#### SOCIAL CLIMATE ANALYSIS

The Thrivance Group conducted an on-the-ground field review of the entire Transform Fresno project footprint including the full plan boundary of the Southwest Fresno Specific Plan, in addition to Chinatown, Downtown, and highly used transit stops. Through this planning exercise we confirmed the assumptions made through traditional research.

A Social Climate Analysis provides an interdisciplinary snapshot of current conditions for decision-makers and implementers of land-use policies and projects. The Social Climate Analysis challenges traditional methods for assessing the environments we live in. While data and engineering are usually the main focus of urban planning and transportation improvement projects, there are important social and cultural factors at play as well. The Social Climate Analysis creates an opportunity for project technical staff (such as engineers and planners) to be immersed in the community and to incorporate resident leaders in the process of identifying meaningful ways to preserve community assets and to address the socio-cultural barriers a proposed project might create.

The recommendations that emerge from the Social Climate Analysis inform the overall scope, implementation timeline, and engagement strategy for the project. The Social Climate Analysis also helps to identify direct service providers, advocates, and programmatic needs that should be considered throughout and after the life of the project. A Social Climate Analysis can be used to propose many public processes including: infrastructure planning, policy proposals, and project evaluation. A Social Climate Analysis typically consists of three phases, structured to provide past, present, and future context at the community level.

##### Social Climate Analysis Phases

###### PHASE 1

During “Phase 1” project staff visit the community to review current conditions. The Thrivance Group prefers to engage with actual residents (current or past) to do Phase 1 observations. Phase 1 is an important step because it reveals details that traditional data sources often fail to capture. During “Phase 1” project staff make a genuine effort to observe places and people beyond the desired outcomes and contexts of the project. The following indicators are included in this initial observation phase:

* Cultural identity
* Socio-economic dynamics
* Social services needs (including housing)
* Environmental factors
* Non-standard infrastructure conditions and uses
* Mobility patterns
* Resident oral accounts
* Community leadership and kinship formation

After “Phase 1” of the Social Climate Analysis, project staff reach out to residents, service providers, and community based organizations that either are impacted by or whose work relates to the social context deriving from the first phase.

###### PHASE 2

For “Phase 2”, residents, service providers, and community based organizations accompany engagement staff for a field (or virtual) visit in the project area. During this visit, non-project staff provide oral histories, background on community assets, and make additional recommendations for key residents and stakeholders to participate in ongoing engagement efforts. The Phase 2 field visit highlights and documents anecdotal and experiential knowledge about the project area in addition to community histories that elevate or induce special considerations that could be made within the final project scope, including opportunities for institutional atonement.[[1]](#footnote-1)

###### PHASE 3

“Phase 3” is an opportunity for project technical staff to convene with participants from the first two phases to discuss findings and to co-create solutions for problems that were documented in prior phases. This is also an opportunity for project staff to gain an appreciation for existing community values, practices, needs and assets. The goal is to preserve or enhance those assets through the planned project.

## WHAT WE LEARNED FROM BEING THERE IN-PERSON

### Murals Can Either Help or Hurt Anti-Displacement Goals

Thrivance Group noticed a dozen murals, commissioned public art, and independent public installations. Many of these installations appeared to be highlighting the historical significance of the spaces themselves. The murals reminded us of studies that have shown the potential of displacement-related impacts in communities where there is a pre-existing risk of displacement. Murals are sometimes seen as features of redevelopment that are associated with investing in making the space feel new.

Where murals are added to vacant buildings or next to vacant lots, they tend to encourage developer speculation, often being a literal image of what new inhabitants would (or should) look like or, the opposite, which community is absent from the space.[[2]](#footnote-2) Anti-displacement efforts, community engagement, and phased redevelopment within the project area should exercise caution and discretion to avoid exploiting public art as a way of dressing up vacant spaces, abandoned lots, and substandard dwellings. An analysis of wall art and mural placement should also include a context-driven effort to protect and preserve actual cultural markings that don’t have the negative effect of causing existing residents to feel like they aren’t worthy of being represented in art as the future of a community. Arts institutions and designated arts districts should be primary locations for art that seeks to disrupt erasure or assert cultural identity and representation.

### What Keeps People Together? What’s Keeping People Apart?

One thing we noticed frequently was the presence of intra-cultural and cross-cultural communities and groups in Southwest Fresno. What we know about how cross-cultural connections form in communities is:

* Every community is made up of multiple communities (like sub-communities)
* Groups of people within each community (and sub-community) can be defined through commonalities that include both physical attributes and values
* People find a sense of home in communities through their own context, timeframe, or individual connection with other communities
* All of these factors make it difficult to develop a precise definition of the community and its identities, but this also tells us we need to be flexible when we plan policies and build infrastructure in cross-cultural communities

Here are some ways we saw cultural identity stand out during our in-person observations:

#### SACRED GATHERING SPACE

The Thrivance team observed high numbers of Black residents in Southwest Fresno. When we reviewed our notes to understand this dynamic, we considered the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and that there was a chance Black residents were more likely to be visible because they were also more likely to be essential workers traveling on their way to work.[[3]](#footnote-3) Aside from that assumption, we notice Black residents were more likely to engage neighbors and friends in front yards, on patios, and at the ends of driveways. This suggests a strong degree of resident leadership and a natural setting for collective decision making. This also signified a place-based venue for intergenerational, interfaith, and multi-income engagement. This observation is consistent with what prior research tells us about front yards as a primary source of social cohesion and people-power, particularly in areas where access to the economy is more limited. This observation also validates anecdotal–yet valid–widespread concerns regarding the impact of development-related easements in residential zones. Easements (as well as the fear of imminent easements) pose a grave risk to cultural cohesion, the sense of community, and desires of residents who are reluctant to remain in-place with the threat of their homes being taken away by local government agencies for the purpose of development.

“The front porches of literature, history and collective memory are the link between public and private. Their origins stretch back to ancient Greece and Rome, but they are intimately tied to images of Southern culture and the space making, particularly, of African-Americans, who brought their notions of mutuality with them during the Great Migration.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

#### LATINX IDENTITY IN PLACE

All Social Climate Analysis team members noted a significant presence of Latinx residents and cultural markings throughout the project area. In curbside communities (homeless encampments), the majority of residents that the Thrivance Group team observed appeared to be Latinx. In addition to this, one of the most emotionally impactful observations was the extent to which Latinx residents were leading COVID-19 mutual aid efforts and essential services. This observation, coupled with the scarcity of language justice in official City postings/notices, insufficient pedestrian infrastructure and transit connectivity, and the incredibly apparent overwhelm in safety net and social services, was particularly concerning.

Still, there was a layer of complexity in analyzing existing signs of displacement risk juxtaposed with widespread expansion of Latinx enterprise that, on its face, appeared to be a prominent element of redevelopment and gentrification–particularly in the Southwest Fresno community. It should be noted that Thrivance Group researchers found it difficult to validate their observations against existing data sources and narratives regarding the Latinx communities in Fresno. This made it clear that an earnest effort to compile Latinx oral histories across Fresno would improve the integrity of a broader anti-displacement research effort.

#### INTERFAITH NETWORKS

Interfaith networks and key destinations were prominent characteristics within the project area. In fact, many interfaith venues had displacement-avoidance resources posted on their doors. This unique coalition work across multiple faith communities was perceived by Thrivance Group observers as an institution in and of itself. Additionally, many interfaith community partners appeared to be anchored to social justice values centering the needs and rights of marginalized residents in Fresno. Even during shelter-in-place, the interfaith community led efforts such as distributing food and resources to those in need. Because of the depth of its roots and the extent of its reach, Fresno's interfaith communities will be a theme throughout the remaining phases of research and engagement on the Displacement Avoidance Plan project.

#### INACCESSIBILITY, HOSTILE INFRASTRUCTURE AND SCATTERED QUALITY OF LIFE DESTINATIONS

One of the most glaring high-risk signs of ongoing displacement was the extent to which social activities and quality of life destinations were spread out across the region and the infrastructure connecting these spaces were either non-existent or challenging to navigate. Observers characterized the project area as feeling “scattered” “incomplete” and “ambiguous” when they were asked to describe existing land use and resident mobility within the project area. We’re placing a substantial emphasis on the term *feeling* because the perception of land use dynamics can also drive the factors and indicators associated with displacement burden and risk.

Additionally, hostile infrastructure worsened the sense of disconnect and impassible routes. Hostile infrastructure is street components, signage, and placement of barriers which discourage (or even criminalize) people from accessing public spaces in ways that don’t perfectly align with the intentional design of the space. These practices most often negatively impact people with disabilities, aging adults, people of color, and those who are unhoused.

The scattered design elements created barriers to efficient use of those amenities and even made them less-ideal for travel to and from quality of life destinations beyond the immediate project area. Beyond simply documenting the availability and number of transit stops, Thrivance Group observers documented inconsistencies between the natural paths and routes of community members and the stops and routes being honored through the existing network design. The literal inaccessibility of existing mobility infrastructure in addition to the distances between quality of life destinations presented what seemed to be major limitations to network effectiveness–something that should be explored prior to the introduction of new routes, technologies, and infrastructure.

#### BLUE-COLLAR WORKERS, ESSENTIAL WORKERS, AND SEASONAL WORKERS

The prevalence of blue-collar workers, essential workers, and seasonal workers was really apparent to the Thrivance Group observers. This was particularly surprising because we were in the midst of a global pandemic and weren't expecting very many people to be visibly navigating the public space. This observation, which was common across the board, suggests any interventions or policies implemented through a displacement-avoidance strategy must take into consideration that the exacerbating issues contributing to displacement likely extend beyond a lack of availability of employment opportunities. Examples of broader contributing factors may include difference between standard notions of cost of living and affordability metrics and actual costs and burdens associated with living in the Fresno region. This could also be a sign that there is a need for protections, programs, and policies that help residents move into more stable, long-term entrepreneurial opportunities within the City.

#### HOSTILITY TOWARD UNHOUSED RESIDENTS AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

What our research uncovered regarding the legacy of hostile land use practices prompted the Thrivance Group to look further into the present day versions of those practices. We discovered a recently passed ordinance that banned people from seeking shelter in parks or other areas deemed “public.” The issue with these types of policies is that they require a person to have a structure for a home in order to be considered “residents” that can access public space. A recent settlement of a statewide class action lawsuit resulted in residents impacted by state-sanctioned encampment sweeps to receive damages for the (potentially unconstitutional) personal and sociological effects of such acts of hostility. While it is clear that we need to identify dignified housing solutions for those who are currently unhoused, further stripping residents of their dignity through the use of encampment sweeps will only worsen displacement trends in the region. In 2020, the total number of unhoused people living in Fresno and Madera Counties was 3,641.[[5]](#footnote-5) The availability of dignified shelter and locally-managed beds would only be sufficient to house a fraction of these residents. So, it is immediately apparent that a ban on public sleeping does nothing to solve the issue of homelessness in the region.

Thrivance Group observers also noted infrastructure that was hostile toward people with disabilities. Observers kept a tally of instances where a crossing or sidewalk was impassable or unsafe to navigate for an able-bodied person as well as instances that would be impassable or unsafe to navigate for a person using an assistive device or living with a visual or hearing impairment. When compared to Chinatown and parts of Downtown Fresno, areas located in Southwest Fresno, were 73% more likely to be either impassable or difficult to navigate for both able-bodied people and people with disabilities.

#### LEGACY OF EMINENT DOMAIN

Many residents expressed concerns about an excessive use of eminent domain for the purposes of community revitalization and redevelopment in the private development sector. As of 2015, 425 Acres have been claimed by San Joaquin Valley jurisdictions for the purposes of High-Speed Rail ([linked](https://hsr.ca.gov/high_speed_rail/station_communities/fresno.aspx)). Assemblymember Jim Patterson attempted to barr these actions in 2015, but his proposed bill did not pass. As such, concerns continue to grow as residents find it difficult to be civically engaged in planning efforts that could potentially result in eminent domain being used on property or land in their communities. In 2020, the City of Fresno continued to use eminent domain to advance projects for the purposes of housing people during the COVID-19 pandemic, but because of the legacy of the practice, some residents argued continued use of eminent domain would fail to directly benefit local residents and instead, potentially exacerbate environmental and economic disparity in already displacement-burdened communities. While the use of eminent domain is justified and welcomed in some cases, it is important to remember the legacy of excessive use of eminent domain across the region and the ways in which projects re-traumatize residents who've already been dislocated as a result of that mechanism.[[6]](#footnote-6) At the time of the Social Climate Analysis, the Thrivance Group was unable to verify that current plans for development in the Southwest Fresno region would not use eminent domain to meet design objectives.

#### GHETTOIZATION THROUGH INVESTMENT

The term “ghetto” was frequently used by residents engaging in conversation with the Thrivance Group about the plans for the Southwest Fresno region. Out of 200 hours of Transformative Justice interactions, we were able to count the use of this term over 75 times. Residents expressed concerns that the implementation of infrastructure and housing projects in the area would worsen the appearance of ghettoizing characteristics and other signs and symbols of marginality. What is important to highlight, is not that there was an ideological or classist distinction being made, but that residents themselves have noted a pattern in the quality of materials and a lack of design creativity for projects in the Southwest Fresno area. This prompted the Thrivance Group to explore occurrences of ghettoization in other regions of the world to better understand how or if this phenomenon was contributing to displacement or the fear of gentrification in Fresno. In 1984, the United States Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Robert Weaver, famously asserted, no more “ghettos” should be created in the United States[[7]](#footnote-7). The Oxford English Dictionary defines “ghetto” as:

1. Formerly a section or quarter in a European city to which Jews were restricted
2. A slum section of an American city occupied predominantly by members of a minority group who live there because of social or economic pressure.

When you look into the origins of the term, *ghetto* you find that what people are really describing when they use this term is a descriptor of a common set of neighborhood configuration types, the rules that govern those areas, and the identities of the people living in the areas. These characteristics mark a community and the people who live in it as essentially bound to their identities as marginalized people. This identity of marginality includes the assumption that, by virtue of your presence in the neighborhood, you are unintelligent, unable to be employed, unable to maintain your property, and prone to health issues and violence. While we are not making a statement that marginality as an identity is any less dignified or less human than others, we do agree that ghettoization and marginality should not be used as an urban planning device for drawing boundaries between communities.

Through an on the ground Dignity Street Team effort, Thrivance Group found most community plan documents and educational materials reinforced this perception, and also that existing built environment design was in fact synonymous with commonly known ghettoizing concepts. One revelation we came across as we sought deeper understanding, was that those who were most likely to reject the idea of affordable housing development in their neighborhoods felt so because of the aesthetic and material quality of the infrastructure, as well as a lack of wrap-around support for those who would live in the units–not the affordable housing itself.

#### BLENDED SOCIO-ECONOMIC IDENTITY AND INTRA-COMMUNITY DEFICIT DYNAMICS

One challenge associated with development that spanned multiple communities, was disagreement between groups representing varying economic backgrounds, racial identities, age-ranges, and political beliefs. There was such a vast range of opinions and ideas regarding community transformation that consensus seemed to be an impossible pursuit. In interactions between the Thrivance Group and local community members, it became apparent that the mix of socioeconomic identities was itself a symptom and outcome of displacement and gentrification in the region.

Where we encountered declining intra-community dynamics, a common cause was widespread scarcity. We use the term *scarcity* to describe the unavailability of social services, emergency interventions, access to civic engagement processes, lack of investment in recreation and centers of joy, and an inaccurate notion of affordability. We tested this theory by compiling statements from meeting notes, presentation remarks, survey responses and other types of feedback into a categorized database any time those comments alluded to scarcity or deficit. What we found was, 90% of the time intra-community conflict could be traced back to lack of available and needed resources. The other 10% of the time, intra-community conflict was being spurred by a legacy of strain between residents and local government agencies.

#### FAILURE TO MAKE AN EQUITY-CENTERED BUSINESS CASE

While the Thrivance Group does not believe there is still a need to make a “business case” for equitable planning practices, we recognize local jurisdictions like the City of Fresno are beholden to funding through a set of competitive funding cycles. Cities like Fresno are expected to make a business case for projects desperately needed by communities experiencing displacement burden. In order to rise to this occasion, the City of Fresno is in need of policies and shared language which comprehensively convey the extent to which the City of Fresno is willing to go to 1) prioritize curing the impacts of the legacy of racism and slavery, 2) solving the crisis of houselessness and 3) ending the trauma of displacement within the City.

When Thrivance staff reviewed videos from public meetings and city planning documents we found a huge disconnect where a business case could have been made for equity-centered planning and investments. The ambiguity of who will benefit from Fresno's pipeline of infrastructure projects not only impacts Fresno's ability to procure resources for development, it also impacts the outcomes of civic engagement processes and resident perceptions related to planning and development in Fresno. The state-funded programs which appear to yield the most potential for an equity-centered approach to the built environment in Fresno include the Active Transportation Program ([linked](https://dot.ca.gov/programs/local-assistance/fed-and-state-programs/active-transportation-program)) and the (Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities) AHSC program ([linked](https://www.hcd.ca.gov/grants-funding/active-funding/ahsc.shtml)).

## SNAPSHOT OF PLANNING-RELATED CURRENT CONDITIONS

We felt it was important to zoom out from our data-centric method of understanding the project area and to document, simply, what the environment felt like to us. These observations were validated solely through what we ourselves experienced while working on this project.

### Signs of Untracked Migration and COVID19-Induced Displacement

During each phase of our social climate analysis, Thrivance Group staff noted an influx of moving vans, furniture dumping, impound notices, and even exploitive advertisements targeting residents who may be experiencing displacement pressure. This observation manifested in our own efforts and attempts to engage Fresno residents (especially those in the Southwest area) as a large number of mailers and robocalls were returned as undeliverable for residents who we were able to reach mere weeks prior. A grave concern of ours is that this type of displacement, presumably linked to COVID-19, is not being tracked because it is happening so rapidly. It is important to identify where residents are migrating to and the reasons they felt the need or desire to leave Fresno (or their neighborhood) to both prevent this from happening to other residents and to make attempts to reclaim those residents. **13 percent of residents engaged directly by Thrivance Group at the onset of our work in February 2020 were unreachable ten months later.** We hope this is not a microcosm of a broader dynamic underway.

### Strained Civic Engagement Opportunities and Expedited Development

The COVID-19 pandemic definitely limited our ability to reach as many residents as we sought to engage. Our assumption, given this challenge, was that other agencies were also experiencing this limitation. So, it felt contradictory to see and to hear that in addition to our project, other projects which will likely result in a permanent transformation of the landscape continued to progress with the same timelines and fervor as pre-pandemic planning practices. In some cases planning projects even seemed to be expedited. We aren’t privy to the reasoning behind expedited projects, but we empathize with residents who expressed frustrations while juggling complicated at-home challenges, lives as essential workers, and households with distance learning students, with far less time for civic engagement and even less access to the technology necessary for virtual interactions. It is our hope that project development felt expedited simply because of the immense pressure associated with broader feelings of living in a pandemic. However, if in fact development continued to move forward, projects continued to be green-lit, and construction timelines were not adjusted, we believe some of the untrackable displacement and migration we observed could be attributed to literal and perceived development-induced displacement pressures.

### Clogged Social Safety Net and Lack of Resource Pooling

As the Thrivance Group sought to identify immediate interventions to distribute to residents who were at immediate risk of displacement, we experienced several challenges reaching the correct department, understanding eligibility parameters, and identifying accurate information for accessing resources that were being advertised as available. In addition to this, we encountered some service providers and community partners experiencing an exhaustion of resources, while others were having trouble distributing an abundance of available resources. We suspect our own experience navigating existing networks of service providers and resources was a symptom of broader siloing. If this is truly a broader issue, there are operational remedies that could achieve tremendous headway toward the aim of eradicating displacement in the Fresno region.

### Disproportionality of Extent of Burden

Mostly every resident we engaged expressed either literal displacement burden challenges or the fear of imminent challenges. In order to focus our work, we conducted an analysis to identify those who were experiencing displacement burden for longer amounts of time, as well as those for whom displacement posed the greatest degree of severity in terms of depth and risk associated with displacement impacts. We discovered that a core group of residents were most in need of immediate intervention *and also* long-term protection. We centered all of our recommendations around reducing harm and relieving suffering for these groups. in this report, we are referring to these groups as our *Risk Focus Areas,* and they are as follows:

#### AGING ADULTS

\*This quote reflects the thematic nature of the feedback we received most frequently from this Risk Focus Area

“We’re always being targeted for displacement.”

Aging adults (everywhere) are experiencing unique impacts associated with renewal and transformation. One way to quantify impacts is through an analysis of displacement and gentrification impacts on the health of aging adults. The aging-adult population typically experiences the worst of the economic marginality while also experiencing major impacts to mental and emotional health. Even aging adults with higher incomes stand to lose quality of life connectivity earlier than other groups because the neighborhood transformation becomes a major disruption to routine and familiarity.[[8]](#footnote-8) Of those we were able to reach directly through transformative justice sessions and interviews, the vast majority of aging adults that Thrivance Group engaged felt the neighborhoods they lived in were more likely to be targeted for displacement and least likely to be assisted when they are experiencing displacement risk.

#### PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

\*This quote reflects the thematic nature of the feedback we received most frequently from this Risk Focus Area

“We’re always being targeted for displacement.”

Thrivance Group conducted an expanded analysis (beyond the Fresno region) to better understand the displacement risks that are exacerbated for people living with disabilities. Those who we were able to connect with mentioned a heightened sense of concern and insecurity resulting from climate change and recent wildfires across the region and the state. Respondents with disabilities expressed concerns that they were being under-considered in local planning for climate resiliency. Additionally, the nature of available jobs in the City of Fresno (manual labor, blue collar) are rarely available to people with disabilities. Personal accounts of displacement revealed disabled people were most likely to experience displacement for the longest stretches of time, compared to the other Focus Area Groups. Residents with disabilities felt their displacement vulnerabilities are routinely ignored, their living conditions are rarely accessible, and at times they are targeted or taken advantage of during neighborhood transformation.

#### YOUNG ADULTS

\*This quote reflects the thematic nature of the feedback we received most frequently from this Risk Focus Area

“We have to leave Fresno to attain financial stability.”

Unlike what we’ve experienced in other regions of California, young adults were among the list of groups most likely to be experiencing voluntary displacement burden. We attribute this to Fresno being a city that is typically home to multiple generations of families whereby young adults are inclined to remain in the region as they seek education and employment opportunities. When asked what factors play into the pressure to leave the City of Fresno, young adults noted a lack of opportunities to look forward to for wealth generation. With a median age of 28.5 years old (among the lowest in the United States), there is clear evidence of the need for a more focused analysis of factors that cause residents to move away as they age.

#### VETERANS AND PEOPLE RETURNING HOME FROM INSTITUTIONALIZATION

\*This quote reflects the thematic nature of the feedback we received most frequently from this Risk Focus Area

“We have to leave Fresno to attain housing stability.”

All forms of institutionalization appear to be contributing to displacement and homelessness in Fresno. While state and federal numbers in the county have been declining, the population of incarcerated people being held in Fresno county jails has increased each year for the past decade. Recent COVID-19 relief policies as well as decriminalization policies will likely result in an increased demand for housing for formerly incarcerated people. People engaged through the Social Climate Analysis shared their experiences of having very few housing options if they had been recently incarcerated or had a conviction on their record. Immediate action should be taken to expand availability of existing housing to this population.

Similarly, while the rate of young people (16-20 years old) aging out of foster care is lower than other municipalities (per capita), residents formerly in foster care were among the groups of people who were most likely to experience a perpetual state of homelessness within two years of aging out of the system. While we were unable to determine direct causality for this population’s higher risk for displacement, we believe the difficult-to-navigate social services network is contributing to this dynamic.

Lastly, local institutions providing involuntary mental health care were unable to identify meaningfully supportive practices for identifying dignified housing once a person is discharged. Recent assessments of people who’ve been included in the Fresno homelessness count estimate over 80% of unhoused people have a clinically diagnosable mental illness; 34-50% of those respondents would qualify for residential care.[[9]](#footnote-9) Individuals who are forcibly held in mental health institutions represent the population with the greatest likelihood of being unsheltered in the immediate future.

People who have experienced any version of institutionalization in Fresno feel very strongly that their only opportunity to attain housing and economic stability will come through relocation to another city where more resources are available to formerly-institutionalized people.

#### FARMWORKERS AND PEOPLE WITH DOCUMENTATION CHALLENGES

\*This quote reflects the thematic nature of the feedback we received most frequently from this Risk Focus Area

“Landlords are taking advantage of my vulnerability”

Households with mixed immigration status, farmworkers, and undocumented people experience a tremendous amound of displacement burden in most contexts. This Risk Focus Area is listed particularly because those we engaged who were willing to share their documentation status revealed an added layer of vulnerability as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. By all accounts, immigrant communities have seen the worst impacts of the pandemic. Employed in “essential worker” roles at a rate estimated to be above 80%, the number of mixed documentation status households that have been directly impacted by COVID-19 cannot be accurately quantified. However, we know from our understanding of pre-existing risks for this population that the combination of living in more crowded areas and with multiple generations of family members could be significant contributing factors. Households experiencing illnesses and deaths are facing the possibility of eviction once state eviction protections expire. While populations included in the other Risk Focus Areas have the protection of an eviction moratorium, immigrants and households with mixed immigration status are experiencing a heightened risk for unofficial evictions–particularly as landlords aim to attract tenants who are more likely to be able to maintain rent payments during and after the pandemic.

#### THIRD GENERATION BLACK HOUSEHOLDS

\*This quote reflects the thematic nature of the feedback we received most frequently from this Risk Focus Area

“My family’s legacy is being erased”

While the Thrivance Group was unable to find statistically validating resources that correspond with the feedback we received from Black interviewees and participants in Transformative Justice Sessions, we found a great deal of continuity amongst oral histories pertaining to the legacy of Black migration and agricultural influence in Fresno. More specifically, elders and their children were able to tell stories about hostile land practices, the use of eminent domain, and exploitation by landlords. These stories, although told on separate occasions and by separate people, were almost identical, led us to believe in their truth and they must be acknowledged in our work.

We were able to delineate that families with a minimum of three generations of lived experience in Fresno had almost a guaranteed risk of experiencing either direct displacement or rapid gentrification, causing them to voluntarily relocate. Black families who could trace their lineage beyond three generations also told stories about their relatives’ contributions to the agricultural industry in Fresno and strongly believed those histories were intentionally being left out of common discourse and planning processes.

#### SOUTHEAST ASIAN RESIDENTS

\*This quote reflects the thematic nature of the feedback we received most frequently from this Risk Focus Area

“My family’s legacy is being erased”

A recent study in the Fresno area revealed people who are Southeast Asian experienced a 10% rate for formal eviction over the last decade. Just as with Latinx communities where English is not always the primary spoken language in the household, these families are more likely to be exploited by landlords and excluded from racial and ethnic data sets associated with conversations about displacement. Southeast Asian households in Fresno tend to be older and also tend to experience high levels of rent burden. When interviewed about their experiences with planning processes and displacement risk, Southeast Asian residents more often than not expressed surprise that they were even being included in the conversation. We suspect that an ongoing trend of ignoring the unique circumstances and needs of Hmongs and Southeast Asian residents is contributing to their disproportionate risk of displacement and a lack of culturally-specific supports.

#### COMMUNITY ADVOCATES

\*This quote reflects the thematic nature of the feedback we received most frequently from this Risk Focus Area

“Civic engagement and competitive bidding are not accessible”

Community Advocates, community-based organizations, and certain types of entrepreneurs expressed difficulty accessing and being competitive for opportunities to do business with the City of Fresno. When the Thrivance Group explored the extent to which these experiences could be contributing to the overarching dynamic of displacement in the region, we found a pervasive belief that community-based organizations serving many of the other Risk Focus Areas were less likely to be given opportunities to contribute to the revitalization of the communities they support. In addition to this, entrepreneurs who ran Black owned businesses, small businesses, or were led by aging adults, shared a common disdain for what they believe to be unfair and excessively complicated bidding processes.

When asked about the potential effects of these perceptions and experiences, all of these groups specifically listed an imminent likelihood of having to relocate in order to remain financially afloat. These experiential accounts of doing business in the City of Fresno mimic the feedback we received from people who felt they were intentionally being alienated from participatory decision-making opportunities. In some instances, disenfranchisement went hand-in-hand with antiquated contracting practices.

# **BLUEPRINT FOR DISPLACEMENT AVOIDANCE**

### The Key Objectives

To arrive at a set of anti-displacement policy recommendations for the City of Fresno, we've identified potential solutions that would directly meet the needs of people who fit into one or more of the Risk Focus Areas. That's not to say that these recommendations don't or won't benefit people who don't identify as having any of the listed experiencesOur strategy, however, is rooted in meeting the most immediate and disproportionate needs first. We recognize that portions of some of these policies already exist in some form or iteration. To that end, the Thrivance Group is recommending this set of policies within the context of those existing partial policies because we truly believe they need to be combined in order to be effective. The intention guiding the key objective of these proposed recommendations is to reduce harm first and then to achieve systemic change in the near- and long-term. To be consistent with anti-displacement initiatives across the country, we’ve used terms that align with the categories most often used by anti-displacement advocates.

#### WHAT WE MEAN WHEN WE SAY HARM REDUCTION

The key elements of a harm-reduction strategy for policies rooted in displacement intervention include:

* The policy, on its own or in combination with another policy, **addresses a specific element of harm** identified through research and stakeholder perspectives
* The policy or the implementation plan strives to **identify a specific and intentional recipient of issue-specific, direct intervention**
* The eligibility/qualifying factor **does not pose an additional burden** or barrier that would contribute to new or additional displacement

The policy and the people who implement the policy **intend to create a permanent redress** for the impacts of past harmful planning practices

1. In this instance, the term *institutional atonement* is used to describe an intentional effort on behalf of the City to acknowledge, disrupt, and undo the impacts of slavery, discrimination, and environmental injustices. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [How Developers Turned Graffiti Into a Trojan Horse For Gentrification](https://www.archdaily.com/871531/5-pointz-how-developers-turned-graffiti-into-a-trojan-horse-for-gentrification) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Chrisanna Mink. (2020) Blacks in California are dying from COVID-19 at a higher rate. What’s being done to help? - https://www.modbee.com/living/health-fitness/article247436420.html [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [Losing the sacred space of the front porch](https://theundefeated.com/features/losing-the-sacred-space-of-the-front-porch/) - https://theundefeated.com/features/losing-the-sacred-space-of-the-front-porch/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
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