

Building California's Urban Community



COVID-19 surfaced the long standing need for equitable access to affordable housing, food and healthcare, particularly in urban areas.

Assurance of equitable access to safety, freedoms, and opportunity for all requires that California take action, now. A network of support to accelerate the pace and scale of community success, with deliberate inclusion of all, requires an investment to link resources, knowledge, and actions across agencies and organizations. The Community Development Network plays a critical role, providing essential capacity, coordination, and science-based – solutions. This Community Development Network's success provides access to economic and social prosperity, serving as a catalyst for all communities and Californians.

A Focus on Urban Community Development

Social injustice is deeply intertwined and ingrained with urban planning. During the 50's, 60's and 70's Black families were pushed out of their disinvested communities to make room for schools, highways and business developments. Historical racism and inequality have left many Black neighborhoods in America lacking resiliency. Racial covenants like urban renewal and segregation have also left these communities disenfranchised and neglected by American society. The impacts and implications of history continue today, leaving groups of society behind and preventing a disproportionate number of people in marginalized communities from achieving their full potential. We see the long-term consequences of past behaviors in the disparate effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on health outcomes, unemployment, and access to virtual resources.

Changing course, and improving outcomes, requires that inclusion and equity be at the forefront of all community planning conversations. The American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) commits that planners seek "social justice by working to expand choice and opportunity for all persons, recognizing a special responsibility to plan for the needs of the disadvantaged and to promote racial and economic integration" (APA 2016, A.1.f). Often, people of color or marginalized communities are not represented at the table when planning occurs. These communities need a voice to engage the community members in the conversation to co-create solutions and represent their needs and interest when they are not present. If neighborhoods must be displaced, it is imperative that residents of a community are not disconnected from their social and cultural foundations. Failure to do so, results in disconnected families, decreased public health, increased poverty and crime, increased unemployment and the creation of food deserts. Planners and politicians must be made aware of the economic sustainability opportunities in these neighborhoods and enter into a new era of revitalization.

Opportunity and the Outcomes

An inclusive and equitable community requires an understanding of the needs of all community members. Necessary, too, is a voice for all perspectives and a network of influencers that, collectively, engage all

community members. A cohort of applied researchers that live and work in urban centers across California and are focused on convening and communicating with key community members and stakeholders, can directly engage county and city governments, community influencers, regional and county planners, non-profit organizations, and the public to reduce California's social and economic vulnerabilities to marginalization of its citizens. The community-centered cohort works closely with its community members and decision-makers, while at the same time partnering with the expertise across the University of California system.

As a cohort, the Community Development Network, collects local data to identify successful practices, options and needs to implement, including necessary approaches, investments, or inclusions. A Community Development Advisor can honestly and clearly identify necessary actions that create an equitable playing field for underrepresented people of color, who have historically been mistreated, discriminated against and denied opportunities. The local Advisor is an advocate for inclusive processes in community development and deployment, including workforce development, rethinking business processes, and use of technology as a key component of inclusion. This is a tedious process that requires evaluation of environmental, economic, and demographic impact. It also requires assessment of current state and defining future state impacts. Using communities across the U.S., the cohort can study and document, for easy transfer to stakeholders and policymakers, what worked and what didn't, what attributes of success are consistent across cases, and what flexibilities in process are necessary.

Research data, collected by the cohort, may reveal disparities in access to opportunities that might otherwise go unnoticed. The cohort will measure progress and identify opportunities for improvement.

Impacts

Working with community members and partners, the Community Development Network empowers the local community to create its own future, from individuals to the community as a whole. Communities are stronger and lessons learned for success are shared across the state, creating a vibrant California.

Why UC ANR?

The University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources is uniquely positioned to fill a need in communities across the state. As a component of UC ANR, UC Cooperative Extension (UCCE) is a network of community-based and campus connected professionals that help build stronger and resilient communities through leadership, outreach and technical skills in community and economic development, natural resources, agriculture, nutrition, youth development and community health. The UCCE network is embedded with county governments and communities throughout California and provides direct access for communities to the extensive, world renowned and impactful research of the full University of California system. In addition, over 100 network members reside on 6 of the 10 UC campuses, directly connecting the science and discovery from the entire UC system to community-based implementation of evidence-based solutions. As a trusted long-term partner in counties (>100 year history), UC ANR provides educational delivery that empowers communities at every level. UC ANR evaluates and develops practices, disseminates new research and innovations through trainings and guidance documents, provides coordination and capacity for local and state-level collaborative implementation and policy efforts, and helps identify and promote appropriate policies. UC ANR has an existing network of professionals to provide guidance, expertise, and coordination on food systems throughout the state. This effort offers much needed support to bolster existing work and simultaneously filling critical needs.

Proposed Network

Campus-based CE Specialists serve as a conduit between research faculty located across the UC system and locally-based CE Advisors that co-create solutions with community members and partners. Also located in communities are Community Education Specialists that deliver education and work closely with communities to implement solutions, assess impact, and improve responses. As a network, these professionals share experiences and ideas, thus strengthening impacts for the communities in which they live and serve.