

EXECUTIVE REPORT

THE PEOPLES'S PLAN FOR ECONOMIC JUSTICE IN STANISLAUS COUNTY

2024

This report reflects the dedication and collaborative spirit of community members, organizations, local allies, and leaders, whose valuable contributions made this effort possible.

Who We Are: Our Team and Mission

The West Modesto Community Collaborative (WMCC) is an organization that connects communities through partnerships, constantly adapting and addressing complex systems and social determinants. The primary goal of this organization is to tackle health-related challenges affecting African American, Hispanic, Southeast Asian, and other communities within Stanislaus County.

The creation of The People's Plan for Economic Justice is a collective effort by WMCC, involving extensive collaboration, dedication, and commitment from numerous individuals and organizations. This initiative sought to amplify the voices of underserved and marginalized communities, providing them with a platform to share their perspectives on the future direction of the City of Modesto and Stanislaus County. The preparation of this report required meticulous planning and community engagement over two years. Numerous community meetings were held, featuring guest speakers who discussed the overall economic situation of the county and city.



The People's Plan for Economic Justice was created to amplify the voices and needs of underserved communities and promote fair and inclusive growth.

These activities generated important questions in five fundamental areas:

- 1) Community Engagement
- 2) Economic and Social Well-being
- 3) Transportation Options and Equity
- 4) Living Conditions
- 5) Climate Change

Project Motivation

Stanislaus County, located in California's Central Valley, is known for its rich agricultural history, diverse communities, and dynamic economy. Established in 1854, the county spans approximately 1,515 square miles and is home to over half a million people. The population has an average age of 34 and is composed of 61% Hispanic or Latino, 26% White (non-Hispanic), 7% Asian, and 3% African American individuals. In Stanislaus County, 80% of adults aged 25 or older have a high school diploma, but only 19% have a college degree or higher.

The county faces economic challenges, with 12% of residents living in poverty with an average annual household income of \$82,758, below the state average. The employment rate is 58%, and although a third of jobs offer growth opportunities, more than half of families in the county still struggle to meet their basic needs. Young and Latino workers face additional challenges, and only 13% of available jobs are considered "good jobs," leaving 41,000 workers in need of better job opportunities. For families to cover their basic needs, wages must rise to over \$16.00 per hour.



Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

In 2021, Stanislaus County updated its Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the 2022-2027 period to promote job creation and essential services. Shortly after, the Stanislaus Community Foundation launched Stanislaus 2030.

Investment Plan Stanislaus 2030

It is an initiative that brought together over 200 business, government, and civic leaders to drive economic progress through a diverse, inclusive, and sustainable economy. This 10-month project provided insights into economic stability, wage increases, and strategic partnerships.

The Stanislaus 2030 Investment Plan represents a key step in coordinating funding and expanding economic growth opportunities. However, **it does not fully address the racial, social, and economic challenges that impact underserved communities**, such as Indigenous people, people of color, immigrants, and those who speak only one language. These communities continue to face inequities that require specific attention and resources to achieve truly inclusive growth.

To address this need, **The People's Plan for Economic Justice** was created, which seeks to give a voice to these communities and support equitable and inclusive growth. For these initiatives to achieve a significant and sustainable impact, they must focus on equity, economic justice, and social inclusion.

Our Approach

The People's Plan for Community Economic Justice seeks to reduce inequities by focusing on policies that address injustices related to race, ethnicity, gender, culture, and economics.

Decades of neglect in low-income neighborhoods have deepened disparities in income, education, health, and housing, highlighting the urgent need for immediate action to address these growing gaps. Policymakers, officials, and leaders must take decisive action to eliminate these barriers and ensure fair access and equal opportunities for every community.



Our approach strengthens and uplifts communities to achieve lasting economic fairness. It focuses on inclusive, community-driven methods to ensure that economic justice reaches everyone. The People's Plan for Community Economic Justice works to reduce inequalities by addressing unfairness tied to race, ethnicity, gender, culture, and economics. It promotes equal opportunities while meeting the needs of marginalized groups. We have a clear vision with goals based on data on community needs, alongside genuine community involvement and leadership. Strong partnerships increase impact, while data-driven approaches guide action. Key steps include advocating for policy changes to reduce inequities, raising awareness to build support, and mobilizing the community to take action. These principles pave the way for resilient, thriving communities built on lasting economic fairness and opportunity.

Key steps to achieve lasting and sustainable economic equity



Advocating for policy changes to address systemic inequities



Raising awareness to build strong support



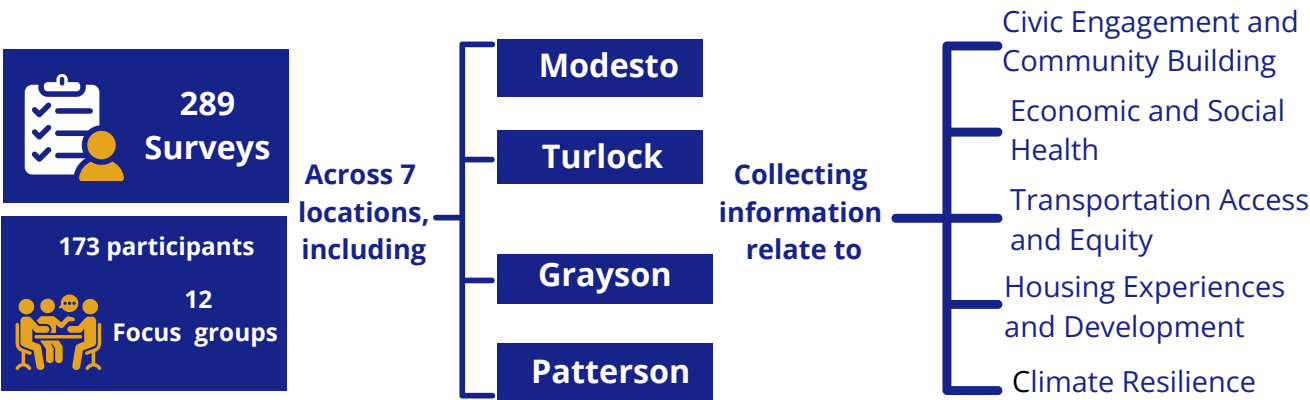
Mobilize the community to drive action

Together, these principles create a comprehensive path toward resilient, thriving communities, and lasting economic equity.

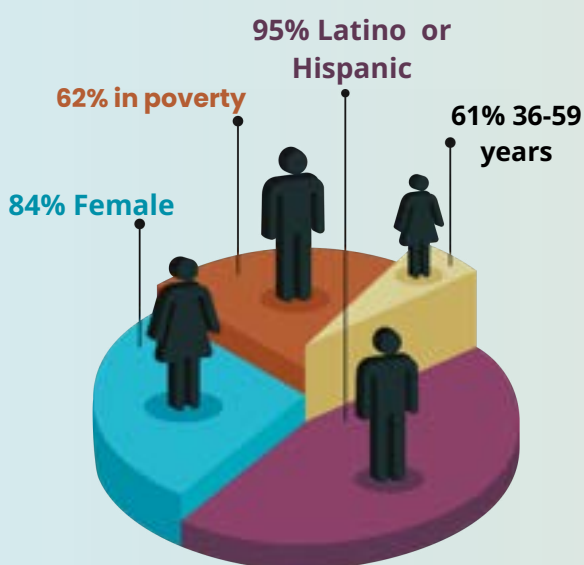


Using data and community feedback, the WCMCC identified communities in Stanislaus County with great need and limited opportunities. To gather information, we surveyed 289 residents and conducted 12 focus groups with 173 participants across seven locations, including Modesto, Turlock, Grayson, and Patterson. This approach enabled broad and diverse participation throughout the county. WCMCC, along with partners and residents of Stanislaus County, created a survey and organized focus groups to gather input on key topics: (1) Civic and Community Engagement, (2) Economic and Social Health, (3) Transportation Access and Equity, (4) Housing and Development, and (5) Climate Resilience.

The West Modesto Community Collaborative identified communities in Stanislaus County with great need and limited opportunities to capture experiences throughout



Results



Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Most survey participants were between 36 and 59 years old (61%), mainly female (84%), Hispanic/Latino (95%), and Spanish-speaking (44%). Most had a high school education or less (74%) and were living below the poverty line (62%). Nearly half had lived in Stanislaus County for over 10 years, and 34% were unemployed. Most participants lived with family members (55%) or partners (36%), while 7% lived alone. Most respondents had children: 42% had 1-2 children, 25% had 3-4, and 29% had no children. Among English speakers, 77% had lived in their current home for over 10 years, compared to 39% of Spanish speakers.

Civic Engagement and Community Building

Survey results show that 44% of participants feel there are enough cultural activities in the area, but only 36% have attended local workshops. Civic awareness is low: 24% know about the housing plan, 18% know about the general city plan, 44% know their city district, and 29% can name city council members. Just 38% feel that officials value their opinions, only 8% are very satisfied with opportunities to voice concerns, and 30% believe there are enough ways for residents, including youth, to get involved.

Focus group discussions revealed several barriers to civic engagement, including language obstacles, limited awareness of civic opportunities, and restricted access to resources. Participants stressed the need for community-building activities that promote trust, collaboration, and a strong sense of belonging among residents.

Community-Driven Solutions

Participants highlighted the need for educational programs, cultural activities, and community resources to strengthen engagement in the region's development.

Main recommendations

-  Reaching out directly to households
-  Enhancing advertising and information sharing
-  Establishing youth mentoring programs
-  Creating community centers and safe spaces
-  Providing educational opportunities and workshops
-  Addressing barriers to community participation



Economic and Social Health

The survey shows that many people are struggling to find good jobs. The unemployment rate is 34%. A significant number of respondents reported that their race, disability, gender, or sexual orientation create barriers to finding employment. Nearly half (49%) feel that they must leave the county for better opportunities, and only 9% believe local jobs pay enough to cover living costs. While 80% value a college or trade education, just 50% report good access to development courses, and 74% think schools should offer more training in entrepreneurship and business skills.

Participants reported major social health challenges: only 7% found affordable childcare options, and just 17% viewed healthcare as accessible. Key barriers to healthcare access included cost (67%), provider shortages (45%), location (34%), and language (29%). Additionally, one-third of respondents reported that accessing healthcare has become more difficult since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Focus groups identified major issues in economic stability, healthcare access, and social cohesion. Participants highlighted a shortage of well-paying jobs, high housing costs, limited financial services, and difficulties accessing affordable healthcare and mental health support. They also emphasized the need for stronger community engagement and cultural inclusivity.

Community-Driven Solutions



Participants highlighted the most critical economic developments needed in their communities:



Affordable housing



Improve childcare resources and support



Improved healthcare access and facilities



Higher-paying jobs and employment opportunities



Support for small businesses



Industrial and technological development



Educational services

Recognizing the importance of training for economic and social well-being, participants recommended focusing on healthcare education, technology skills, trade training, and general education. They emphasized career transition support and job readiness, with training aligned to local industries and key roles in Stanislaus County. Acknowledging childcare access as a major challenge, participants suggested making it more affordable, expanding availability, and offering financial support for low-income families. They also highlighted the need for better communication about existing services and a focus on enhancing childcare quality and safety.





Transportation Access and Equity

Survey findings revealed major transportation challenges in Stanislaus County. Seventy-four percent of respondents rely solely on driving, with 76% citing high costs as the main barrier to transportation. Additionally, 29% struggle with long travel distances and 18% lack alternative options. Many face lengthy commutes, with 10% traveling over an hour daily and 23% spending more than 20% of their income on transportation. Only 18% find local transportation convenient, and just 10% reported receiving information about transportation projects in the county. These results highlight the urgent need for more affordable and accessible transportation solutions.

Focus group discussions revealed significant transportation challenges, including limited accessibility and affordability, inefficient routes, infrastructure shortcomings, safety issues, and a lack of medical transport options. Many residents feel unsafe using public transit due to inadequate security, poorly maintained vehicles, and insufficient lighting. These safety concerns lead to transit use and limited mobility for the community.

Community-Driven Solutions



Some of the participants' proposals include:



Create travel programs like 'ride for a dollar' and bus cards for seniors.



Expand the coverage of public transportation to underserved areas and improve the consistency of bus schedules.



Improve safety and maintenance at public transportation facilities by installing adequate lighting, speed bumps, shelters, and seating at bus stops.



Build more sidewalks and install streetlights to create safer walking conditions.



Make transportation more accessible by promoting the use of existing resources, such as the app for purchasing bus tickets.





Housing Experiences and Development

Nearly 37% of respondents spend over half their income on housing, and another 32% allocate 30-50%. Housing diversity is also limited, with only 14% finding options very diverse. Demand is high for specific housing types, including single-family homes (55%), duplexes/triplexes (46%), apartments (36%), and townhomes (30%).

The primary barriers to accessing housing in the region include high costs (80%), limited housing supply (51%), and qualification requirements such as credit checks and application fees (48%). Additional challenges involve family size (28%) and language barriers (15%). Moreover, 21% of respondents reported facing discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or disability, with race being the most cited factor (50%), followed by gender (17%) and disability (12%).

Focus groups highlighted housing affordability and high rents as major barriers to securing stable homes. Discrimination and unfair practices worsen these issues, leading to evictions and long waits for assistance. Inadequate and poorly located housing, along with tenant exploitation, increase the risk of homelessness. Additionally, substandard living conditions and faulty infrastructure negatively affect community cleanliness and safety.

Community-Driven Solutions



Participants outlined several key ways they wish to contribute to enhancing housing experiences and development in their community.

Participants:



expressed a desire to actively attend meetings and workshops to engage in discussions and address housing issues directly.



emphasized the importance of improving information sharing and communication by continuing to conduct surveys and gather feedback from residents, ensuring that everyone's voices are heard in the decision-making process.



are committed to advocating for more affordable housing options by collaborating with developers and county officials to promote low-cost housing initiatives.



Nearly half of the survey respondents believe the region's climate has become less predictable, with 26% identifying climate resilience as their top concern. Additionally, 75% feel the area is not adequately prepared for climate change, and an overwhelming 96% have never received any communication from local government about climate resilience efforts. Participants highlighted several impacts of climate change, including health issues such as asthma and allergies, economic challenges like rising utility and food costs and job cancellations, environmental problems like increased heat and flooding, and disruptions to daily life, including travel difficulties and challenges for those in outdoor jobs. Furthermore, almost 60% of participants are worried that climate change will have a very negative impact on the region's overall health.

The focus group identified several key priorities for enhancing climate resilience in the region. They emphasized the need for active city involvement, effective communication, and strong community engagement. They called for government support to address rising food costs, job insecurity, and extreme weather. Key measures include environmental education, infrastructure improvements, financial and workplace support, health impact mitigation,

pesticide management, and securing necessary resources. These steps aim to build a more resilient community capable of facing climate challenges

Community-Driven Solutions



Participants proposed various solutions, including:

- 1 Expanding renewable energy efforts
- 2 Enhancing public education
- 3 Improving infrastructure
- 4 Implementing policy changes
- 5 Fostering community initiatives like recycling programs, support for the homeless, and local clean-up efforts





Conclusion

The survey results and discussion groups reveal urgent issues in Stanislaus County, such as the high unemployment rate and employment barriers due to discrimination based on race, disability, gender, and sexual orientation. Nearly half of the residents are considering moving due to low wages and limited local opportunities. The community also faces a lack of affordable childcare and healthcare, worsened by high costs and the impact of COVID-19.

Transportation issues, including long and costly commutes, and housing challenges, such as high costs and discrimination, add further pressure on residents. Addressing these issues with comprehensive strategies is key to building a stronger and fairer Stanislaus County.

Residents want to participate in civic and community activities but encounter obstacles due to a lack of information about opportunities and limited access to resources.

Participants highlighted the need for initiatives that strengthen the community, build trust, encourage collaboration, and foster a sense of belonging among all residents.

To solve the urgent issues in Stanislaus County, it's essential to work closely with the community. This means creating more jobs, expanding education and training programs, and improving access to basic services.

Better transportation options that are affordable, accessible, and efficient are also important to improve people's quality of life. Finding affordable housing options with policies that ensure equal access for everyone is a priority too.

Listening to and involving community members is key to finding real solutions. When residents are included in decision-making, it ensures strategies meet their needs and create lasting, fair results. This approach builds trust, empowers the community, and leads to positive, lasting change, helping make Stanislaus County strong and successful for everyone.

Acknowledgments



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