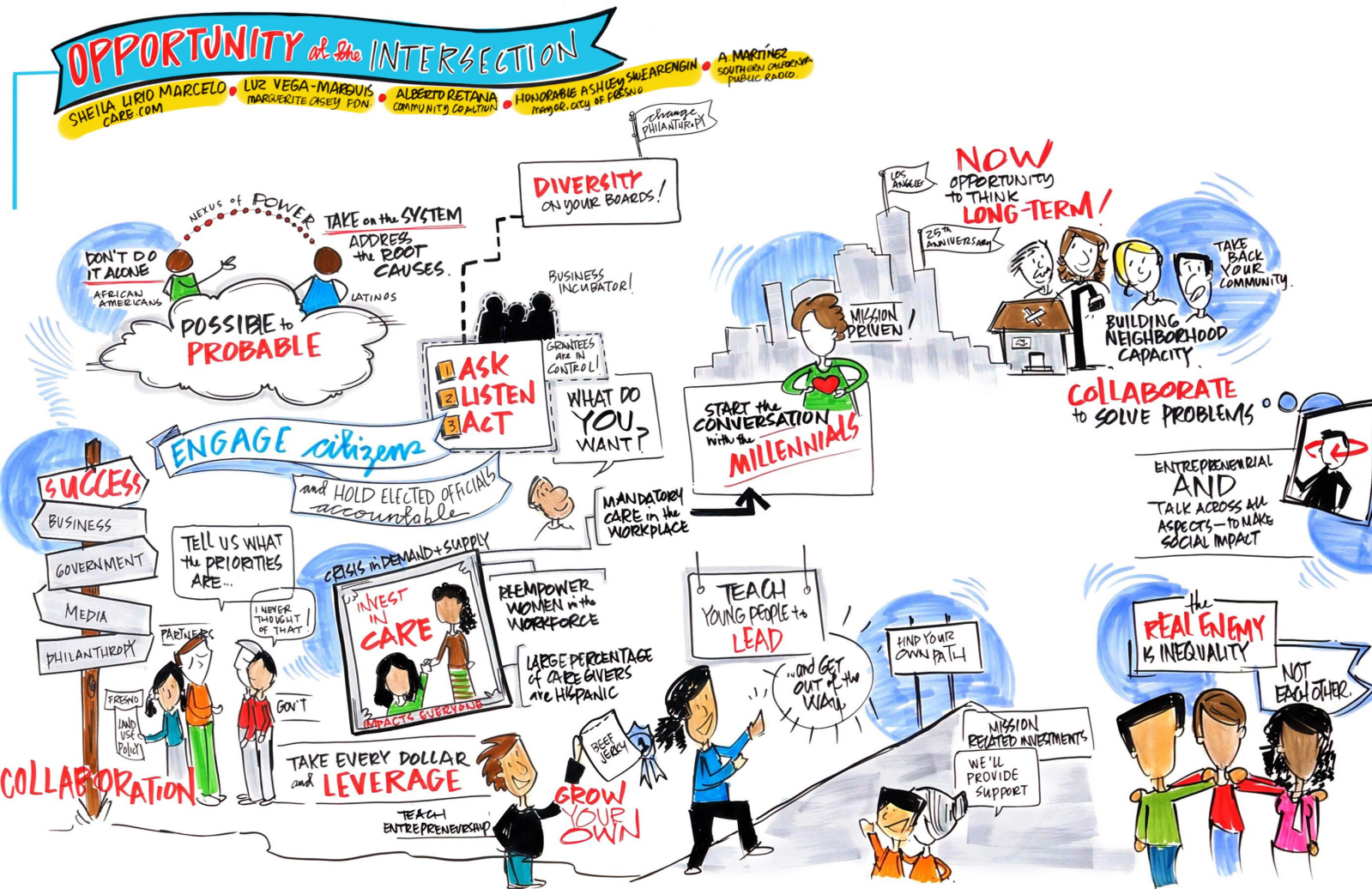


OPPORTUNITY REIMAGINED: AN INCLUSIVE VISION FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

A White Paper of the Aspen Institute Latinos and Society Program's
America's Future Summit:
Reimagining Opportunity in a Changing Nation

Prepared by Lisa Pilnik



*This white paper **Opportunity Reimagined: An Inclusive Vision for Healthy Communities** is the result of discussions held during the America's Future Summit: Reimagining Opportunity in a Changing Nation. None of the comments or ideas contained in this paper should be taken as embodying the views or carrying the endorsement of any specific participant at the gathering or of any of the supporting donors.*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In August 2016, The Aspen Institute Latinos and Society Program convened the [*America's Future Summit: Reimagining Opportunity in a Changing Nation*](#), in Los Angeles, California, bringing together 200 diverse thought leaders to discuss pathways to opportunity and strategies for achieving equity for all Americans, particularly the American Latino community. The Summit's organizers and participants recognized that in order for a community to be healthy, all of its members must have equitable access to opportunity. This paper is derived from content generated during and after the Summit and seeks to highlight some of the most important components for expanding opportunity:

Health equity, meaning all community members have access to physical and mental health care services, and that all communities—including those traditionally left behind—have equal access to safe pedestrian routes, places to play and exercise, and that low income and communities of color are not disproportionately burdened with environmental hazards such as lead or air pollution.

Education access, referring to the broad availability of high caliber and affordable pre-K through post-secondary at a minimum; as well as improved schools and how they prepare young people, knowledge-building through mentorship, public civic education, and other education strategies that advance equity.

Economic opportunity, or access to the means to support yourself, build personal wealth, and contribute to your community, whether through a well-paid job or through entrepreneurship.

An Equity agenda, meaning that all aspects of policy and practice, across sectors, include a focus on ensuring equity and that it is built into all of the work that they do; this is essential for achieving access to and realizing the full potential of opportunity.

Much hard work has already been done on these fronts across America and for Latinos in particular, but more remains to be done. Strategies discussed during the *America's Future Summit*, that have contributed to previously successful efforts to improve equity, opportunity and healthy communities and that should be accounted for in future efforts, include:

Collaboration across a broad range of sectors (e.g., schools, government, business, community organizations, and philanthropy) as well as among impacted populations (e.g., low income and communities of color).

Addressing root causes that impact an individual, family, or community's ability to take advantage of opportunity, such as trauma, violence, and poverty (e.g., providing mental health services in conjunction with job training).

Community member and youth involvement in all efforts that impact the community, including educating individuals on how and why to advocate, as necessary. An important principle in an equity agenda is that those most affected must be the ones driving the work and developing the solutions. In many

communities, and particularly considering the age demographics among Latinos in the U.S., this means that we need to provide young people with opportunity, and then get out of the way so that they can be the ones creating and driving efforts.

Latino leadership in education, business, politics, philanthropy, and other fields that are central to facilitating opportunity, including the presence of relatable role models young Latinos can look to.

Relevancy to target populations, for Latinos, this means not just making information available in Spanish (for those whose dominant language is not English), but also working with Latino leaders and community members to ensure that efforts and methods are culturally appropriate and that community members who are undocumented are equally able to access services and supports.

Place based efforts, grounded in and responsive to the particular geographic and environmental qualities of the communities they are working to impact.

INTRODUCTION

What is a healthy community?

Americans increasingly recognize that life expectancy, disease rates, and other indicators of behavioral and physical health are impacted by both medical elements (such as access to health care) and social and environmental factors (such as availability of quality schools and clean air). We are also increasingly aware that in order for a community to be healthy, *all* of its members must be healthy and that communities must have full participation from—and access to opportunity for—all members. These conversations about health equity and equal access to opportunity have broad intersections: health is impacted and determined by an individual's access to education and jobs and also the policies and practices that support or limit the individual, such as policing, racism, and disinvestment in their communities. At the same time, the very existence of employment and educational opportunities, as well as high levels of incarceration and trauma, have major effects on physical and behavioral health. Healthy communities are those who have positive physical and behavioral health outcomes, but also do well on social, economic, and civic measures.

A Lens on Latinos in America

There are many reasons to focus on Latinos when considering how to create and improve access to opportunity and healthy communities. First, the size of the population: there are 56.6 million Latinos living in the United States,¹ and Latinos made up 54% of U.S. population growth from 2000 to 2014.² Secondly, the Hispanic population is also significantly younger than other groups, with a median age of 28 (compared to 43 for whites and 33 for African Americans).³ U.S. born Latinos are the youngest of any major ethnic/racial group--47% are under age 18.⁴ Despite these demographic imperatives, Latinos experience many disparities in health and life outcomes:

- Latinos are more likely than any other major ethnic/racial group to lack health insurance coverage and are more likely than the white population to suffer from low birth weight and obesity.⁵

1 U.S. Census Bureau. "Sumter County, Fla., is Nation's Oldest, Census Bureau Reports," June 23, 2016, available at <http://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2016/cb16-107.html>

2 Jens Manuel Krogstad. "Key facts about how the U.S. Hispanic population is changing." Pew Research Center/FactTank. September 8, 2016. Available at <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/08/key-facts-about-how-the-u-s-hispanic-population-is-changing/> Note that this report stated that Latino population growth is declining, although still growing at a rate of 2.8% each year (down from 4.4% each year prior from 2000-2007).

3 Eileen Patten. "The Nation's Latino Population Is Defined by Its Youth." Pew Research Center. April 20, 2016 Available at <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2016/04/20/the-nations-latino-population-is-defined-by-its-youth/>

4 Eileen Patten. "The Nation's Latino Population Is Defined by Its Youth." Pew Research Center. April 20, 2016 Available at <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2016/04/20/the-nations-latino-population-is-defined-by-its-youth/>

5 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health. "Profile: Hispanic/Latino Americans" available at <http://minority-health.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=3&lvlid=64>.

- Over 25% of Latinos live in poverty (compared to 11% of whites) and the average median household income for full-time/year-round Latino workers in 2014 was \$40,417 (compared to \$56,565 for whites). Latinos are more likely to work in service occupations and less likely to work in managerial/professional settings than non-Hispanic whites as well.⁶
- Although the high school dropout rate for Latino students has dropped significantly, 12% of Latinos still leave high school without a degree (compared to 7% of blacks, 5% of whites and 1% of Asians). Only 15% of Latinos age 25 to 29 hold at least a bachelor's degree (compared to 41% of whites, 22% of blacks, and 63% of Asians in the same age group).⁷
- Hispanics are jailed at 1.4 times the rate of whites nationally, with that rate being significantly higher (3 times the rate or more) in several states. Note that this is likely an undercount because some states don't comprehensively collect/report data about ethnicity.⁸

All groups within a community must be included in order for society as a whole to thrive and be healthy; given the large and growing number of Latinos in the U.S. coupled with the current inequities they face, the distinct needs, strengths, and circumstances of Latinos should receive special attention when we consider how to address health equity and access to opportunity in America.

6 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health. "Profile: Hispanic/Latino Americans" available at <http://minority-health.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=3&lvlid=64>.

7 Jens Manuel Krogstad "5 facts about Latinos and education." Pew Research Center/FactTank. July 28, 2016. Available at <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/28/5-facts-about-latinos-and-education/>

8 Ashley Nellis, Ph.D. "The Color of Justice: Racial and Ethnic Disparity in State Prisons." June 2016. Available at <http://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/The-Color-of-Justice-Racial-and-Ethnic-Disparity-in-State-Prisons.pdf>

AMERICA'S FUTURE SUMMIT

Recognizing that equitable access to opportunity and creating healthy communities are inextricably linked, the Aspen Institute Latinos and Society Program focused on pathways to opportunity and strategies for achieving equity during its 2016 America's Future Summit: Reimagining Opportunity in a Changing Nation (the "Summit"). The Summit took place in Los Angeles, California, a multicultural city of the future, offering examples of cross-cultural and cross-sector collaboration and coalition building that may serve as models for the Latino community and the nation. This paper draws from insights and knowledge shared by presenters and participants at the Summit, as well as from key background resources relied on by the Summit's organizers.⁹

This paper looks at key issue areas that are essential for healthy communities: health equity, economic opportunity, and education. It also recognizes that an equity agenda (e.g., the systematic inclusion of equity in every aspect of policy, programming, and practice)¹⁰ must be part of any healthy community and included in each of the areas listed above. Although distinct challenges and strategies were discussed in each of those areas, many common themes emerged including the importance of: collaborating, centering efforts on communities that have been traditionally left behind; addressing root causes of inequity; partnering with affected community members and ensuring that they are drivers of change; and increasing the participation of Latinos and other people of color in a wide array of sectors and as leaders in positions of power.

"While we live in a land of opportunity, we know that opportunity is not equally accessible to all. Your zip code, the color of skin, your gender, your immigration status, your language determine whether you have access to the tools and onramps to opportunity. We are all accountable for ensuring that equity, fairness, and upward mobility apply to all communities. So today, let us ask ourselves: how can we ensure that everyone is invited and welcomed and has full access to a level playing field, is able to fully reach their potential and contribute at the highest levels."

Monica Lozano

Chair, Aspen Institute Latinos and Society Program
([Click here for video of remarks](#))

⁹ When not otherwise attributed, the ideas and assertions presented throughout are based on speakers' presentations and notes from small group discussions that took place during the Summit.

¹⁰ The definition of equity agenda used here (and throughout this paper) was developed by the Aspen Institute Latinos and Society Program, and draws from the work of Angela Glover Blackwell, CEO of PolicyLink. See, e.g., "America's Tomorrow: Race, Place, and the Equity Agenda," available at <http://www.whatworksforamerica.org/ideas/americas-tomorrow-race-place-and-the-equity-agenda/#WCsYdC0rLIU>.

LEARNING FROM LATINOS ABOUT THEIR PRIORITIES

In partnership with the *America's Future Summit: Reimagining Opportunity in a Changing Nation*, Nielsen's Harris Poll asked respondents across the country what they thought was necessary to increase opportunity for themselves and people like them.

Hispanic respondents listed the following as their top priorities:¹¹

- "Affordable, quality health care" (77%)
- "Elected officials who are held accountable for their decisions" (76%)
- "Safe neighborhoods" (73%)
- "Good jobs that offer a living wage" (73%)

Among Spanish language dominant Hispanics, "convenient and reliable public transportation" ranked extremely important or absolutely essential by 70% of respondents, compared to Bilingual or English Dominant Hispanics at 49% and 39% respectively, indicating differences in priorities within the Latino community by language preference. Asking community members themselves what they need can provide valuable insights and help target programs and services where they can have the greatest impact.

¹¹ Respondents were asked to rate the importance of 15 different factors as either Absolutely Essential, Extremely Important, Very Important, Somewhat Important, Not At All Important.

HEALTH EQUITY

Many factors contribute to health, well-being, and success in life, but perhaps no single determinant is more important than where you live. A person's zip code can predict their physical and behavioral health outcomes, likelihood of attending college or being unemployed, and overall life expectancy. Although health equity can include all of the social determinants of health, this section primarily focuses on physical and behavioral health. Individuals who are not in good health are not as able to grasp or fully realize the benefits of opportunity. For example, someone experiencing chronic pain may not be able to focus on and perform as well at school or work. The non-health benefits of opportunity, such as good jobs, may also mean less if individuals who have access to them also have lower life expectancies or high rates of life-threatening diseases.

Many physical, environmental, and geographic factors can contribute to poor physical health, such as:

- The phenomenon of food deserts where community members do not have access to affordable, fresh, and healthy food because there are no stores selling them in their neighborhood.
- Lower rates of exercise because there are not safe spaces for children or adults to run or play or safe routes for them to walk to school or work.
- Presence of lead in homes or schools, safe drinking water, or air pollution.

Communities with fewer resources may also lack access to health care, including access to preventative measures such as immunization. Violence and deprivation experienced by community members may lead to higher rates of trauma, poor educational performance, and substance abuse. Lack of opportunities and resources in underserved communities can also affect health and well-being in broader ways, such as underperforming schools or lack of living wage jobs—the barriers and potential strategies related to education and economic opportunity are discussed in greater detail later in this paper.

Achieving Change

Resolving physical and behavioral health issues will require investments of resources in underserved communities, as well as policy change. An example of such policy change includes providing incentives for grocery stores to open businesses in underserved areas (paired with public education about healthy eating) or provision of mental health services. It also means ensuring that programs reach all community members, including those who do not speak English and/or are undocumented. Locating these services in places community members are familiar with and already regularly access can contribute to their utility (e.g., a health and wellness center in a predominately Latino neighborhood's high school, as discussed in a later section on students and civic engagement).

For Latino leaders working to eliminate barriers to opportunity, grassroots advocacy may require something of a culture shift. As mark! Lopez, Executive Director, East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice explains, “[in] the communities that we come from, we weren't traditionally disrupters. [It] wasn't till coming here that we had

to be[come] disrupters, that we had to disrupt systems of oppression to create community here, whether it was English only at schools or environmental racism."¹² Like many other primarily minority communities, Southeast Los Angeles has disproportionately unhealthy air quality and lacks adequate sidewalks, stop signs, and other tools

"There's a lot of work ahead, we're up against a lot, but what gets me out of bed every day... is that there are lives at stake and the more we leave these young people by the wayside, we're losing lives. In my community...young people are dying due to the lack of opportunity [and that's why] we need to keep pushing."

Lashon Amado

National Coordinator of Community Action Teams,
Opportunity Youth United
([Click here for video of remarks](#))

that ensure pedestrian safety. Lopez' group uses a variety of strategies to protect the health of residents and, therefore, increase their chances of accessing opportunity and fully realizing its potential. For example, it campaigns to keep out contributors to pollution such as rail yards and truck traffic by educating community members so they can advocate for their own health, actively engaging with local government, and aggressively litigating when necessary. Lopez also explains that one of the biggest challenges his group faces is "getting people to understand that the situations we find ourselves in now aren't normal," citing as examples police shootings and the fact that there are 2,000 premature deaths due to air quality in his community each year.

Although opportunity is often associated with education and ultimately employment, there is a growing body of work recognizing that individuals who are grieving, traumatized, or dealing with other mental health or substance abuse

issues may not be able to benefit from educational or vocational programs unless those issues are addressed. Community-based programs can be essential for connecting young people to opportunity, while also addressing unmet health needs. The Summit highlighted one such program, Homeboy Industries, which puts many of the strategies discussed in this paper into action. Homeboy provides a wide range of services for formerly gang-involved or incarcerated individuals, including case management, mental health and substance abuse services, parenting and anger management classes, and education and vocational training. Father Boyle, the importance of the program's founder, and two participants spoke about their experiences with the program. Both emphasized the importance of therapy provided, as well as other services that allow trainees to work on themselves. They cited the provision of these services as a key factor in allowing men and women to heal and, therefore, to take full advantage of all of the other opportunities Homeboy offered them.

¹² Unless otherwise noted, all quoted statements are from presentations at the Summit.

EDUCATION AS A PATHWAY TO OPPORTUNITY AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Education is widely considered one of the most important pathways to opportunity, and educational attainment is frequently considered in measures of community health. Yet the quality of education varies widely across communities, and Latinos in particular have higher high school dropout rates and lower levels of 4-year college completion. Safe, supportive schools that nurture students can further opportunity and health for Latinos, and all community members¹³. Yet, participants at the Summit identified many barriers that prevent educational attainment, including the fact that too many schools, at best, fail to engage students and, at worst, criminalize them and cut them off from society/community and a healthy future.

Achieving Change

Participants at the Summit identified a number of potential strategies for increasing educational success among Latino and other young people in several different areas:

Improving school climate and providing role models:

- Improving school-wide culture and relationships between students and teachers/staff and fighting the criminalization of students.¹⁴
- Undertaking targeted efforts to increase the number of Latino teachers, administrators, and educational leaders. This is essential because all youth, but especially Latinos and youth of color, need to see people who look like them or that they can relate to as role models. Participants noted that increasing these numbers may require large scale changes, such as better pay and treatment of teachers and other educational professionals.
- Increasing availability of mentoring and other opportunities and efforts that meet young people where they are. Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti shared that Los Angeles holds a dropout prevention day where government officials, school administrators, business leaders, and others knock on the apartment doors of young people who have dropped out to personally encourage them to re-engage in school.

¹³ The National Center for Safe and Supportive Learning Environments suggests that in order to create environments that support learning, attention to the physical health and safety needs of the entire school community must be taken into consideration. Further information about safe, supportive schools is available at <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/environment/physical-health>

¹⁴ Although the issue of school discipline disparities and school climate were not discussed in depth at the Summit, participants in the lunch table discussions articulated concerns about the criminalization and dehumanization of students as a barrier to accessing and utilizing education as an opportunity. Helpful resources on this topic include “Ending the Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Track” by the Advancement Project <http://www.advancementproject.org/issues/stopping-the-school-to-prison-pipeline> and “Rethinking Discipline” by U.S. Department of Education <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/index.html>.

Tackling community and system-level factors:

- Awareness-raising efforts around how the country is impacted when Latinos are not well educated, as well as the use of data to paint a picture and to ensure accountability. This could include efforts such as celebrating bilingualism and highlighting the importance of addressing root problems and needs of the whole family.
- Addressing contributing factors to disinvestment such as school funding and housing segregation¹⁵

Creative use and building of resources:

- Partnering with the sectors that are most impacted by the lack of well-educated workers, such as the tech sector. One participant pointed to the work of the Silicon Valley Education Foundation (SVEF) as an example. SVEF is partnering with local school districts and community advocates, to close the achievement gap for Latinos and African Americans by promoting A-G (courses required for entrance to University of California and California State) for all high school students, as well as promoting best practices in STEM education, offering programming, and supplying STEM equipment and curricula in schools.

"[I]f we're ever going to take on the disinvestment in our communities, we have to bring African-Americans and Latinos together."

Alberto Retana

President and CEO, Community Coalition
([Click here for video of remarks](#))

- Participants also called for bringing training and preparation for high tech careers into low performing schools to ensure that young people who need opportunity the most don't end up left out of new technology. They noted that STEM education must begin during elementary school and that for some Latino communities, there needs to be a shift that supports parents in encouraging their children, particularly their daughters, to aim for careers in tech (e.g. computer programming) and develop important skills such as computational thinking.¹⁶

- Using data to guide education policy as well as program planning (e.g., programs or career counseling offered in schools based on expected growth of particular industries).
- Improving school quality by incentivizing teachers and principals with effective track records to teach in underserved communities.

In all of these efforts, communities and advocates must ensure that youth themselves, parents, and impacted groups have an active role in contributing to and leading the work. As one participant put it, "when parents are the ones leading, the ones delivering the message, it changes the conversation." Participants also noted, however, that parents and other community members may have jobs or other obligations that prevent them from joining in some advocacy efforts (e.g., a city council meeting may be during working hours), so a range of engagement levels and opportunities at the local government level should be more readily available.

As in other areas, collaboration, building community support, and increasing political will can be key to changing the status quo and a variety of advocacy methods may be needed. Several advocates have found that college and preparation for college during high school are important leverage points, and that collaboration across sectors and communities, is essential in creating change in these institutions. Students in Los Angeles fought for--and won--better access to college by getting their school district to align graduation requirements with college preparation expectations. Alberto Retana, President and CEO, Community Coalition, attributed this success to Latinos and African-Americans working together to address the root causes that were obstructing their access to opportunity. Retana reported that, 11 years later, Los Angeles Unified School District has a graduation rate of 75% with college

15 The factors contributing to community disinvestment are complex and include at a minimum housing segregation and school funding. For related articles on disinvestment and school funding please see City Lab from The Atlantic. "Mapping the Continuing Culture of Disinvestment in Baltimore's Black Neighborhoods" available at <http://www.citylab.com/housing/2015/11/the-continuing-culture-of-disinvestment-in-baltimore-black-neighborhoods/416448/> and Urban Institute. "Segregated neighborhoods mean segregated schools" available at <http://www.urban.org/urban-wire/segregated-neighborhoods-mean-segregated-schools>

16 Carnegie Mellon University's Center for Computational Thinking defines the term as "a way of solving problems, designing systems, and understanding human behavior that draws on concepts fundamental to computer science."

preparatory-level graduation requirements. He believes this success came about "because black and brown students came together and demanded that they deserved a right to go to college and that it wasn't enough to be promising opportunity if you weren't dealing with the conditions, if you weren't dealing with the fact that students don't even have access to those classes." In addition to ensuring students are prepared for higher education, communities need to make college affordable. To answer President Obama's challenge to make community college free," said Mayor Garcetti, "this year every graduating student from LA's Unified School District [will] be guaranteed free tuition at community college."

BUILDING EFFECTIVE COALITIONS

The need for meaningful cross-sector cross-community collaborations was a major theme of the summit, and was identified as a necessary component of coalition building. The following are considerations for creating and sustaining impactful coalitions:

- Meaningful partnerships across sectors must include opportunities for listening to communities and commitment to an action agenda for equity.
- Trust-building is essential because trust leads to power sharing and collective decision-making.
- Coalition building needs to include stakeholder education so members are all on the same page or at least working with the same information.
- A coalition's makeup must be sensitive to place, reflecting the community and its needs.
- Coalitions need strong leadership, which includes setting accurate expectations for participants on what is required and what is possible.
- Latinos and African-Americans, along with other groups, should work together and welcome collaboration with people from different backgrounds, recognizing that almost anyone can be an ally.

Knowledge-building beyond school systems

Although schools and school systems are essential to building pathways to opportunity, Summit speakers and participants also identified many other methods for knowledge-building outside of the K-12 system that can create change. These approaches can originate from within government and public school systems or can be initiated by the private sector or by communities. Some examples of the efforts discussed at the Summit include:

- Prioritization of early intervention and early childhood education. As Summit speaker Angela Glover Blackwell, CEO, PolicyLink, put it, "[t]he day has long past when we talk about K-12 education, it's clearly early childhood through community college at a minimum."
- Focusing on competency-based education¹⁷ and looking at young people's actual capacity, not just the courses they've taken.
- Undertaking, within education, "ban the box"¹⁸ efforts similar to those in the employment advocacy space. Mayor Garcetti explained that his city has worked with colleges and universities on accepting students with criminal records, citing education's link to lower rates of recidivism.

17 Competency-based education as described by CompetencyWorks.org "a systems model in which (1) teaching and learning are designed to ensure students are becoming proficient by advancing on demonstrated mastery and (2) schools are organized to provide timely and differentiated support to ensure equity". More on competency-based education at <http://www.ed.gov/oii-news/competency-based-learning-or-personalized-learning>

18 According to National Employment Law Project "Ban the box" refers to removing the conviction history check-box from a job application. For more on "Ban the Box" see NELP "'Ban the Box' is a Fair Chance for Workers with Records" available at <http://www.nelp.org/content/uploads/Ban-the-Box-Fair-Chance-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

- Supporting non-traditional avenues for learning (e.g., Khan Academy, a free online learning resource, and Lynda.com, a website offering courses in business, technology and creative skills).
- Leveraging the role of cities in local civic education.¹⁹ Mayor Garcetti explained that the city partnered with a local university to create a program, Civic University, that has taught “generations of people how city government works, how zoning works, how affordable housing gets built, how you get a park done”, the ultimate goal of which is to create a more engaged citizenry in L.A. well beyond his time as mayor. Los Angeles also uses libraries as a hub for education and assistance around citizenship. Mayor Garcetti noted that trained librarians and citizenship corners in public libraries have helped “50,000 people in the City of L.A. begin or finish their pathway to citizenship.”

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND OPPORTUNITY

The Mikva Challenge is a Chicago-based organization that works with youth in several cities around the country to “involve young people in civic engagement through hands-on, project-based learning that deeply transforms students’ civic attitudes, skills, and sense of agency.”²⁰ Several Mikva Challenge students spoke at the Summit, sharing 2-minute speeches that they developed through a curriculum called Project Soapbox which teaches students how to develop and deliver effective speeches as a means for civic empowerment.

Wagner Escobedo, 12th grade, Los Angeles Unified School District, shared the challenges faced by undocumented immigrants and the many ways that they contribute to the U.S. economy and to society, ending with a call to action that included concrete steps such as voting for representatives who are committed to addressing this issue and supporting relevant local organizations such as human rights groups.

Kimberly Gomez, 11th grade, Los Angeles Unified School District, raised the issue of alcohol and substance abuse advocating on behalf of the Promesa Boyle Heights campaign to build a wellness center at her high school, saying that schools struggle to help students with health and wellness issues so more advocacy is needed. The wellness center would be “a place where people from the community, families could go to and receive the support that they don't get anywhere else,” said Gomez. She closed by asking the audience to support the wellness center initiative, saying “we need to get this built...so people can grow.”

Cyanne Rangel, 11th grade, Los Angeles Unified School District, spoke about gentrification, and the changes she saw in her own Boyle Heights neighborhood, a historically Latino community known for its activism, and feeling unwelcomed in her own neighborhood. She told the audience that, although change is valuable, it needs to come from within the community, calling for investment in local businesses and prioritization of rent control and affordable housing. Otherwise, she said, “all of our history embedded in Boyle Heights will be erased.”

¹⁹ More on the vital role cities and city government can play in fostering a culture of health available at <https://cityesspeak.org/2016/11/11/why-cities-must-keep-equity-a-central-focus-in-building-a-culture-of-health/>

²⁰ The Mikva Challenge. “The Mikva Model” available at <http://www.mikvachallenge.org/programs/the-mikva-model/>

CREATING AND SUSTAINING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Without living wage jobs, community members struggle day-to-day and cannot afford to meet basic needs such as housing, food, and health care, much less make real progress towards realizing the American dream of opportunity for all. As discussed earlier, over 25% of Latinos live in poverty and even full-time Latino workers are more likely to hold low-paid service jobs. Summit participants identified several barriers that hinder economic opportunity among Latinos including high costs of child care, lack of investment in their neighborhoods, and restrictions imposed by local, state, and federal law.

Angela Glover Blackwell explained that creating opportunity and ensuring equity through good schools, jobs, and health for everyone has moved from a moral imperative to an economic necessity. Without these preconditions, our future adults, the majority of whom will be people of color, will not have the ability to start the businesses or buy the goods and services our economy depends on. As one example, Glover Blackwell asked, "if the people who were going to be the home buyers are not prepared to buy homes, what happens to...baby boomers who thought they were going to retire on the value of their homes?"

Ensuring that each young person has the ability to contribute to the economy and realize their own potential will require individual strategies, such as mentoring, as well as policy change and a shift in the way we talk and think about the career options for communities that have often been left behind.

It will also require looking beyond simplistic measures of economic vitality such as total number of jobs to looking at what drives long-term investment in communities. In many cases, investments are tied to land use policies, zoning rules, and infrastructure investments, all of which are primarily controlled by local governments.

Achieving Change

Improving educational attainment, both in high school and post-secondary education, will certainly better position Latinos for economic success, but other educational measures are needed as well. Many Summit participants agreed that economic success starts with education but felt this needed to include a better connection between school experience, job preparation and financial education. Ideas to achieve this include:

- Making employment opportunities part of high school curricula—allowing students to develop hard and soft job skills, as well as social capital, through internships and apprenticeships. (Participants noted that many who most need access to opportunity don't possess the social capital that others in more privileged circumstances possess and have accumulated over generations.

"If we're going to make opportunity real, we have to transform the conditions that make accessing opportunity unlikely. Our nation prides itself on creating opportunity...[b]ut how probable is that if the conditions in their community have not improved? For me, we have to move this notion from possibility to probability and hopefully one day to a definite reality."

Alberto Retana

President and CEO, Community Coalition

[\(Click here for video of remarks\)](#)

- Teaching the fundamentals of creating wealth in schools, including money management skills and financial literacy (e.g., information about personal banking, good vs. bad debt, credit scores).
- Encouraging risk-taking, self-empowerment, and self-esteem among students. This point was underscored by Donnel Baird, Founder and CEO, BlocPower and Carolina Huaranca Mendoza, Principal, Kapor Capital. Baird pointed out that “when you come from communities of color, immigrant families, you may be the first person in your family to go to college or graduate school and the pressure that comes with that is immense.” Both agreed, however, that failure—and learning from failure—was a necessary step along the road to success. Entrepreneurs like Baird and Huaranca may hear “no” a hundred times before finally getting to “yes,” and we need to teach students that huge risks and perseverance through failure are sometimes necessary to achieve their goals.

The private sector has an important leadership role to play in driving these changes, but this needs to happen in concert with policy so that today's students can become the labor force we'll need tomorrow. Many stakeholders have a role to play in creating economic opportunity including the education system, business sector, government, and philanthropy along with impacted community members owning these efforts. Strategies also must be place-

based and local governments in particular can have major influence through their regulatory and funding roles. Zoning and land use decisions can invite investment in communities (by homeowners and businesses) or can keep it out. Easing regulations for small businesses can nurture them, while tightening regulations can stifle new initiatives or push them into friendlier communities.

Summit speaker Ashley Swearengin, Mayor, City of Fresno, explained that soon after becoming mayor, she realized that “the very rules of the game that were driving investment away from the neighborhoods that needed the most were rules that city government controlled. So we had to change those rules.” Some other strategies she and her administration employed included directing infrastructure funding to the parts of the city that most needed it (working in close collaboration with residents, business and nonprofits), as well as leveraging small wins to build a culture of success. Starting with relatively easy problems identified by community members, such as fixing broken streetlights, adding stop signs and speed bumps, or dealing with stray dogs, has led to conversations about larger efforts like bringing in private investors to help provide affordable housing.

“[I]f you see a neighborhood that looks amazing you can thank your local government. If you see neighborhood that does not look amazing you should be asking, what's going on [in] this neighborhood when it relates to your land use policy and your zoning regulations. And of course, that's the platform that then either invites that reinvestment by property owners, home owners, et cetera, or it causes that investment [to] flee that area and continue to find the next place.”

Mayor Ashley Swearengin
City of Fresno
[\(Click here for video of remarks\)](#)

Even communities that have had success increasing employment rates and educational attainment must continue to push for equity for every single community member. Mayor Garcetti said that he thinks “every single day about not averaging out prosperity.” He explained that lower crime rates or unemployment rates don't matter if you were the victim of a shooting yesterday, or heard one on the street, or if you are the one who doesn't have a job. “For me, building a city of opportunity requires us to put a lens on where people are still suffering and where they still come short. That's a first step. The second step is then to look at what do we build to make sure that everybody has an equal shot moving forward,” said Mayor Garcetti. In keeping with that outlook, Mayor Garcetti noted that Los Angeles will be hiring 6,000 new workers, focusing on individuals with criminal records, former foster youth, and those from LA's poorest neighborhoods.

The city has also expanded LA's summer jobs program to 15,000 jobs. Although the public sector provides about two-thirds of the positions, the mayor encouraged private sector participation; “there hasn't been a CEO who's come into my office...that I haven't talked to about my summer jobs program.” When Hollywood was facing criticism over the lack of people of color nominated for the Oscars, the mayor used that attention to push for

summer jobs as a first step towards long-term investment in youth and getting people of color in front of and behind the cameras, resulting in hundreds of jobs committed.

Although much of economic opportunity is driven by the business sector and government putting in place practices and policies that support well-paid jobs in communities that need them, we must also prepare young people to grasp these opportunities through their own career development. Mentorships and internships can help them build social capital and widen their thinking about potential careers or work settings. Community-based programs who hire from broaden their communities are also providing role models to the clients they serve. A common theme across all of the issues discussed at the Summit was the need for young people to be able to see leaders who look like them. Many of the leaders who spoke at the Summit work in the communities they grew up in, and representatives of community-based groups in attendance also highlighted the importance of this. For example, when Jose Arrellano of Homeboy Industries works with young people who come to Homeboy, he is able to tell them "I've been there, I know what you're feeling...I know what it feels like to be in the streets, I know what it feels like to be homeless, not have electricity. And I'm able to give them that hope and show them what I did to change my life." He shared that although he faced many challenges, it was those experiences that let him say "my life has so much purpose today." Creating and sustaining opportunity must include nurturing and supporting individual leaders from within the populations who have the least access to opportunity, so they can succeed, and help their peers to succeed as well.

CREATING OPPORTUNITY THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Many Latinos and other community members want to take full control of their own economic destiny and build personal wealth through entrepreneurship. Fresno Unified School District, the 4th largest school district in California, trains every fifth- and sixth-grader in entrepreneurship and development of business plans. The District also includes entrepreneurship programs at other grade levels and is home to the nation's only entrepreneurship high school. Fresno's community colleges and the undergraduate and graduate programs at Fresno State also have entrepreneurship programs. Fresno's efforts seem to be paying off: Mayor Swearingin reports that among Fresno State students, the majority of whom are Hispanic, "by large numbers what they're doing [is] starting businesses."

BUILDING AND SUSTAINING AN EQUITY AGENDA

Creating healthy communities and access to opportunity for all community members requires a specific focus on—and plan for—achieving equity. It requires building equity into every aspect of policy and practice—in other words, ensuring “just and fair inclusion in a society in which all can participate and prosper.”²¹ Developing an equity agenda requires policy change, funding (from both government and private philanthropy), strong leadership, and community engagement. The barriers to this type of comprehensive change are great, from lack of transparency and accountability in government and other sectors, to lack of funding targeted at communities and populations that need it the most, to misperceptions about these communities and populations. But the potential reward is even greater—a society in which everyone starts at the same starting line and, as Alberto Retana put it, has the *probability*, not just the *possibility* of success.

For any problem that exists, there are innovative solutions out there. However, what we have yet to do as a country, says Angela Glover Blackwell, “is to pull all of that knowledge together, translate it into policies at the local, state, and national level, and stand on the platform of that policy agenda to be able to reach the levels of scale that we need.” This means that each sector needs to contribute by making equity their priority:²²

- Businesses need to ensure they have diversity in both governance and hiring, as well as looking at how their products and services impact communities. In addition to ensuring that their services make “communities strong and healthy and participating they need to use their “policy voice” to ensure children enter school ready to succeed, that community members can afford housing, and that workers’ rights are protected.
- Governments need to move beyond simply having offices for opportunity, equity, and diversity and should be using their resources and their leverage to make sure every community member has access to education and economic opportunity and can participate fully.
- Philanthropy needs to ensure that every program or initiative they fund, from the arts to the environment, is tackling the issue of equity and helping the underserved.

Glover Blackwell also stressed the importance of making sure the most vulnerable communities and individuals can fully participate in society and cautioned against inaction resulting from worrying that targeting some means forgetting others. She said, “In that worry, we end up not doing anything and we lose the moment...what we have to understand is when we focus on those who are most vulnerable, we are doing the work at scale because when you get it right for the most vulnerable you get it right for everybody.” She shared the example of curb cuts on sidewalk corners, which were installed after advocacy from disability rights groups, but have lowered traffic fatality rates for entire communities by encouraging people to cross safely at crosswalks.

21 Angela Glover Blackwell, “America’s Tomorrow: Race, Place, and the Equity Agenda,” available at <http://www.whatworksforamerica.org/ideas/americas-tomorrow-race-place-and-the-equity-agenda/#.WCsYdC0rLIU>.

22 Based on the remarks of Angela Glover Blackwell.

Achieving Change

In this area, perhaps more than any of the others discussed in this paper and at the Summit, the importance of public perception and political will cannot be understated. Participant discussions of creating and sustaining an equity agenda touched on a broad set of actions and strategies that involve public sector, private sector, communities, and individuals.

On the topic of the media and to how public figures could further support the creation and use of an equity agenda, one participant suggested making the idea of equity more popular—turning it into the next big trend or fad—so that people would want to be associated with it. This would need to be followed, however, by work to deepen that discussion and keep it at the forefront of public discourse. Other strategies shared by participants include:

- Increasing Latino representation in media. This can start as early as elementary school, as evidenced by the Latino Film Institute Cinema Youth Project which allows students to learn about all aspects of filmmaking and create their own short films.²³
- Fostering recognition of—and therefore incentives for—businesses' efforts. Jason N. Chavez, *Generation Indigenous Ambassador*, Aspen Institute Center for Native American Youth, shared an idea that was generated at the Aspen Institute Latinos and Society Program 2016 convening *Unlocking Latino Millennial Civic Potential*: an Aspen Leaf certification for "Good Citizenship" that would recognize businesses and others who—among other efforts—increase/build pipelines for Latino leadership, foster diversity among employees, and work with Latino organizations. The certification would have different levels similar to the LEED standards for green buildings.²⁴
- Using disaggregated data to address problems. One participant gave the example of making sure that equity-focused policies in the workplace look at data and establish metrics for outreach, recruitment, and hiring. Another suggested creating a clearinghouse of the information that exists on Latino market growth, recruitment partners, and programs to help make the business case for diversity and inclusion.
- Ensuring intentionality. Participants felt that moving from diversity to inclusion to power (one of the lunch discussion themes of the Summit) required *intentional* efforts to include Latinos (and others) at the table and in decision-making, intentional outreach efforts towards and recruitment of Latinos, and focused attention on Latino issues.
- Looking beyond traditional media. Television, newspapers, and even traditional websites are not reaching young people. Lashon Amado explained that social media is the best way to reach millennials, saying "they are not online, they're on Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram, and that's about it." He suggested that traditional media and movements led by young people need to work together and leverage each other's resources and platforms.

"One of the big things is trust is your currency... And it's certainly your currency in your own community, across communities. But it's also a currency with people you are pushing towards a better world."

Juan Salgado

President and CEO, Instituto del Progreso Latino
([Click here for video of remarks](#))

23 Pasadena Independent. "Edward James Olmos Inspires Madison Elementary School Film Students." March 23rd, 2016. Available at <http://www.pasadenaindependent.com/featured/edward-james-olmos-inspires-madison-elementary-school-film-students/>

24 For more details on this idea and others from the 2016 Aspen Institute Latinos and Society Program's convening on *Unlocking Latino Millennial Civic Potential* see [Activating Latino Millennial Civic Power](#) a report of the Aspen Institute Latinos and Society Program.

Ensuring that those who are most affected are informing and driving change was another focus of discussion throughout the day. Strategies shared to accomplish this includes:

- Ensuring that diversity is never confined to a single person. As Luz Vega-Marquis, President and CEO, Marguerite Casey Foundation, explained, “[r]esearch shows that if you put one Latino and one African American on a board, it’s not going to work. You have to have at least two or three for them to learn to work together and then advocate on behalf of communities and educate the rest of the community about issues in where the foundation funds.”
- Truly listening to communities--asking what they need and then acting on that. Vega-Marquis shared the way the Marguerite Casey Foundation does its work: “we ask, we listen and then we act.” This means that they do not bring in the same stock set of resources to each community. In Albuquerque, they are working to bring alternatives to predatory lenders—companies with fair rates who help borrowers rebuild credit—because community members told them that “in certain neighborhoods... there were more predatory lenders than there were fast food outlets”. In New Orleans, they created incubators with phones and computers available, in response to the requests of young people who had received job training, but didn’t have tools to find and apply for available jobs.
- Valuing the expertise of young people. Lashon Amado explained that we need to see and value the experience and perspective of young people living in poverty because “when it comes to finding solutions,

they are the ones who know—they are the ones who are living this every day.” Other participants echoed this insight, and emphasized that young people must have a voice and a role in shaping the policies that determine their futures by creating—or hindering—access to opportunity.

- Getting out of the way. Summit participants and speakers particularly emphasized that young people must be given the support—but also the freedom—to create change in their communities. As Alberto Retana, put it “you give [young people] the space to lead and get out the way... [Y]oung people are ready to lead and drive change. It’s oftentimes the adults that just get in front of them.”

“I think that what we have to understand is when we focus on those who are most vulnerable, we are doing the work at scale because when you get it right for the most vulnerable you get it right for everybody.”

Angela Glover Blackwell
([Click here for video of remarks](#))

- Making sure those who do have a seat at the table have the support and confidence they need, allowing them to reach back and bring others along. Julie Chavez Rodriguez, Special Assistant to the President and Senior Deputy Director of Public Engagement for The White House, shared that what gives her hope is young leaders like Lashon, Jason, mark!, and others who are “not only taking their rightful seat at the table, but making sure that they are reaching back and bringing others along.”
- Anticipating, celebrating, and building upon success and “small wins” was echoed throughout the day. Lashon Amado discussed the importance of “small wins” in grassroots advocacy, saying that youth organizers need short-term victories “so they can be empowered and want to continue the fight.”
- De-mystifying civic engagement and making activism easier. Lashon Amado explained that young people—and others—need to be educated about all the ways that they can engage beyond just voting. He shared another idea from the *Unlocking Latino Millennial Civic Potential* convening, an online platform called #mycomunidad. Users would simply create an account to learn about online and offline ways to get engaged in their community (e.g., work, school, family, neighborhoods, and places of faith). They could use the platform to create or find graphics to share on social media, highlighting data or stories about issues in their communities.
- Ramping up “get out the vote” and other political efforts. The actor Edward James Olmos has spent much of his life encouraging people—particularly Latinos—to vote, and spoke at the Summit about how much power is held by those who make their voice heard through voting. He stated, “make sure when they look

at you, when they look at a Latino, they say 'be careful, those people vote!'" Chavez also spoke about his efforts to register young Native Americans to vote, emphasizing that millennials, including those who live on reservations, which are sovereign land, may need explicit education about how even city-council level decisions can impact them and their communities.

- Undertaking a range of advocacy efforts, both as individuals, and through organizations. Abigail Golden-Vázquez Executive Director of the Aspen Institute Latinos and Society Program pointed to actions each one of us can take to help create equity and opportunity "[w]e can reject the status quo, we can insist on fairer distribution of resources, we can vote at the ballot box or with our dollars, we can ask who is at the table in our board rooms, in our offices, in our schools, in our local and federal government, and we can speak up when we see that there are people left out."

CONCLUSION

A full and fair shot at opportunity is essential to educational attainment, to economic success, and to health for Latinos and all Americans. An equity agenda, where equity is the concern of all sectors, and of all policy and practice, is key to achieving that goal. This will require full participation from the Latino community, one of the fastest growing demographics in America, and an intentional focus on those who are most disadvantaged and those who have traditionally been left behind. The current inequities that exist must be addressed today, to ensure that current and future generations can realize the American dream and its inherent promise of a better life.

"As a nation, we have not only risked losing our moral soul with de facto segregation, staggering rates of incarceration, and vast differences in the education offered our children based on where and to whom they were born, I would argue that we are risking the very foundation of what has made our country so successful generation after generation - the idea that anyone could work hard, and make a better life, if not for themselves, at least for their children. This is America's promise. It's never been perfect, but we have to strive to make good on that promise once again."

Abigail Golden-Vázquez

Executive Director, Latinos and Society Program

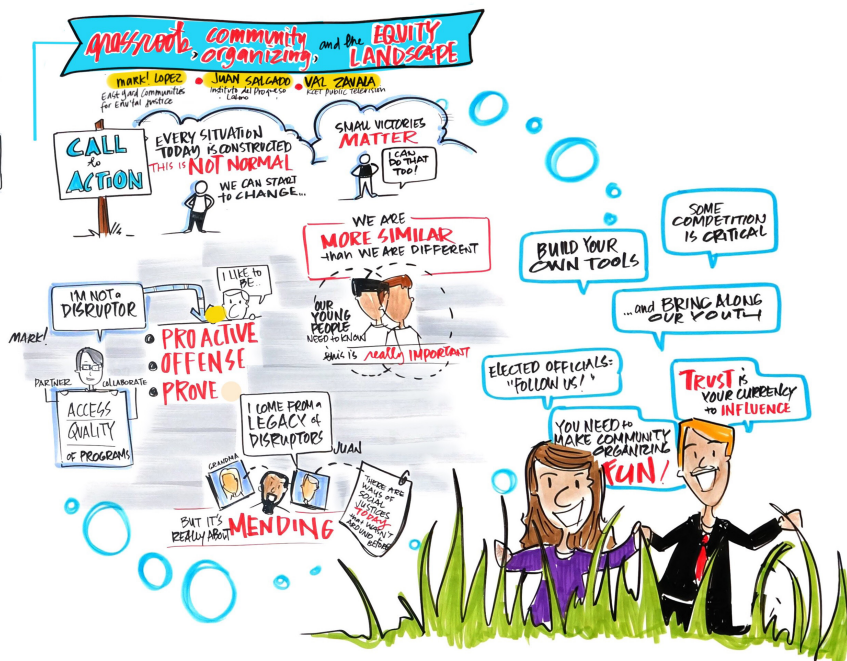
[\(Click here for video of remarks\)](#)



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