

Community Benefits and Lessons for Local Engagement in a California Open Streets Event: A Mixed-Methods Assessment of Viva CalleSJ 2018

Project 1895
August 2019

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This report presents the findings from an evaluation of the City of San José's Viva CalleSJ open-streets event held on September 23, 2018, in San José, CA. This event was the fourth Viva CalleSJ organized by the City of San José. The research was designed to provide information that would help the city assess the success of the event, guide planning for the Viva CalleSJ program in the future, and inform potential funders and community partners about the benefits of Viva CalleSJ.

Viva CalleSJ, a free open-streets event, closed streets along a six-mile route. Participants were invited to walk, jog, bike, skate, scoot, or use any non-motorized travel mode along the route. The event featured numerous activities, including organized classes such as yoga and Zumba, a rock-climbing wall, a roller rink, soccer in the streets, music and dance performances, live chalk art and mural painting, and food trucks. An estimated 125,000 people attended.

Study Methods

The mixed-methods study relied on both a participant survey and a multi-phase qualitative study that gathered the impressions of participants, local residents, and workers at businesses along the event route. The survey instrument was a one-page paper questionnaire distributed to a diverse set of adults attending the event, 1,571 of whom turned in surveys usable for analysis. The qualitative component, conducted before, during, and after the event in neighborhoods adjacent to Viva CalleSJ, included 114 semi-structured interviews, participant observations during the event, and evaluation of an open-ended question from the participant survey.

Findings

The participants: Survey respondents were evenly balanced between men and women, 50% were between the ages of 25 and 44, and 77% were San José residents. In terms of race and ethnicity,

one third (34%) said they were Hispanic, one third (33%) identified as white (non-Hispanic), and 18% identified as Asian/Asian American.

“Many participants said that Viva CalleSJ brought people together from across the city and inspired a sense of community and civic pride.”

Event benefits for both participants and neighboring businesses:

- Participants were resoundingly positive about their experience. People liked the event because it felt fun and safe to bike on streets where they do not usually feel comfortable.
- Many participants said that Viva CalleSJ brought people together from across the city and inspired a sense of community and civic pride.
- The events succeed in providing the majority of participants with at least one hour of physical activity.
- Most local businesses and residents viewed the event positively, and many food and beverage outlets appeared to profit from increased patronage during the event.

Concerns from some local businesses and residents:

- Many shopkeepers along the event route and many residents in surrounding neighborhoods were not aware of Viva CalleSJ in the weeks prior to the event.
- Many of those who were vaguely aware of the event did not have a clear understanding of what it would be like or how it might impact their lives or businesses. Some businesses could have been better informed in order to take advantage of the opportunities that the event presented
- Auto-oriented businesses appeared especially wary of the road closures that would accompany the event, and some closed for the day as a result. Some were frustrated about the event.

Viva CalleSJ Program Recommendations

The study findings suggest the following recommendations for the Viva CalleSJ program:

- The event is extremely popular with participants, so the city should continue and expand its open streets program.
- New methods should be tried for communicating with businesses along the planned route in advance of the event, so that businesses are prepared both to take advantage of the event traffic and to cope with limited vehicular access.
- Similarly, targeted outreach through community-based organizations in neighborhoods along the route could increase participation among these residents.

About the Authors

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To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at transweb.sjsu.edu/research/1895



MTI is a University Transportation Center sponsored by the U.S. Department of Transportation's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Research and Technology and by Caltrans. The Institute is located within San José State University's Lucas Graduate School of Business.