graphics, a unique Los Angeles-based resource with a collection of over 40,000 political posters.

The meeting was attended by a diverse group, including people from organizations that had not previously been involved in the Jobs Committee, as well as many residents.

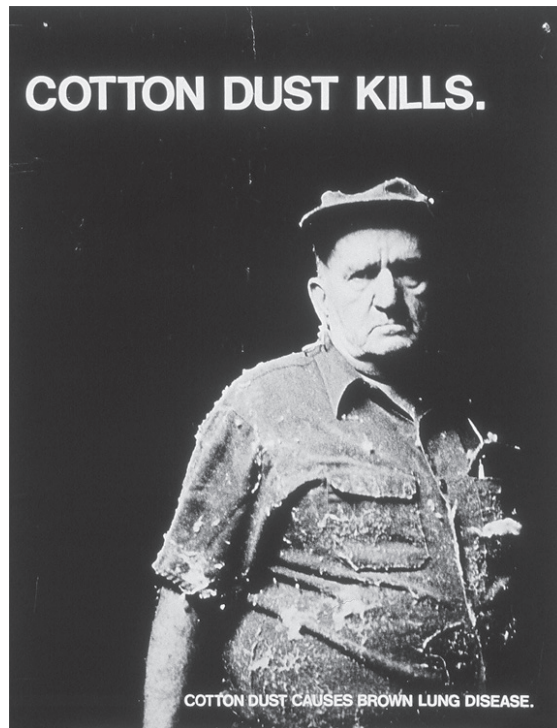
Following a presentation on the history of selected posters from the exhibit and a report from the Travel Team, participants broke into smaller groups to discuss the posters and the Coalition's work around jobs. Each group then reported back to the assembly, with the following results.

The posters that resonated the most with the participants related to their experience. Virtually every one of the residents either was a garment worker at one time or had a family member who was a garment worker. They also had personal experience with injuries on the job or had relatives or friends who had been injured or even killed through industrial accidents.

A poster that depicted an old man with the simple caption "Cotton Dust Kills" inspired a story from one participant whose friend's lungs were so badly damaged after fifteen years of cutting cloth that he died shortly after contracting pneumonia, although he was only in his forties. Another worker talked about how her asthma had been caused by her job in the garment industry.

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A poster that depicted an old man with the simple caption “Cotton Dust Kills” inspired a story from one participant whose friend’s lungs were so badly damaged after fifteen years of cutting cloth that he died shortly after contracting pneumonia -- even though he was only in his forties.



Images of children in sweatshops generated discussion about why children work -- because their parents do not earn enough to support a family -- and how people in the United States benefit from slave labor conditions in other countries.

The group concluded that these experiences pointed to the importance of unionization and the importance of working with unions in building a Figueroa Corridor Coalition jobs program.

The discussion and feedback on the site visit report was animated. A lot of our comments were generated by the fact that HART spun off its jobs program from its community coalition base at the precise time of the site visits. Participants anticipated some of the issues that might come up in creating a jobs

program -- running it themselves, working with and choosing partners, or creating a new entity. Their overall sentiment was that it would be best for the Figueroa Corridor Coalition to work with experienced partners that had a track record in providing jobs training and placement services, to choose them well, and to make them accountable to the needs of the community. Key points from the discussion included:

- We need to pursue strategies that keep us united.
- We need to ensure that our work is always grounded in our values.
- We must be able to follow through on our promises to the community -- the CalWorks Welfare-to-Work program offered empty promises.
- We need to be sure that there are real jobs available at the end of the training program, and that job training is preparing people for good jobs.
- We need to focus on our primary goals of placing people in good jobs and developing leadership in our community. We should be standing with the residents and not try to micromanage a program.
- If our real strength is in organizing people, we should focus on making our future partners accountable and helping them solve problems.



- The permanent jobs must be union jobs -- unions are the only way that people can be protected and get higher wages and benefits. This is what will allow people to buy homes and create a stable community.
- We need to establish clear criteria for what makes a good partnership, including a partner's capacity to provide education and willingness to serve all people in the community -- including, for example, undocumented immigrants and gang members.
- When and if we consider "spinning off" the jobs program from our Coalition, we need to consider the experiences of other organizations, what our constituency needs and wants, and how our program will become sustainable and self-sufficient.
- We need to carefully monitor what is happening in the jobs program.

Another discussion that occurred in the meeting reflected on the fact that Travel Team members were struck by the geographic sense of neighborhood that seemed present in the communities they visited on the East Coast. Participants felt that this physical sense of community was needed and was missing from the Figueroa Corridor. Suggested strategies for getting started included the use of posters and identifying important landmarks in the community.

Housing Committee

The Housing Committee held a second large meeting to report back from the trip and put out a call to Coalition members as well as to tenants in the area. The goals for the meeting were to share what they had learned from the site visits, determine people's interest in

establishing their own Displacement Free Zone, and to get people pumped up for the struggles ahead.

The Committee wanted to make sure that people could anchor all the information provided by the Travel Team in their own person experience. To accomplish this, the meeting started out with a discussion of the problems that people were experiencing in their buildings. Then, each member of the Travel Team talked about one organization that they had visited and presented the most important lesson that each had brought back from the trips.

The energy in the room was enormous because everyone on the Travel Team was clearly confident that everything they had seen on their visits could be accomplished here in the Figueroa Corridor.

Finally, an additional goal of the meeting was to begin building community spirit among the tenants who were just getting involved in organizing, so people talked about the reasons that they wanted to stay in the community and the reasons that they loved their community.

Participants expressed strong support for the Displacement Free Zone and were excited about doing something to protect their neighborhood.

What We Like About Our Neighborhood

- We are close to work at the university
- We are close to transportation -- the Metro and bus.
- We can walk to our church.
- It is a quiet, safe, and good neighborhood.
- I have lived here for 22 years and my children grew up here.
- We know our neighbors.
- Norwood Elementary School is close.
- There are parks.
- There is a Police Department.
- People here are nice and friendly.
- We are really close to the hospital.
- It is a beautiful, historic neighborhood.
- It is a central area to attend events -- at USC, museums, the Coliseum, and Staples.
- We are close to Mercado La Paloma.
- A diverse group of people live here.
- There are a lot of children.

Chapter Four

From Research to Action

The purpose of the *Redefining Redevelopment* research effort was to further the economic justice mission of the Figueroa Corridor Coalition for Economic Justice.

Towards this end, the research process was interwoven into the daily life of the grassroots coalition -- its leaders, members, and discourse. The value of research and this approach to research rests in the extent to which the results are applied and invested into the organization's future.

Presented below are examples of how the research has been employed over the five month period following the site visits by the Travel Team.

A Figueroa Corridor Displacement-Free Zone

Upon their return, and with the enthusiastic support of fellow Coalition members who participated in the report back meetings, the Travel Team has taken leadership over a process to create a Displacement-Free Zone in the Figueroa Corridor.

The area selected for the Zone has been the target of intense activity by the *Healthy Homes Project* -- a collaborative effort by three Coalition member organizations to combat the threat of childhood lead poisoning and other environmental hazards in the neighborhood. The project involves door-to-door health edu-

cation and outreach by Esperanza Community Housing Corporation's trained community health promoters; free blood lead testing and follow-up health services from the St. John's Well Child Clinic; and tenant organizing by Strategic Actions for a Just Economy.

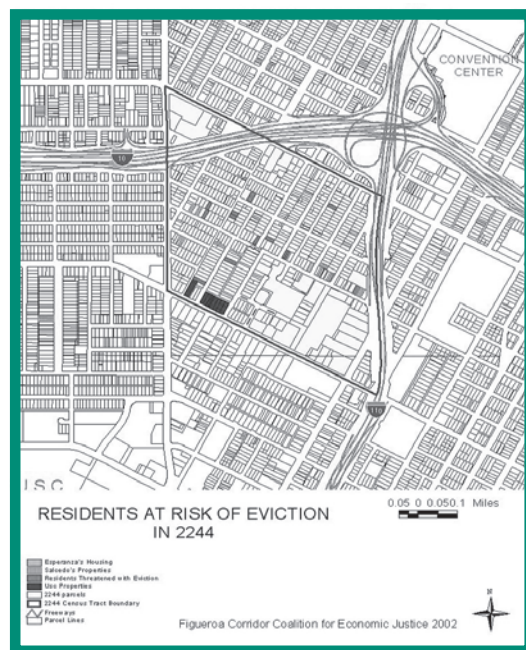
In the wake of increased real estate activity in the area, health promoters like Travel Team member Monic Uriarte have found their ability to sustain tenants' interest in health issues to be undermined by the increasing threat of losing their homes altogether as illegal evictions, harassment, and discrimination by landlords have risen to unprecedented levels.

The result has had a stunning impact on the community. For example, in September 2002, the number of children attending the local Norwood Elementary school decreased for the first time in decades -- with a drop of 150 children -- all due to displacement in the area.

The Displacement Free Zone will encompass census tract 2244 -- the area around Norwood School -- where organizing activity coupled with legal defense of tenants will be heavily concentrated and coordinated. The long-term goal is to build a foundation for new policies that can protect tenants throughout Los Angeles from painful and unnecessary displacement from their neighborhoods.

Today, the Figueroa Corridor Coalition is in the process of organizing the first Displacement-Free Zone in Los Angeles.

The site visits to several anti-displacement projects in cities outside of Los Angeles helped generate commitment and confidence in the approach. The visits also helped shape basic organizational decisions, such as hiring an attorney that will be dedicated to the project. This decision was a direct response to the Travel Team's observations that the more effective models back East employed their own attorneys who could respond rapidly to tenant problems.

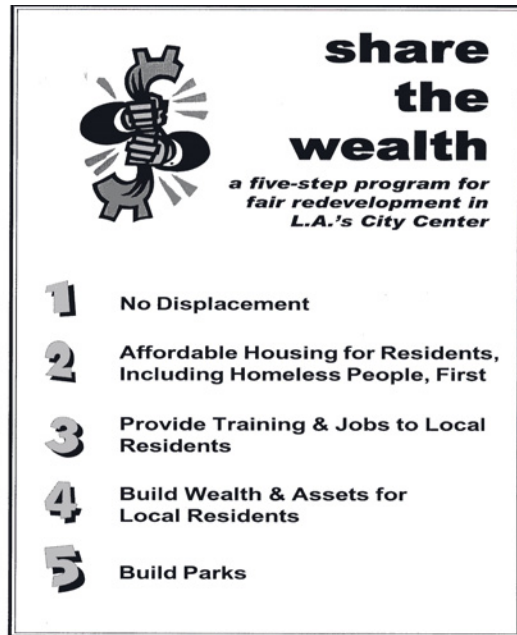


Share the Wealth Campaign to Redefine Redevelopment in Los Angeles

Just a few months following the return of the Travel Team to L.A., members of the Figueroa Corridor Coalition were stunned when they read an L.A. Times article which reported that the City Council would be taking a final vote on a new redevelopment area the following day-- an area that includes the site of the L.A. Sports and Entertainment District and the homes of hundreds of Coalition members who live in the area. Although the redevelopment agency had included a community participation process for the plan, none of the Coalition's organizational or individual members had been notified. As a result, the new plan, which has a thirty year lifespan, does not reflect the values or priorities shared by Coalition members.

The area encompassed by the City Center Redevelopment Plan includes much of downtown as well as the Los Angeles Skid Row community, which appears to be a primary target for redevelopment activity. When a last minute effort to change the plan during the City Council meeting failed, the Figueroa Corridor Coalition moved quickly to develop a strategy. A partnership was forged with the grassroots L.A. Coalition to End Hunger & Homelessness, which has a large, organized constituency in Skid Row. Together, the two Coalitions developed a legal and political strategy to change the plan.

Hundreds of people created overflow crowds at the People's Hearing on Redevelopment co-sponsored by the Figueroa Corridor Coalition for Economic Justice and the L.A. Coalition to End Hunger and Homelessness.



Central to the effort was the development of a consensus platform that represents the policy goals of both groups. That platform, entitled *Share the Wealth*, was first presented as a pamphlet for Coalition members, and soon afterwards as a policy paper which further elaborated the proposals and their rationale (see Appendix F). Both documents include information about policy precedents drawing heavily from the Coalition's own Community Benefits Program as well as the *Redefining Redevelopment* research project. Hundreds of people created an overflow crowd at the People's Hearing on Redevelopment co-sponsored by the two collaborating coalitions. The agenda of the event, held on August 5,

2002, focused on a presentation of the platform to two key City Council members and a Redevelopment Agency commissioner, who agreed in concept to support the demands. Of course, the devil is in the details, and as of the writing of this report, the campaign to reform the redevelopment plan continues.

Building a Jobs Program from the Grassroots

The Community Benefits Program's commitment to provide thousands of good jobs to local residents presented both exhilarating and daunting prospects to the Figueroa Corridor Coalition. On the one hand, the agreement represents a tremendous victory and opportunity for real community development. On the other, training and placement programs that had a good track record in serving the Coalition's immigrant and African-American constituency are few and far between. Further, local hiring programs are only required to hire "qualified" people, and ultimately, the responsibility for adequately preparing area residents for the jobs rests with the Coalition.



The Coalition decided instead to combine leadership development with an intensive planning process by holding a 16-week class for Coalition leaders to plan a community jobs program themselves.

In June, 2001, after reading an *L.A. Times* article about the agreement, the President of Los Angeles Trade Technical College called the Coalition's headquarters and offered the resources of his institution to support the community effort. It soon became clear that initial discussions about providing vocational English classes and customized job training were premature -- the jobs would not be in place for a few years, and research on local hiring strategies had only just begun.

So, as the first step in what is hoped to be a long-term relationship with the college, the Coalition decided instead to combine leadership development with an intensive planning process by holding a 16-week class for Coalition leaders to plan a community jobs program.

As of the writing of this report, the class is in its fourth week, and to date the 40 diverse community participants have received some basic training about the economy and how it works; developed their own criteria for evaluating job quality; analyzed which of the projected jobs from the L.A. Arena Company's development they would like to target for training; and heard presentations by union members of the Coalition and then discussed how their jobs effort could best work with unions. Next, building from the results of this research, the group will begin its first steps towards designing a program.

The community college took extraordinary steps to support the effort. Coalition activists who were interested in the class came to SAJE House where the Figueroa Coalition for Economic Justice is headquartered and were met by bilingual college staff who helped them enroll in the class and apply for financial aid in familiar and comfortable surroundings. The class is being taught by the lead organizer of the Coalition, with support from this research staff and Coalition volunteers.

The Coalition also provides its customary support to participants -- simultaneous translation with a professional interpreter and equipment so that activists can communicate across language barriers; childcare for parents; and transportation home after class.

Travel Team member Calton Davenport, has been facilitating small groups for the class and is enthusiastic about its potential, "I think the class is really headed in the right direction and has a very good chance of coming up with a great jobs program that serves the community -- because we are the community."

Epilogue

The events of September 11, 2001 rocked the country. In addition to the tragic loss of life, economic ripple effects influenced daily life tremendously, including this project and its participants. Many members of the Figueroa Corridor Coalition lost their jobs due to layoffs and are still struggling today.

Across their differences of nationality, language, and experience, all members of the Travel Team share simple unifying principles which are the cornerstone of the Figueroa Corridor Coalition for Economic Justice. At the foundation of these principles is a commitment to non-violent action, which prompted the group to participate in a national march against the war in Afganistan as a prelude to their study tour of best practices in community economic development.

While we all work locally for a more just economy, our hearts and minds are tethered to these global events which further immiserate the lives of the poor in other nations. As the war on innocents in Afganistan continues and the threat of war with Iraq and targets yet unnamed reverberates throughout the world, we stand steadfast in the following widely shared notion well-expressed by Pope Paul VI:

Peace cannot be sustained while there is
widespread injustice in the world.

If you want peace, work for justice.

