

Community Safety Perspectives Through Dialogue with San Francisco Residents

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Introduction

Purpose Statement

Founded in 2016, San Francisco Latino Parity and Equity Coalition (SFLPEC) is dedicated to ensuring equitable representation and resources for Latinos in San Francisco. Our Vision is a thriving and healthy Latino community in San Francisco embodied through our four pillars: Workforce, Place, Health, and Community Safety. We are deeply committed to uplifting the voices and experiences of those often marginalized within our community: children and youth, LGBTQIA+ individuals, newcomers and recent arrivals, the unhoused, and women. To do so, we unite 23 Latino-led agencies, boasting a cumulative workforce of over 900 employees and positively impacting over 60,000 individuals city-wide each year.

Our advocacy efforts reach residents primarily in Districts 9, 10, 11, 5, and 6, crafting tailored solutions year-round for Latino families. Our vision entails coordinating and marketing a robust network of vital services while driving structural changes to combat racial disparities. Our collective impact initiative seeks to enhance equity in our communities through:

- Advocacy & policy change
- Pursuing financial investment in the Latino Community
- Data gathering and community outreach
- Connecting our community to our services

The purpose of this initiative was to engage in a community data-gathering project that validated and refined our then-current approach, providing a clear pathway forward for our strategic plan. By actively involving our community, we aimed to gain valuable insights into a specific sector, fostering trust and stronger connections between SFLPEC and our community. Through that dialogue, we strived to co-create a narrative that accurately represented the needs and aspirations of our constituents, ensuring that our actions and initiatives are thoughtfully aligned with the voices and values of those we serve

Why Community Safety?

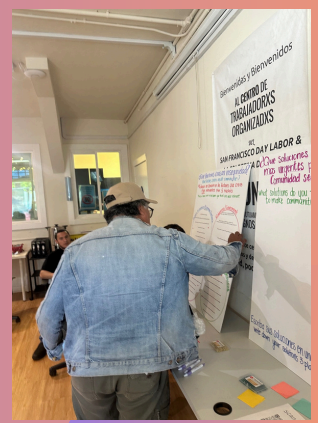
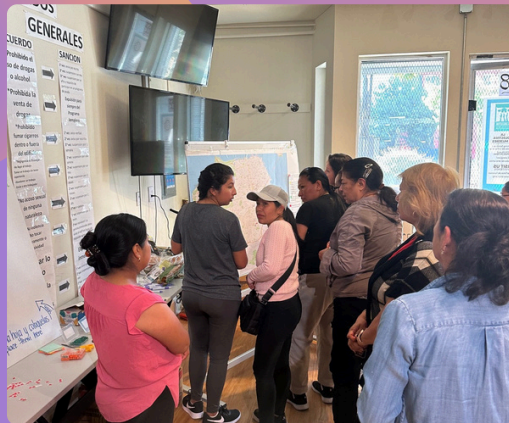
Community safety is a critical and current priority for San Francisco, and understanding community perspectives on this issue is paramount to effectively aligning the coalition's initiatives with the city's goals and needs. Community safety is a complex, intersectional topic that goes beyond traditional boundaries, intersecting with various sectors such as immigration housing, education, and the workforce. Community safety has emerged as a pressing concern, receiving attention from the media, city government, and residents alike. The prevailing narrative shaped by media coverage and city policies has underscored the urgency of addressing this issue. By exploring community safety, we aimed to develop an understanding of community perspectives around the root causes that create unsafe conditions and understand the solutions we can uplift as a community. Listening to community input is crucial to accurately tell the story of what is happening in our neighborhoods.

Methodology

We leveraged our member organizations to identify spaces, and developed a roadmap and activities with an evaluation consultant, codifying and synthesizing the data. We partnered with the following programs: The Day Laborer Program, La Colectiva, Galeria de la Raza, SF Community Ambassadors Program, and The Women's Building. Engaging with this diverse and community-oriented network ensured a more holistic understanding of community safety issues and allowed for the development of targeted, culturally sensitive, and inclusive connections. The community's importance lies in its richness of perspectives, and experiences, and the potential for collaborative, effective solutions.

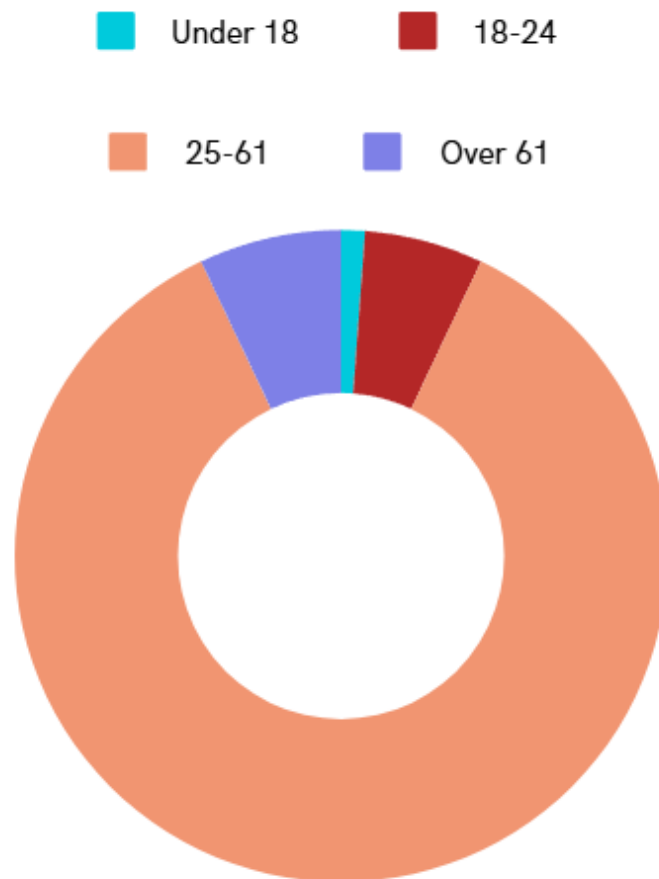
We made sure our activities were interactive and thought-provoking. We wanted to engage people in multiple ways by incorporating stickers, pins, and sticky notes. We crafted a set of activities adaptable to either a 15-minute engagement or a more immersive 45-minute workshop, depending on the context. Our intention was to provide diverse incentives, and recognizing and honoring people's time commitments was a key aspect.

The aim was to create an environment where individuals could contribute meaningfully within a short timeframe. To show our gratitude for the participant's valuable time and their shared interest in community safety, we offered fidget toys, coffee, donuts, bagels, and the exciting opportunity to win a Target gift card. Offering incentives for participation is crucial to the community as it not only motivates and acknowledges individuals' contributions but also fosters a sense of engagement, collaboration, and mutual support, ultimately building trust between our coalition and the community.



Through these efforts, we successfully gathered data from 85 participants across five events. The series commenced on October 18th and concluded on November 6th, 2023. The initiative involved three poster-based activities: Safety Mapping, Root Causes, and Solution Brainstorm.

Age of Participants (85 Total)



Activities:

- **Safety Mapping:** This activity consisted of a large map of San Francisco attached to a poster board. Participants were given red, green, and yellow push pins to place on the map. Red pins signified locations in which the participant had witnessed or been a victim of a crime, yellow pins signified locations in which the participant felt unsafe due to street safety or cleanliness, and green pins signified locations in which participants felt safe.
- **Root Causes:** We encouraged participants to share their opinions on the factors that may contribute to unsafe communities. We provided a list of 34 factors in the following sectors: economic, societal, governmental, and family/individual. Participants were given 5 stickers to place on the factors they deemed most impactful to community safety.
- **Solutions Brainstorm:** We asked participants to share ideas on creating safer communities. Participants were given post-it notes on which they wrote down any ideas or comments they wanted to share, they then placed the notes on a poster board.

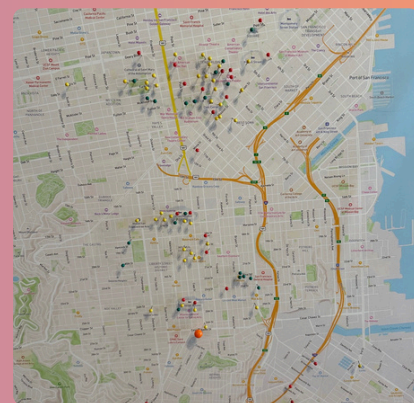
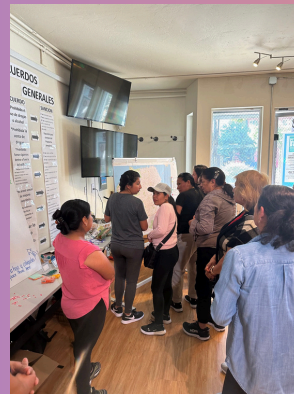
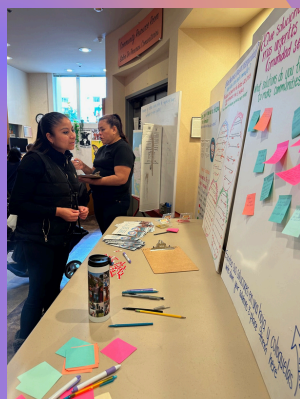
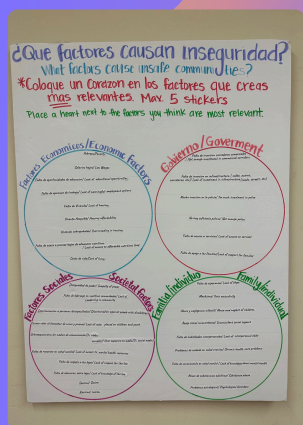
Findings: The Community's Story on Safety

Safety Mapping:

The Safety Mapping activity provided valuable insights into the intricate nature of safety in our community. Concentrated pins highlighted specific areas where people felt unsafe, notably around Civic Center, 16th Street, and 24th Street BART stations – areas consistent with those highlighted as unsafe in the media and city reports. Many safety concerns in these highlighted zones were tied to perceptions of cleanliness. However, the intriguing aspect lies in the placement of green pins (signaling Safe environments), often interspersed among red and yellow ones. The story often untold is the significance of the green pins amidst the dominant narrative of red pins representing unsafe areas. This suggests that people feel secure in specific spaces with services like libraries, community organizations, and parks, even when the surrounding environment may be perceived as unsafe or unclean. This nuanced picture paints a scenario where while certain areas or neighborhoods may feel unsafe, there are also pivotal safe havens contributing to fostering safety within the community. Additionally, transportation plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions of safety; during the event with La Colectiva, a majority of women expressed concerns about the safety of public transportation.

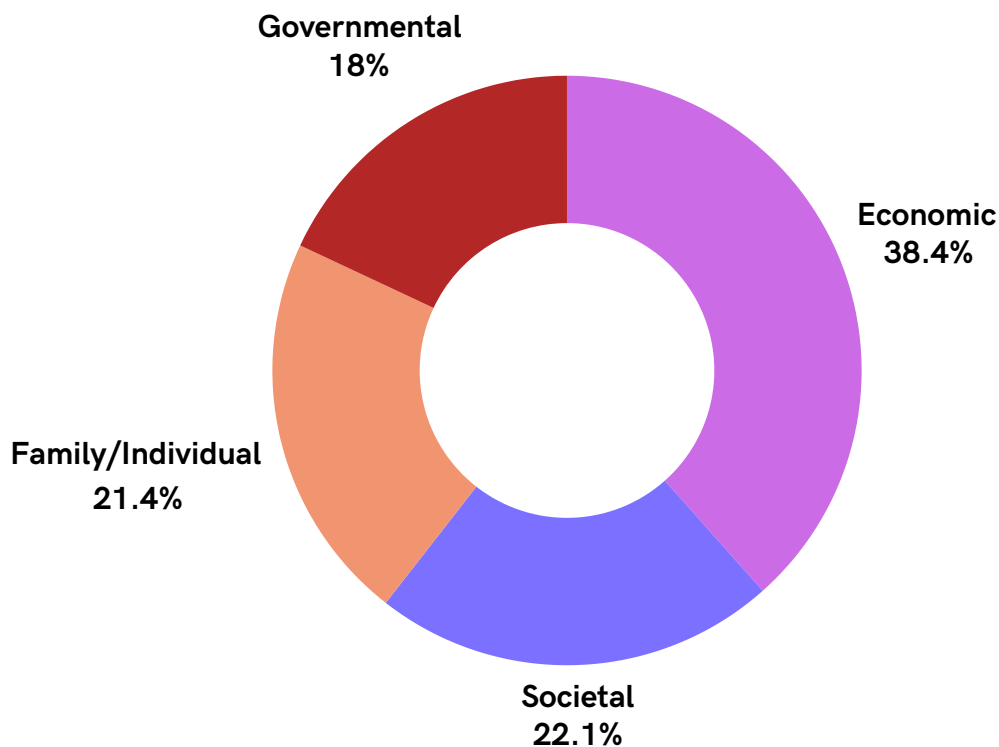
Root Causes:

When asked about the root causes of unsafe communities, residents overwhelmingly attributed them to economic factors. They emphasized that poverty, exacerbated by post-COVID economic challenges, stands out as the primary catalyst for creating unsafe living environments—another untold narrative. Numerous discussions highlighted a recurring theme of insufficient government investment in children, youth, families, individuals, and seniors, hindering the creation of conditions necessary for recovering from the pandemic.



The Root Causes activity effectively illustrated community concerns across four overarching sectors: economic, societal, governmental, and family/individual. Participants placed 294 stickers on a list of 34 identified causes. Economic factors garnered the majority of votes, with housing affordability securing the top spot as the leading contributor to perceived community unsafety. Following closely, the lack of meaningful employment, while the shortage of housing garnered third place. Discrimination against people with disabilities secured fourth place.

Grouped by Themes (294 Total Votes)

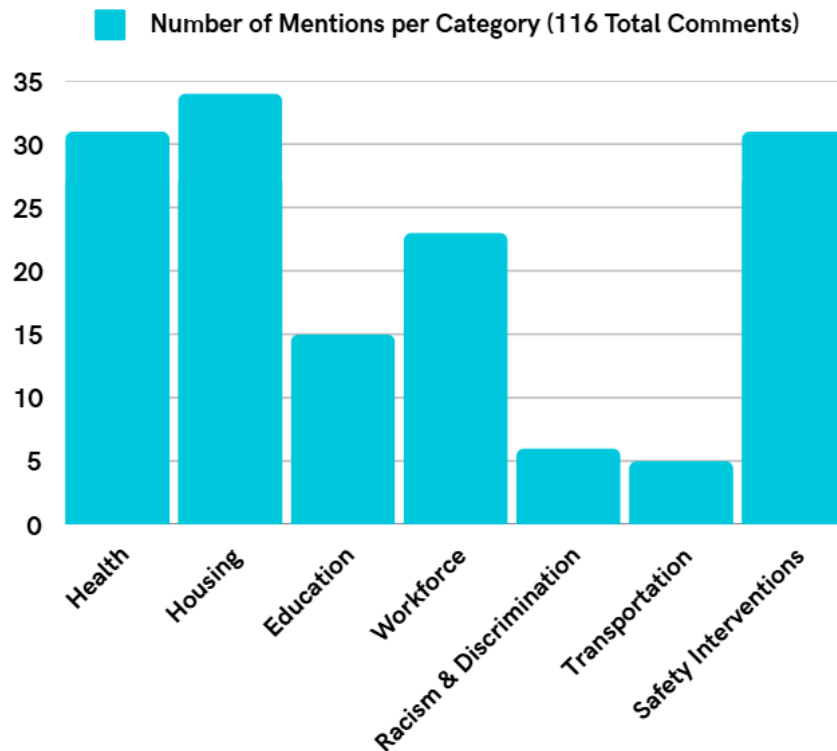


Beyond economic factors, health considerations, including mental health and substance use, emerged as popular choices. The diversity of responses underscored the intricate interconnections of societal challenges, revealing a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted issues contributing to the perception of unsafe communities.

Brainstorming Solutions:

Through our outreach efforts, community voices expressed a comprehensive understanding of community safety that extends beyond the scope of policing alone. Seven pivotal themes that demand immediate attention and proactive action rose to the top: health, housing, police and safety interventions, workforce, education, racism and discrimination, and transportation.

Woven into these insights is a crucial narrative - it emphasizes the critical need to develop an equitable ecosystem around our communities, offering fundamental necessities and opportunities. Beyond merely the presence of law enforcement lies the essence of quality and purposeful policing. There's a resounding call for reimagining law enforcement's role, infusing it with anti-racist training and deeper community integration, which speaks volumes about the quest for trust and meaningful connections between the two. Apart from advocating for police reform, there's also a growing demand for alternative safety interventions such as community ambassadors and proper mental health interventions.



Housing - Participant feedback highlights a clear need for solutions to homelessness, focusing on accessible and affordable housing, shelters, and transitional housing. Their insights underscore the importance of robust interventions, including subsidies and workforce programs, to prevent homelessness. This collective input advocates for a comprehensive strategy that combines housing initiatives with targeted interventions, fostering a more resilient and sustainable approach to addressing homelessness in our communities.

Safety Interventions - The relationship between the police and our community is intricate, encompassing layers of historical racism and discrimination coupled with the unique context and perspective of the Latin American experience. This dialogue is crucial as it goes beyond a simple yes or no; it delves into the painful traumas experienced by our people.

Within our project, we heard numerous extreme cases of police violence against brown men, highlighting the urgent need for rebuilding trust and fostering positive relations. To achieve this, addressing police violence is paramount, as it undermines community trust in law enforcement. Instances where police intervention proved unproductive and unhelpful further underscore the necessity for change.

While there might be a call by different community members for more police on our streets, the emphasis should not solely be on quantity but on the quality of policing. This involves comprehensive training, particularly in areas like anti-racism, to enhance community interactions. The community is calling for a paradigm shift in policing—one centered on building trust and robust relationships.

Solutions proposed include alternative safety interventions, increased presence of community ambassadors (24/7), increased resources for mental health interventions by experts, reduced police funding, improved police-community relationships, and enhanced police training, with a focus on de-escalation techniques. These measures collectively aim to usher in a new era of policing, rooted in community trust and cooperation. Emphasis on police violence causes lack of community trust in law enforcement. Scenarios in which police intervention was unproductive and unhelpful. This means they need better training, especially in areas like anti-racism, so they can interact better with the community.

Health - There is a pressing need for enhanced mental health services, given the limited resources and holistic interventions currently available for individuals experiencing mental health crises. Solutions to address this gap involve prioritizing affordable and accessible healthcare, particularly in psychological resources. Additionally, providing accessible resources for those undergoing mental health crises, promoting mental health education, and allocating increased funding to mental health initiatives are vital steps toward building a more comprehensive support system.

Workforce - The emphasis on creating jobs with living wages and enhancing job accessibility for immigrant communities is crucial. Proposed solutions include increasing access to job opportunities, raising the minimum wage, elevating salaries for public school teachers, providing accessible workforce training for adults, and fostering more spaces for Latinx small businesses in the Mission. These measures aim to address economic disparities and promote inclusivity within the job market, particularly benefiting immigrant communities.

Education - The pressing issue of limited opportunities for youth underscores the need for comprehensive job training programs within schools, as well as initiatives facilitating access to higher education. Proposed solutions involve advocating for affordable and accessible higher education, securing increased funding for schools, and providing additional educational resources tailored for low-income families. Addressing these challenges aims to create a more equitable educational landscape, empowering youth with the tools and opportunities necessary for their future success.

Racism and Discrimination - Our community expressed that there is a pervasive presence of racism within law enforcement, coupled with discrimination in communities and workplaces based on ethnicity and disabilities, which demands urgent attention. To counter these issues, solutions include implementing anti-racism training for law enforcement and fostering a culture of awareness and accountability. This proactive approach seeks to dismantle systemic biases and discrimination, promoting a society where equity and inclusion prevail and every individual is treated with dignity and respect.

Painting a New Narrative of Community Safety in San Francisco

The pivotal insight we aspire everyone can learn from this project is the profound impact of community consultation—acknowledging that the answers lie within our communities. Our project seeks to weave a comprehensive narrative of safety, emphasizing that safety is not a binary choice or a one-size-fits-all solution. It emerges from the intricate collaboration of various elements within a community's ecosystem.

True safety materializes when fundamental needs are met, and opportunities are extended to all. It is born from the achievement of equity and the eradication of racism. A particular emphasis by our participants was placed on investing in the well-being of children and youth, fostering conditions that unite families, and cultivating relationships grounded in positive values. The essence of our endeavor lies in creating a tapestry where safety is not just a concept but a lived experience shaped by economic growth, equity, and shared values.

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