Focus Groups: National City

Partnerships 4 Success

PARTNERSHIPS 4 SUCCESS

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Background

Partnerships 4 Success (P4S) began as a program of the Insititute for Public Strategies in 2020 with the goal of improving community health among the Latine/x communities in the South Bay and Border Region of San Diego County. To lay the foundation for P4S, the team conducted a Needs Assessment of the region to better understand what community members were experiencing in their neighborhoods. This report documented severe inequity in opportunity, economic hardship, and neighborhood conditions within the South Region of San Diego County communities.

For the report, we also interviewed many community leaders who described a long history of underinvestment in the region, attributable to institutionalized racism. For decades, practices like redlining and federal policy that racially segregated public housing projects isolated minority communities from much-needed investment by businesses and government. The effects of these policies and the ongoing inequality in our society reverberate today.

The Partnerships for Success program developed its strategic goals based on this report. The goals ultimately aimed to combat the lasting toxic stressors and systemic violence that have long existed in the South Bay and Border communities. One of those goals is to develop a Bilingual Reporting Lab aimed at improving the flow of information in the South Bay and Border communities. The reason for this goal was due to two pervasive themes that came up time and time again in our stakeholder interviews and listening sessions was 1) how little trust many Latines in the South Region currently have in government institutions, including health and social welfare systems, and 2) how Latines stigmatize mental health and substance use disorders within their communities. In addition to the Needs Assessment, the P4S program also surveyed the community members in 2021 to better understand how community members are currently accessing information goods. What became very clear from the survey is that the South Bay and Border Communities need reliable, accurate, relevant, and accessible news, particularly as it relates to their health and other factors that either promote or compromise a quality life. Reliable information that is of consistent quality and is trustworthy; accurate information that is based on fact and/or scientific evidence; relevant information specific to the South Bay and Border Communities; and accessible information in Spanish on platforms that are free to use and easy to download to mobile phones.

The two themes and the lack of reliable information in the South Bay and Border communities present a potent barrier to prevention work in the South Region. It may take years to rebuild trust in local institutions like County health systems. And there is no doubt that immediate action from the federal government to reverse the cruelest and most damaging immigration policies must occur before the Latine/x community in the South Region can begin to feel safe accessing health care and social services and seeking protection from the police. However, in addition to policy advocacy, we understood that we need to create a community reporting lab to help community members navigate the information goods, often linked to government institutions and direct-service nonprofits, they need to navigate everyday life and thrive. A failure to provide them is a public health issue that requires tailored preventative solutions like this lab.

The Bilingual Reporting Lab will help fill this gap. This intervention is an important step toward the dissemination of community news and health resources in the region so that members have the best chance at living the kind of life we all want to live.

The BRL will aim to provide the basic information needs (also known as critical information needs). This includes information about:

1. Emergencies and Risks (immediate (e.g., a wildfire in Chula Vista) and long-term (e.g., contaminated beaches of Imperial Beach)
2. Health and welfare (including local health information (e.g., health information of San Ysidro) and group health information (e.g., elderly, Latine/x, or people with a chronic health illness).
3. Education (quality of local schools and other local education resources)
4. Transportation (costs, schedules)
5. Economic Opportunities (job information, small business assistance, trainings, etc.)
6. The Environment (includes quality of air, water, and access to recreation/parks/green spaces)
7. Civic information (including access/availability to civic institutions, opportunities to associate with others/ volunteering, community events
8. Political Information (includes anything that involves local governance, policies, and elected officials)

To make sure the tool is tailored to the community members in the South Bay, the P4S team conducted focus groups in two communities: San Ysidro and National City. These two communities will be the first to use this tool. The report that follows are the results of the focus group in National City.

Methods

Focus group participants were recruited in partnership with local community-based organizations. In National City, the P4S team partnered with Olivewood Gardens, a CBO that serves as an interactive, indoor-outdoor classroom for community members and focuses on building healthy families and a healthy environment. The focus groups were conducted in Spanish with one interviewer, presenter, and note-taker. An outline of the focus group was created to help ensure that all of the focus groups were conducted in the same way. This outline gave participants a basic background on the P4S program and the process that would be followed during the hour-and-a-half-long sessions. The discussions were audio-recorded, with the participants' permission, transcribed, and then deleted once the transcription was completed. After the sessions, participants were compensated for their time with a $50 gift card to a store of their choice. The transcripts were content analyzed to pull out themes, which are supported by direct quotations from the discussion in the section below. Participants were asked questions under three guiding themes: what kind of information is needed in their community, difficulties accessing community news, and receiving information. The questions asked were:

Theme 1: Kind of information needed in your community

1. *What kind of information or news do you need for you and your family to feel protected, safe and to be healthy?*
2. *Do you have an example of a piece of information/news that helped you solve area life/daily problem? How and where did you get that information?*
3. *What kind of information do you prioritize?*
4. *What kind of information do you need in your community?*
    a. *Prompt: What concerns do you see in your community that you believe require a credible flow of communication and information?*
5. *What kind of information do you want in your community?*
    a. *Prompt: What have you noticed in your community that you would like to have learned more about beforehand?*
6. *Follow-up: Is it easy to get that information?*

Theme 2: Difficulties getting community news

1. *What are your difficulties in getting news? Can you describe a time when you were looking for information but could not find it?*
2. *Are there specific issues you care about where it is difficult to find credible information?*
    a. *Prompt: What make those specific especially difficult to research?*

3. *What do you believe are 2-3 steps that community coalitions can take to improve the flow of information in the South Bay and Border communities?*
    a. *Prompt When researching a topic, what obstacles do you face?*

Theme 3: How would you like to receive information

1. *What would be the easiest way for you to receive the news that you mentioned you want to receive?*
2. *Would you subscribe to receive SMS messages from us?*
3. *Would you prefer an app like WhatsApp?*
4. *What day would you like to receive news?*

Results

The section below provides a summary of the responses as well as some key themes discussed when asked a series of questions regarding the types of information needed, what barriers they face, and lastly, the preferred way of receiving information. The key themes identified during the focus groups in National City are illustrated in the word clouds, where words that were mentioned more frequently appear larger.

Section 1: Types of Information Needs in National City

Word Cloud 1

Participants were asked a series of questions about the information their community needs to feel safe, protected, and healthy as Latine/x residents in the South Bay and Border Region of San Diego County. They were asked what kind of information they would like to receive and examples of situations where they needed information to solve problems. Some primary themes that emerged when answering were the need for reliable resources, community-centered news, and campaigns that addressed their needs. Participants shared their specific news and information needs spanning the topics of housing, COVID-19, health insurance, access to healthy foods, inflation costs on everyday household necessities, mental health, and the stigma of living in National City. This is all compounded by our understanding of shared community trauma and a long history of underinvestment in the South Bay and Border communities.

Primary Theme: Community-Centered News

"I feel like the flow of information is driven cruelly, and speaking about National City specifically, we don't show up on the map."

"They [News Media] always mention Poway, they mention Carlsbad, they mention La Jolla....but news anchors don't cover National City unless someone is dead."

"[We need] more local campaigns that benefit the community because all of South Bay and National City is low income, but we never have social services that benefit us."

"The Promotora model is a good example [of news dissemination to the local community]. The Promotoras live in the community where there is that disconnect between doctors and patients. The doctors speak one language and the community speaks another... the Promotoras help to bridge that gap."

Primary Theme: Solution-Based News and Information

"The news, whatever way, [should be] in its negative form, but also a solution to the problem and put it into practice...If there is a problem and we are going to diffuse news, but what is the solution?"

"News centered on the necessities [of the community] ...if we have an egg shortage, what are the alternatives that are socioeconomically conscious?"

"A lot of times because of yellow journalism and consumerism, the news covers bad things, but not the good things... [they] are centered in the problem and not the solutions because the solution oftentimes is in the community."

Secondary Theme: Know Your Rights Resources and Information

"Legal help [is needed]. There are no pro-bono lawyers. When you go rent, what are your rights? It can be educational. Legal help would be amazing, but it doesn't exist."

"Security [is important] because when a big event happens, the police go, but they don't do anything. Where can we go so, they can help us so that the community feels safe."

"[at the hospital] we didn't have information or resources to help our child. We couldn't find resources to know what to do next."

"[Medical] insurance abuse [people]. They charged me $40 even though the insurance covered it....as soon as my husband called in English, they apologized and refunded the money."

Section 2: Barriers to Meeting Information Needs

According to the community survey that P4S completed in 2022, more than one in four South Bay and border community residents (28%) found it challenging to access news stories or resources that were relevant to them. When discussing what made these topics difficult to research, participants revealed that language barriers, reliability of institutions, and lack of outreach were all components of the inability to access information. These themes overlapped with the difficulty of navigating different institutions like National City's city council, hospitals, insurance companies, and other community organizations. Participants shared that

these institutions have not earned the community's trust and do not want to fix the problems that exist in National City.

Primary Theme: Accessibility

"They use technical terms that the community does not understand. It would be easier to understand the information if it is at a level that we can understand that is common language."

"There is a gap in understanding [news and resources], there is a gap in education."

"People don't have access to things like the San Diego Union-Tribune. That's $5.99 a month, but the information should be accessible. The cost is a barrier to being able to spread information and the beautiful things that happen in this community."

"[in schools], the information should be accessible and relevant to parents. I shouldn't have to translate and explain resources to my parents all the time."

Primary Theme: Linguistically and Culturally Appropriate News and Information

"All the information is in English. If you go on any website, everything is in English."

"Institutions websites are not clear. They need a more effective way. They need that credibility, and there are times when they promise something and don't follow through so their credibility [as an institution] is ruined."

"I work in the morning so I can't go [to my child's] school and so when the information does come, but it is all in English. So, we are the ones who have to translate, but it would be better if it was already translated."

"They [hospitals, local officials, social workers, organizations] spend all their time at their desks... They don't visit the community. It's the only way to understand us... For example, here we are all bilingual, National City is [a] bilingual [community]."

Secondary Theme: Lack of Faith in Intuitions

"Some institutions have a lot of information and a lot of programs, so when you go and ask for information and ask about a specific program, they direct you to a lot of different programs or don't know where to send you. They [staff] should be well versed in the programming they offer as well as other community resources."

"The community is interested in information... But something important is that institutions should not lose the trust of the community. They promise, but don't deliver... we need visible results."

"When we have something to bring up at city council, it takes hours to get to our agenda item and then we have technical terms that serve as barriers. For example, the [permits for the new drive thru at] In-n-Out. We went and gave public comment, but they still approved the permit so how can we trust them?"

Secondary Theme: Outreach in South Bay and National City

"There is a school... there is a lot of traffic on that street. I would have liked if they [National City leaders] had asked our opinion before changing traffic patterns. It did not benefit us."

"The institutions should not be afraid to be in the community...There are people who do not have the privilege to be here and give their opinions, but the institutions should go to them and listen to their problems."

"[related to the COVID-19 pandemic] I ask myself where are the psychologists? Where are the nutritionists? Bring them to the community."

"For example, the institution exists, fine, but there are so many people that cannot access those resources. How come we [community members] take information to the community and they can't take the community members to the institution?"

Section 3: Best Way to Receive Information

When asked about the best ways to receive information, participants stressed that texts, podcasts, audio, and presentations were all important. They also noted that it is equally important to send out flyers or other forms of print media for elders who might not have access to a phone or internet, or have difficulties navigating technology. Participants also shared that there is no particular day or time that best suits them, but they like the idea of going back to the information on their own time and asking questions.

Primary Theme: Podcasts or other Audio-Based News

"I like videos because I can't always be in person or watching news live. It would be good to have something to go back to and then have an opportunity to ask questions."

"I would like a podcast. I would be able to drive or do errands while listening."

"I like something that I am to go back to and also be able to directly ask questions to the facilitator to get the information that I need."

Primary Theme: Email, Text Messages, and WhatsApp

"WhatsApp does flow with the people. The question is then, what information will you send?"

"Email can be hard to keep up with."

"I prefer text messages rather than WhatsApp."

Conclusion

This report has documented the information needs within National City. The current relationship that participants described with traditional news media is nonexistent, irrelevant to the conditions they experience, inaccessible, or not reported in a way they can understand. Many of the participants in the focus group are active within community-based organizations that have a long-established relationship with the community. Participants described a considerable need for information on direct services such as food, housing, legal and medical services. These direct services are often overwhelmed with requests and need the cultural and linguistically appropriate tools to serve the community. Even when these resources exist, participants described difficulty navigating different institutions within the community. These include language barriers, elevated or technical language, and unreliable hotlines or resources.

In creating and implementing the bilingual reporting lab, the P4S team will keep in mind that the community is seeking out community-based news that is culturally and linguistically appropriate about the realities and resiliency of National City. This information dissemination must be accessible and have text and audio access. Above all, participants stressed convenience as well as the ability to be able to ask questions about the information they are receiving.