# Mapping Housing Insecurity for the Elderly Residents of Little Tokyo

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## Background

Little Tokyo, one of the last-remaining historic Japantowns in the U.S., is situated in Downtown L.A.. As of 2015, 25% of the population consists of adults aged 65 years or older. Additionally, 60% of this older population is linguistically isolated— meaning that they report not speaking English “very well”— while 70% of older householders in Little Tokyo live alone. As such, retirement homes for elderly and retired aren’t always accommodating for the linguistic, cultural, and community needs of the Little Tokyo elderly population.

We plan to work with several nonprofits that provide resources and community aid to elders in Little Tokyo; Keiro, Little Tokyo Service Center (LTSC), and Little Tokyo Historical Society (LTHS). We plan to ask these organizations on their past and ongoing work with housing in Little Tokyo and about general information they can provide on issues they deem important to housing concerns in the area for the elderly.

Currently, the only two Section 8 housing projects in Little Tokyo are the Little Tokyo Towers and Miyako Gardens Apartments which offer housing to qualifying low-income seniors 62 and older. Mapping residents’ areas of origin and finding out about how they feel about these projects will greatly help our nonprofits better understand and help the elderly.

## Works Cited

* <https://www.keiro.org/fact-sheet/housing>
* <https://socialinnovation.usc.edu/files/2013/01/Little-Tokyo-Community-Assessment-093016-Final_with-description.pdf> (information on subsidized housing)
* <https://usc.data.socrata.com/stories/s/Little-Tokyo-s-Aging-Community/jihq-4568>

## Objectives

For our project, we hope to map out the places and neighborhoods of origin of residents in Asian-focused low-income senior housing projects in order to visualize the displacement of low-income non-native English-speaker seniors, specifically Japanese elders in the Little Tokyo Towers and Miyako Gardens housing projects. On these markers, we will have another tab that describes the experiences of those living in these homes and the impact that these residential communities have had.

## Community methods

Non-profit organizations that work with Asian elders and tenants in the projects themselves will be empowered with a more comprehensive understanding of their communities and will be able to have their stories heard.

Residents in Little Tokyo, particularly Asian elders and tenants of housing projects, will be empowered to share their personal experiences related to housing, which would raise awareness of issues and problems they face when it comes to housing insecurity.

With this sort of information available, it would be of hope to bring attention to policymakers who can push to build more affordable housing for senior citizens in more areas even outside of Little Tokyo. This would in turn benefit future senior citizens who may consider this sort of housing in the future 5-10 years from now.

### User Stories

* “As a second generation Japanese American in my retirement age who cannot afford a retirement home life and had to move 20 miles from my previous city of residence, I would like to share my experiences in order to raise awareness for cities outside of Little Tokyo to consider building infrastructure such as where I am currently living.”
* “As a first generation Japanese American whose primary language is Japanese and have greatly benefitted from having a language-based residence community, I want to share my positive experiences so that more cultural residences can be created in other parts of Los Angeles in different languages and cultural backgrounds.”
* “As a volunteer for Keiro, having information on our residents’ communities of origin can better inform the programs and resources we offer, so I can meet the evolving needs of Japanese American older adults and caregivers in a culturally-sensitive manner.”

### Potential Survey Questions

* What is your age? (ex. 55-70, 70-85, 85-100, 100+)
* What is your ethnicity/nationality?
* What languages do you speak?
* Which of the following do you best identify as:
  + 1st generation American
  + 2nd generation American
  + 3rd+ generation American
* Where was your previous area of residence?
  + How would you describe your previous area of residence?
* Follow up and ask for their zip code?
* Do you feel any sort of connection (cultural, etc), to your current residence?
* Theoretically speaking, if there was affordable housing in your previous city of residence, would you have preferred to move there rather than your current residence?
* What were your main reasons/motivations for moving to (LTT or Miyako Gardens) specifically?
* Did you ever feel hesitant or reluctant to move to your current residence? Why or why not?

## Long-term impact

We plan to give ownership of our tool directly to the nonprofits that we work with so that the data they provide can not only be visualized, but expanded upon as well. The organizations that we will be working with have been a central force in Little Tokyo that advocates for the empowerment of residents, so we believe that our tools will be used for good in their hands.

Additionally, since the Little Tokyo Council operates as a unanimous voice who wants to advocate for the land and the locals against the Los Angeles City Hall, this information can supplement their arguments when facing pushback from the City Hall on issues relating to housing and zoning.