


May 17, 2022

To the residents of West Fresno:

For the past year and a half, we have been honored to meet and work with so many of you through our community engagement on the West Fresno California Avenue Neighborhood project in partnership with the Fresno Housing Authority. March 2022 marked the end of our contract term in this planning effort, which is a 24-month process funded by the [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grant](#).

In March of 2021, we officially started our partnership with Fresno Housing Authority as the Lead Community Engagement Consultant, to guide, facilitate, create, and most importantly, to implement a **dignity-infused approach** to community based planning through community engagement activities of multiple sizes. Our desired outcomes throughout the process were not only that current residents become centered in the planning process, but that they also become activated and empowered to self-determine *how* they'd like to live and to grow their communities. We hoped our work would spark new ideas and action-oriented civic engagement. Our approach was to ensure outcomes were not predetermined, to anchor each engagement activity in a clear opportunity for participatory decision making with community members, and to build capacity for ongoing resident-led community development beyond the life of this planning project. While visioning for the future, we advocated for the immediate interventions needed to alleviate suffering for residents facing severe housing insecurity, poverty, and environmental injustices. Our experience confirms that *it is possible to deliver transformative and impactful projects without perpetuating legacies of harm and erasure*.

Thrivance Group works to bring transformative justice into public policy, urban planning and community development, asserting that race, place, and joy matter in defining individual and community outcomes. When developing an approach to engagement and community-based planning, our priority is always honoring and enhancing the dignity of those who will be impacted by the project. Our early conversations and interviews with project partners, preliminary shared visioning activity, study of who lives in West Fresno and the challenges they face on a daily basis, review of past resident survey efforts and their conclusions, and in-person walkthrough and field study of the neighborhood led to the creation of a strategy that proposed 46 unique engagement activities across thirteen core focus areas. Each activity had a specific function and was designed to directly inform the final CAN Transformation Plan, creating opportunities for resident-leadership and coalition-building.

Fresno CAN has 13 core engagement focus areas, including:	Celebrating Interfaith Identities 1	Mindful Evaluation and Surveys 2
Enhancing Community Transportation and Mobility 3	Improving Social Cohesion 4	Fair Community Investment 5
Improving Education Outcomes 6	Equitable Public Housing Development 7	Improving Quality of Life 8
Community-Centered Public Safety Alternatives 9	Racial Equity and Social Justice 10	Reviving Civic Engagement 11
Promoting Community-Based Planning 12	Empowering Creative Expression 13	

At the end of March 2022, we had completed twelve community activities from the engagement strategy report, along with supporting over 100 resident-facing activities (450+ hours of interfacing directly with the community), 30+ resident meetings, 27 special community activities, ten community-wide events, and shared about the CAN work in three large planning industry convenings. Our Dignity Team, a group of local Fresno residents, were a key part of CAN engagement, spending over 160 hours of on-the-ground canvassing, phone banking, conversations, and activity support. Beyond the CAN project, early conversations with community members led us to create the Spirit of West Fresno Oral History Project, a space for residents to share their community stories and life histories in a living, ever-growing archive.

Our work with West Fresno CAN was a labor of love. Our dedication to Fresno began long before this project, with both our personal experiences of growing up and living in this city and with the opportunity to make a lasting positive impact through other projects like the displacement avoidance policy recommendation in the Here to Stay report. Throughout the countless hours of meetings, discussions, conversations, and activities, it has been an honor to learn from and build with the residents of West Fresno. We are dreaming of a city where everyone has access to dignified housing, clean air and water, healthy food, easily accessible transportation, big beautiful parks, recreation, fun, music, laughter, and joy.

Our final offering to the residents of West Fresno is the commitment to continue building with you to achieve the vision we share for dignified housing and thriving communities. We would love the opportunity to continue collaborating and to stay a part of your communities. Please reach us at info@thrivanceproject.com if you would like to continue working toward this future together. We thank you for all that you've shared with us and hope to hear from you soon!

**"I'm just from a place
where you feel warm
and loved and you
understand why that is.
It isn't because of the
things that are missing.
It's because of the things
that are there."**

Devoya Mayo,
Spirit of West Fresno Oral History participant

Sincerely,

Navjot Heer of Thrivance Group