

Residents come together in participatory budgeting process



BACKGROUND

This case study spotlights how TCC funding has supported deep community engagement work in Fresno. Specifically, the study looks at the work of three individuals who serve as members of the Outreach and Oversight (O&O) Committee: Artie Padilla, Jordan Gustafson, and Barbara Wilson have helped implement the Community Engagement Plan, detailed on page 42.

Interviews for this story were conducted in December 2019.

The consultant Raimi + Associates presents the findings from five pop-up community engagement workshops at an O&O Committee quarterly meeting on June 12, 2019. Photo credit: UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation

ARTIE PADILLA, born and raised in Fresno, is a member of the O&O Committee representing Southwest Fresno. In 2008, Padilla founded the Every Neighborhood Partnership (ENP), a nonprofit that runs youth, community, and economic development programs in over half of Fresno’s 92 public elementary school districts. The initiatives he helps run at ENP have allowed him to get a deeper understanding of the community’s strengths, social needs, and disparities. He says becoming more involved with TCC was a no-brainer given how the program’s goals naturally fit in with the work his organization does.

Padilla took part in shaping the investment priorities for the Transform Fresno initiative. For him, one of the most rewarding parts of this participatory budgeting process was the civic involvement of residents attending the early TCC meetings.

“One of the ripple effects [of the community engagement process] is that it helped spark more civic engagement throughout the area, especially among folks that normally don’t attend community meetings,” said Padilla.

He believes that the TCC program presents a great opportunity to continue building civic infrastructure and integrating other important neighborhood information into the public meeting format of Transform Fresno quarterly meetings.



Photo credit: UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation

“To me, community engagement anchors our TCC initiative and is building that civic infrastructure of community through involvement on a weekly, monthly basis ... not just a hodgepodge of a meeting here or a meeting there.”

ARTIE PADILLA



Photo credit: UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation

“It wasn’t behind closed doors. The projects were out in the open in these community meetings. There was no one else deciding except the community.”

JORDAN GUSTAFSON

JORDAN GUSTAFSON grew up in Clovis, the neighboring city of Fresno. She refers to herself as a “boomerang” resident — she moved back to Downtown about four years ago after living in New York City. In addition to being a small business owner and startup founder, Gustafson works at Bitwise Industries — an incubator for tech-related companies and jobs in Fresno. She also chairs the Downtown Fresno Foundation, which is dedicated to economic development and revitalization within the city’s central business district. She is a member of the O&O Committee.

The potential of the TCC funds for Downtown revitalization sparked Gustafson’s curiosity and motivated her to attend the first TCC community meeting. Once there, she realized that the projects being discussed were an opportunity to uplift community voices and reinvest in areas that have been overlooked or underserved in the past.

“The way the community put together the budget and project package was invaluable to creating a sense of trust, and the participatory budgeting was extremely successful in bringing people together to agree on the direction of TCC funding,” Gustafson said.

BARBARA WILSON has decades-long ties to the Fresno community. Her father, a preacher and church elder, moved her family to Fresno in the early 1960s. After graduating from Edison High School, her career moved her to the Bay Area, where she raised her two daughters. In 2008, Wilson retired from a nationally known financial institution, as well as the City and County of San Francisco’s tax collector’s office, to return to Fresno to care for her mother. She took on new roles in the community and regularly attends neighborhood meetings. Wilson owns properties in Chinatown, serves as a member of the O&O Committee, and is the secretary for the Chinatown Empowerment Center, a nonprofit formed by local property and business owners to support the improvement of the social, physical, and cultural environment of Historic Chinatown.

Wilson was reading a newspaper when she came across an announcement for the first TCC Community Steering Committee meeting. She called friends to ask if they had heard about it and told them they should check it out. She hasn’t missed a TCC-related meeting since.

She says her motivation to get involved, and to stay involved, comes from her love and connection to Fresno as her home. The opportunity to see redevelopment in her own community excites her. The most rewarding part of the participatory budgeting process for her was the transparency of information and the belief that the insight she brought to the discussions as a longtime resident was truly valued and incorporated.



Photo credit: UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation

“Most urban development projects happen to the community as opposed to happening for the community.... I want to ensure the community engagement is thoughtful and intentional and those who live and work here today will still call it home after the redevelopment is complete.”

BARBARA WILSON