

In December we engaged community residents in Modesto and Turlock through discussions with Seniors at the King-Kennedy Memorial Center and students at the California State University – Stanislaus. Thanks to our partners in the West Modesto community and the University, we were able to:

- Survey: 40 people
- Engage in a focused group discussion: 56 people

From the conversations with community members in these two locations, we learned the following concerns and suggestions held by residents in several areas:

California State University – Stanislaus, 12/6 (2 Sessions)

1. Civic Engagement and Community Building

- Concerns: Lack of accessible and engaging opportunities for participation and limited information about community meetings and resources. Also, fear of judgment and lack of efficacy in influencing processes. There are also language barriers and lack of understanding of government processes that hinder the ability to fully participate.
- Suggestions: Start civic engagement education earlier, with a focus on local government. And reach out to college towns, especially with students from out of area. Providing bilingual/multilingual education and supportive resources as well as offering incentives for participation, like food vouchers or gift cards would be helpful too. Also, improving communication and outreach about meetings and resources would help improve engagement.

2. Economic and Social Health

- Concerns: Limited job opportunities, particularly for students and young professionals. Lack of relevant internship and volunteer opportunities. Financial pressures and time constraints make it difficult to pursue opportunities due to low wages and the high cost of living. Lack of access to affordable healthcare and other social services.
- Suggestions: Increase collaboration between businesses, government, and nonprofits to create more diverse job and internship opportunities. Offer flexible schedules, remote work options, and financial support for internships and volunteer work. Higher wages and policies needed to address the high cost of living and improve access to affordable healthcare and other social services. Provide culturally specific internship and volunteer opportunities and offer career counseling and guidance to students and young professionals.

3. Transportation

- Concerns: Complex and confusing bus system with unclear schedules and long wait times and limited connections between different routes and lack of service in rural areas. Gas is expensive and there is a lack of affordable rideshare options.
- Suggestions: Improve signage and information resources for the bus system to make the bus system more user-friendly with better technology and accessibility features. Increase bus frequencies and expand services to rural areas. Develop more affordable and accessible rideshare options. Install safety buttons and improve lighting at bus stops.

4. Housing Experiences and Development

- Concerns: Rising rents and limited affordability of housing, especially single-family homes. Unfair housing practices from landlords, such as rent increases without notice, and high credit score requirements are making it difficult to qualify for housing. And there is a lack of housing options for low-income individuals and families.
- Suggestions: Implement rent control measures and tenant protections as well as increase affordable housing options, including single-family homes. Address discriminatory housing practices and ensure fair treatment for all tenants. Provide financial assistance programs and support services for low-income renters. Encourage responsible landlord practices and promote community awareness of tenant rights.

5. Climate Resilience

- Concerns: Lack of awareness and preparedness for extreme weather events like flooding and wildfires. Limited communication and outreach from government agencies and community organizations about resources and preparedness measures and a lack of tailored information and resources for different communities and populations.
- Suggestions: Improve communication and outreach about weather warnings and preparedness resources. Provide workshops and educational programs on climate resilience and disaster preparedness. Develop tailored information and resources for different communities and populations, including translations and culturally appropriate materials. Invest in infrastructure and mitigation measures to address specific climate risks in the region. Encourage community-based initiatives and partnerships to build resilience.

Seniors Group, 12/5

A focus group conducted with Seniors from West Modesto, although shorter than our usual focus group sessions, provided us an opportunity to learn from community members on the needs they see in the community and how to address them. Through this discussion, we learned from West Modesto seniors that in the following areas their concerns and suggestions are:

1. Civic Engagement and Community Building:
 - Concerns: Townhall meetings felt too high-level and inaccessible for residents. Lack of tangible results from meetings. Need for increased visibility and communication from public officials. Desire for collaboration with community organizations like churches.
 - Suggestions: Slow down the pace of townhall meetings and tailor them to residents' needs. Hold meetings at safer times for seniors. Increase public information and outreach efforts. Work closer with churches and other community organizations.
2. Economic and Social Health:
 - Concerns: Lack of affordable healthcare and meaningful job opportunities. Lack of transparency and communication from government agencies. Feeling excluded from decision-making processes.
 - Suggestions: Advocate for affordable healthcare and better access to medical care. Invest in job creation and career development opportunities. Improve communication and transparency about government projects and decisions. Involve residents in decision-making processes.
3. Transportation:

- Concerns: Crowded highways and lack of reliable public transportation options. Difficulty accessing destinations without personal vehicles.
 - Suggestions: Improve public transportation infrastructure and expand service to cover more areas. Implement dial-a-ride services and senior citizen discounts. Make bus stops more accessible and comfortable. Improve road conditions and implement traffic calming measures.
4. Housing experiences and development:
- Concerns: Rising interest rates and difficulty accessing affordable housing, especially for entry-level buyers. Unfair housing practices and discrimination against certain groups. High cost of housing maintenance and upkeep.
 - Suggestions: Implement programs to help with down payments and make housing more affordable. Address housing discrimination and ensure fair access to housing for all. Provide financial assistance for seniors and low-income residents to cover housing costs and maintenance.
5. Climate Resilience and Climate Change:
- Concerns: Lack of action and investment in addressing climate change issues. Feeling like concerns are not being heard or addressed.
 - Suggestions: Form a committee of concerned citizens to advocate for climate action. Increase awareness and education about climate change and its impacts. Invest in infrastructure and mitigation measures to address climate risks.

Residents, particularly seniors, crave deeper community engagement but face hurdles like inaccessible town halls and a lack of tangible results. Feeling disconnected from decision-makers, they urge collaboration with local officials and organizations. Solutions like improving the accessibility of meetings, boosting public outreach, and fostering transparency can help bring residents closer to decisionmakers. Affordable healthcare, meaningful jobs, improved public transportation, and senior-friendly infrastructure are also vital. And addressing housing affordability and discrimination is key, as is tackling climate change through community advocacy and education to fully respond to the community's concerns. By implementing these recommendations, Stanislaus County can create a more inclusive community where residents feel empowered and heard.