South Santa Clara County

Community Conversation Proceedings

February 23, 2017
Gilroy Center for Arts
341 Monterey Street, Gilroy, California

Background

This document summarizes key themes and discussion points shared during the South Santa Clara County community conversation as part of Silicon Valley Community Foundation's Grantmaking Review process. The community foundation convened a series of six community conversations as part of this project, each focused on a key issue – economic security, immigration, education, building strong communities, civic engagement and public participation, and using technology for social good – in order to gather perspectives to inform the Foundation's work. At the end of this series, the community foundation added two more convenings in Gilroy and Pescadero, to ensure that the diverse geographic experiences of the region were reflected in this effort.

A total of 22 community participants attended the South Santa Clara County convening, including representatives from municipal and county government, faith-based and nonprofit organizations, service providers, and one member of the community foundation's board of directors, Dan Perez. In addition, various representatives of SVCF's leadership team attended the community conversation, including Chief Community Impact Officer, Erica Wood, and Vice President of Strategic Initiatives and Grantmaking, Manuel Santamaría.

OVERVIEW OF GRANTMAKING REVIEW PROCESS

The grantmaking strategic review process is intended to be both a look back at what SVCF has achieved with its grantmaking investments since 2008, as well as a look forward to assess and understand where there are emerging opportunities for SVCF to make a positive difference for our community through grantmaking. The review process will provide SVCF's staff and board of directors with the information necessary to determine whether to stay the course with our grantmaking, make adjustments or direct our investments to new strategic areas of concern. Decisions based on this review process will be announced in October 2017.

STRUCTURE OF COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Each community conversation follows a similar model, designed to provide participants with a common context and framing for productive discussion. Erica Wood And Manuel SantamarÍa opened the conversation with a welcome, provided an overview of SVCF's impact data and introduced two critical questions participants were being asked to discuss. For the Gilroy convening, the questions were:

1. What are the most pressing issues in Gilroy?

2. How can SVCF add value and best engage to help solve the most pressing issues in Gilroy?

Shiree Teng of the consulting team, Teng & Smith, Inc., provided instructions on the expectations and group agreements for breakout circles. Participants were invited to self-select one group to engage in direct conversations with each other through facilitated small-group discussions focused around the two questions above.

SVCF staff was present in the breakout circles as notetakers/scribes or listeners. After small group discussions were over, participants reconvened as a large group where SVCF staff provided information about next steps in the grantmaking review process and reminded participants to check www.siliconvallecf.org/svcfgrants for more information. All aspects of the conversations were recorded by notetakers and then synthesized for the community foundation to take under consideration.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION THEMES

Participants welcomed the opportunity to share and connect with each other. Teng and Smith, Inc. transcribed participants' post-it notes, as well as the notetakers'/scribes' own observations and reflections, providing for a rich and detailed summation of each question.

Conversation Summaries

The group discussions identified further pressing needs and opportunities for greater impact in our region. The following section summarizes discussion for each critical question in an overview of the conversation.

Please note that the detailed notes for each conversation are available in a separate appendix. They are actual comments and feedback from the participants from this community conversation and may not reflect the opinions or future plans of the community foundation.

QUESTION ONE

What are the most pressing issues in Gilroy?

(Two breakout circles, total of 22 participants)

Overview of Conversation

Participants identified the most pressing issues in Gilroy: homelessness; affordable housing; health, mental health and addiction; poverty, hunger and nutrition; integration and security for immigrant populations; education and training to increase economic equity; support for young people and teens; infrastructure, and a lack of integration into the county and the region overall.

- *Homelessness*. Participants named homelessness, including lack of adequate shelter and coordinated services to deal with the complex bundle of addiction, mental health, unemployment and social connectivity issues that are part of the homeless crisis in Gilroy. The lack of a holistic, complete continuum of services and shelter for homeless makes it hard to address the homeless problem, which they describe as affecting everyone's quality of life.

- *Affordable housing*. Gilroy experiences high costs of housing on par with the region at large, while incomes are lower than the regional average, creating a disconnect made worse by a lack of affordable housing. Participants describe a dearth of affordable housing for low income families, individuals, seniors, disabled, students, international students and others – a wide range that includes different segments of low to medium income earners.

- *Health, mental health, addiction*. Participants describe health overall in connection with poverty, complicated by addiction and mental health issues. They describe the need for nutritional education particularly for those with diabetes. They describe the role that isolation, in some cases linguistic isolation, plays in exacerbating mental health issues. They describe high levels of use of heroin and methamphetamine in Gilroy. Overall they indicate high levels of need coupled with disproportionate lack of services in Gilroy, and a lack of integration with and connection to County services.

- *Poverty, hunger and nutrition*. Participants name poverty, hunger and nutrition as part and parcel of all of these.

- *Human trafficking*. They call out human trafficking as a troubling presence in Gilroy's core industries such as agriculture and beauty salons.

- *Integration and safety for immigrants*. With regard to Gilroy's immigrant communities, participants describe at least two main areas of need. One has to do with integration – ESL classes, citizenship pathways and literacy – as well as "bridging the Latino–Caucasian divide." The other has to do with fortifying immigrant communities in a time when they are being targeted, taking a stand with immigrant communities and disseminating accurate information. "Kids are fearing for parents, who are at risk for deportation. There is fear and uncertainty, what will happen? And an increasing feeling of being targeted and otherness."

- *Education and training to increase economic equity.* Participants want to see an investment in education and training to increase access to equal opportunity in Gilroy, and to enhance its social infrastructure overall. They want to see industry sponsored training and educational programs to ensure clear linkages to jobs. They want to see education that promotes financial literacy and economic security to help alleviate poverty.

- *Focus on young people.* Programs and mentorship for teens are needed, and advocacy to reduce the incarceration of juveniles.

- *Frayed and insufficient infrastructure.* Participants name infrastructure in Gilroy as a pressing issue. They cite roads in disrepair, and lack of public transit alternatives to automobiles. There is a need to take an integrated, holistic approach to managing future growth, beginning to plan for future needs for jobs, schools and affordable housing now. Participants want to see a more resourced, accessible network of social services for Gilroy residents, with reference to imbalanced distribution of services across the County. "We need to make sure we are getting our fair share in South County."

- *Lack of integration into the County and the region overall.* Participants call out a lack of integration and differentiation within Santa Clara County and the regional overall. They describe an unbalanced concentration of the burden of compounded poverty, coupled with an unequal distribution of County services to address these issues. The unique challenges faced by Gilroy are not well thought about or resourced at the regional and County level. "Morgan Hill is very different than Gilroy. Morgan Hill is a feeder to San Jose and Gilroy is not. We are more isolated because of that. We don't get tied in to the Silicon Valley/San Jose thinking. We become our own silo." "St. Louise Regional Hospital is red-headed step-sister of San Jose." "Many folks in Silicon Valley do not know that Gilroy is a part of Santa Clara County." "San Jose does not do enough to solve their homeless problems, folks come down to Gilroy." "How to get people to think regionally about these issues - These are huge issues that go way beyond Gilroy."

CRITICAL QUESTION TWO

How can SVCF add value and best engage to help solve the most pressing issues in Gilroy?

(Two breakout circles, total of 22 participants)

Overview of Conversation

Participants see a role for SVCF to add value in these ways across all of the pressing issues they identified. SVCF can:

- *Convene for action.* Support the use of data and exchange of information to connect people to action. Bring together agencies, nonprofit organizations, funders and donors, faith based institutions, service providers especially around social services for homeless, immigrant communities and affordable housing. Help to further clarify the dimensions of the issues, the actors and the parameters for problem solving.

- *Invest in coordinated solutions for the affordable housing crisis in Gilroy.* Support partnerships and innovative strategies to provide affordable housing for very low, low and middle income segments of Gilroy's community. This could include innovative strategies such as more accessible lending instruments. Participants especially call out a need for affordable housing for college students.

- *Invest in coordinated solutions to Gilroy's homeless crisis.* Support innovative problem solving to address Gilroy's homelessness problem, such as Tiny Homes. Recognize the *community* of homeless in Gilroy, and the need for *community* as a wraparound element of housing homeless solutions. Strengthen the continuum of mental health and other services to support homeless to gain traction and independence. Increase support for mental health services and policy.

- *Advocate for and invest in education, young people, and families.* Invest, advocate and move policy to support Gilroy's young people - especially related to education and incarceration - to diminish the gap in opportunity and keep juveniles out of prison. Participants would like to see a math initiative in Gilroy, better after school supports for young people, more mentorship for young people. They want to ensure implementation of existing policies that help to keep juveniles out of prison. Increase support for financial literacy and empowerment for poor and low-income families and individuals.

- *Increase regional integration, differentiation and equitable distribution of regional resources.* Foster integration at the County and regional level connecting partners, agencies and encouraging communication about balanced allocation of resources. Link agencies and funding to better integrate Gilroy into regional/County services, resources and infrastructure. Create a platform to serve as a voice for needs that are unique to Gilroy and different from the region as a whole. Increase Gilroy's political clout.

- *Within Gilroy, build capacity, leadership and expertise in the social service sector.* Assess existing network of services to better resource, align and augment the continuum of services available to support Gilroy's poor, homeless and immigrant communities.

- *Foster growth.* Support Gilroy to plan for its future: strategic planning and seed money, job creation, economic development, support for its arts and culture facility, projecting the needs of its diverse community into the future and planning for equitable development for *all* of its residents.

- *Share examples of best practices.* Highlight best practices from other regions characterized by regional integration of disparate economic micro-regions and social service infrastructure.

- *Support integration and human rights for Gilroy's immigrant communities.* Coordinate and augment existing programs and supports for immigrant communities. Facilitate access to information and resources within Gilroy's immigrant communities.

- *For SVCF and philanthropy.* Connect donors with nonprofit organizations to increase dialogue. Build partnerships. Focus on activities that require/show collaboration and inclusivity. Bring together funders with providers to develop a common language and deepen understanding. Share information. Leverage micro-regional strategies.