



YOU CAN CHANGE YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD COMMUNITIES FOR A NEW CALIFORNIA

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TRANSFORMING California

EMPOWERING VOTERS. CNC EDUCATION FUND HELPS INSTITUTE CHANGE WHERE RESIDENTS NEED IT MOST

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ



CNC Education Fund organizers and volunteers use personal engagement and the latest technology to give residents a voice on issues where they've historically been silenced.

PHOTO BY CLAIRE TAKAHASHI

In 2008, a group of friends led by Martha Guzman and Jennifer Hernandez began to meet over dinners as their work brought them to all corners of California and each other's towns. Their dinner discussions had a similar theme: the need to help families in California's forgotten rural regions.

"We needed to create a new California, where every neighborhood supports everything a family needs — good schools, good jobs, elected officials who care about our families," says Pablo Rodriguez, founding executive director of CNC Education Fund.

In 2011, those suppers led directly to the formation of CNC Education Fund, a nonprofit human rights organization that promotes economic prosperity and community health for rural, low-income neighborhoods.

Headquartered in Sacramento, with offices in Fresno, Indio and Merced, the organization concentrates on 13 counties in the Central Coast and the San Joaquin/Imperial/Coachella valleys.

"Our focus is on rural areas because that's where most of us were raised," Rodriguez says of himself and his 16 fellow founders.

Besides having its first office, Fresno also gave CNC Education Fund its first critical mass of volunteers. They, together with the organization's Fresno employees, introduced CNC Education Fund's dynamic approach for change: traditional community organizing complemented by the latest technology.

"When we founded CNC Education Fund, we made a big investment in technology," says Rodriguez. Organization employees/volunteers use laptops and tablets when contacting voters via telephone or door-to-door canvassing, which is faster and more efficient than older paper methods.

After educating voters on key issues, CNC Education Fund urges involvement in the civic and electoral processes.

'WE NEEDED TO CREATE A NEW CALIFORNIA, WHERE EVERY NEIGHBORHOOD SUPPORTS EVERYTHING A FAMILY NEEDS...'

PABLO RODRIGUEZ
Executive director, CNC Education Fund

"We're in constant contact with supportive voters" of all races, Rodriguez says.

CNC Education Fund — which subscribes to voter files from all 13 counties it serves — is non-partisan. It focuses on addressing the needs of families at the neighborhood level.

Rodriguez, part of those initial dinner conversations, resigned from a political consulting firm in 2011 to assume his role. The organization, initially run from Rodriguez's Sacramento home, has grown since those days to require its own office in Sacramento — opened in 2016.

CNC Education Fund welcomes 2018, a midterm elections year when Californians will elect, among others, a new governor.

"We've been preparing for 2018 since the day after the 2016 presidential election," says Rodriguez. "When we address the needs of families, when we address the needs of neighborhoods — everyone wins."

Keep reading to learn how CNC Education Fund has helped ordinary citizens transform their own neighborhoods.

Neighborhoods Rising as One

A FRESNO CASE STUDY



CNC Education Fund is revolutionizing neighborhoods, and you can look no further than southwest Fresno to see that happening.

A coalition that included CNC Education Fund recently leveraged their power via a participatory budgeting process and persuaded the city to endorse a \$77 million plan to reinvigorate and rezone southwest Fresno — a neglected, underserved neighborhood.

When approved by the state's Strategic Growth Council, southwest Fresno will receive \$37 million from the state's Cap-

and-Trade Program, which imposes special taxes on major sources of greenhouse gas emissions, such as refineries, and is legally mandated (AB 2722) to invest in communities most negatively affected by excessive pollution. In a participatory budgeting process, communities of the 93706 zip code — which includes some of the most impacted in the state — overwhelmingly voted in support of the proposed projects. Besides funding projects like expanded green spaces and street enhancements, the monies will also help

launch a West Fresno satellite campus of Fresno City College.

Fresno City College has also pledged \$40 million in matching funds.

"West Fresno residents persisted in bringing investments into the neighborhood that generated the funds and has the greatest need," said Dr. Venise Curry, San Joaquin Valley regional director for CNC Education Fund. "CNC Education Fund civic engagement team outreached to hundreds of families face-to-face and ensured community input throughout the process."

TWO SIDES TO EVERY CITY

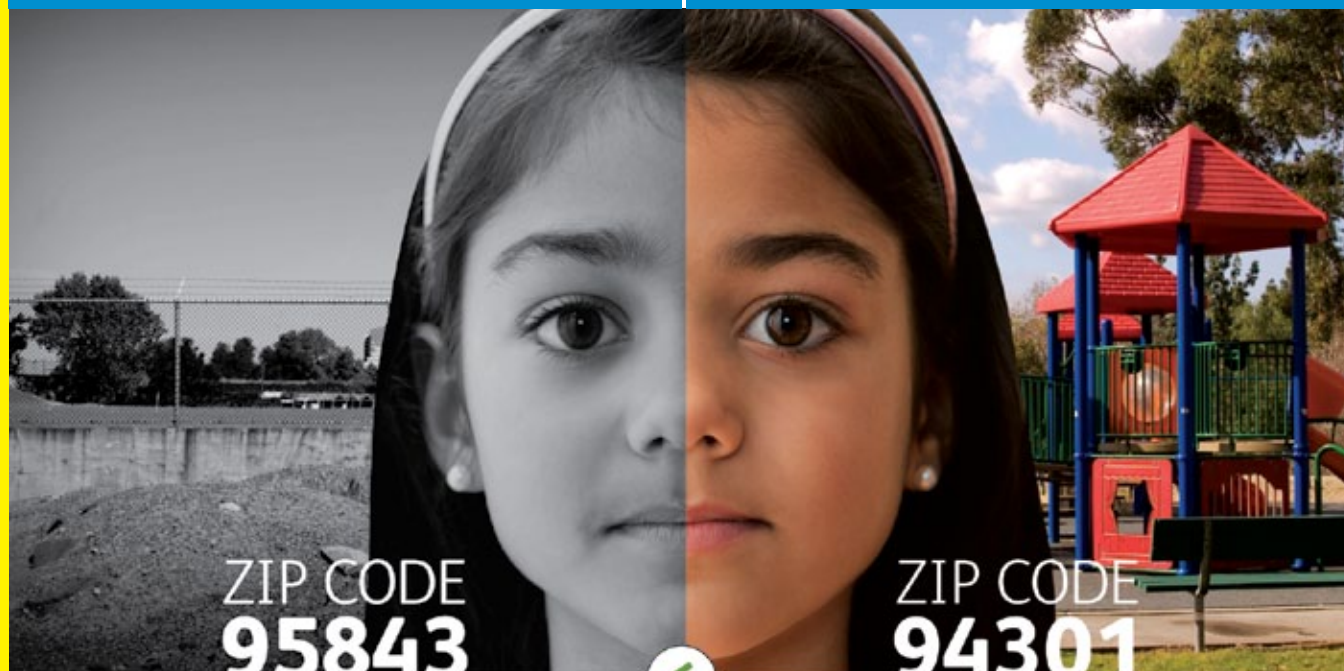
What makes a city? Is it the businesses, buildings or roads in its neighborhoods? Or, is it the collective effort of a neighborhood to ensure that all of its residents are not merely surviving, but thriving? In healthy cities, it's both. Unfortunately, in too many cities and towns, only finished neighborhoods receive the proper tools needed to flourish.

An unfinished neighborhood lacks basic amenities more prosperous neighbors take for granted: things like fresh and clean drinking water, sidewalks, streets and lights. They lack grocery stores, banks and other businesses that meet residents' needs for food, clothing and shelter. In finished neighborhoods, access to quality education enables children to thrive and economic opportunities allow families to focus on creating healthy, happy homes.

Unfinished neighborhoods don't have those pieces.

CNC Education Fund not only gives residents a forum for their concerns, but unifies their efforts to see those needs addressed and helps transform unfinished neighborhoods into finished ones.

UNFINISHED NEIGHBORHOOD



ZIP CODE
95843

Life Expectancy

76

FINISHED NEIGHBORHOOD

ZIP CODE
94301

Life Expectancy

87

HOW CAN YOU TELL A FINISHED NEIGHBORHOOD FROM ONE THAT NEEDS COMMUNITY ACTION TO BECOME A HAPPIER AND HEALTHIER ENVIRONMENT FOR ITS RESIDENTS? LOOK FOR THESE FACTORS:

Transportation infrastructure

- » **Sidewalks and crosswalks** for pedestrians, including those with mobility issues who may need wheelchair access
- » Easily accessible **public transportation** with plenty of lines, scheduled stops and bus capacity
- » **Streetlights** to provide increased visibility for both drivers and pedestrians and to make residents feel safer
- » **Speed bumps** to lower vehicle speeds in residential areas

Parks and recreational areas

- » **Amenities** like safe play structures, water fountains, bike paths and shaded areas
- » **Maintenance** including trash removal, bathroom repairs and landscaping
- » Community center **facilities** for community events, and recreational and social activities

Educational programs and facilities

- » Up-to-date school buildings with more **modern facilities** where teachers can excel with resources like computers and tablets for teachers and students, as well as a smaller student-to-teacher ratio
- » Academic and extracurricular **programs**, including affordable youth programs that provide opportunities for arts, music, sports, vocational skills and STEM programs

Housing and services

- » Fresh, clean **drinking water**
- » **Clean air**
- » **Mixed use development** that blends affordable housing and the neighborhood's commercial, cultural and entertainment needs
- » Access to **banking facilities** reduces residents' reliance on ATM machines that charge expensive fees
- » Many choices in **retail** businesses, including affordable clothing, supermarkets and other stores

Health

- » Access to **supermarkets** with healthy food options
- » Local comprehensive **medical facilities**, including hospitals
- » Well-funded **clinics** and care providers with shorter waits for appointments and potentially higher quality of care
- » Access to quality, affordable **health care for everyone**, regardless of immigration status

CNC EDUCATION FUND AND ORGANIZED
ACTION HELP RESIDENTS FIGHT FOR
QUALITY, AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE

Healthy FAMILIES,

Healthy NEIGHBORHOODS

BY ANNE STOKES



Community action helps programs like Medi-Cal to continue, providing important coverage for Maria Cordova and her daughter.

PHOTO BY CLAIRE TAKAHASHI

A month after her daughter Mia was born, Maria Cordova knew that something was amiss. Even though her pediatrician assured her everything was normal, Cordova ended up taking her daughter to the hospital where she was diagnosed with pyloric stenosis, a blockage of her digestive tract that required surgery.

“Without the Affordable Care Act, I would have had to pay for everything they did for her there,” she says, adding that, like most young children, Mia commonly gets sick and also requires regular visits to the doctor’s office. “Taking her to the hospital probably would have come with a bill for thousands of dollars, so I wouldn’t have taken her as often as I did.”

Cordova and her family’s medical coverage, thanks to the ACA and expansion of Medi-Cal, enables them to provide regular preventive and emergency medical care for their daughter, now 2.

Families throughout California share similar stories. For the past year and a half, Cordova has worked with CNC Education Fund to educate residents about the importance of the ACA as well as how to organize and advocate for the law’s continuation.

“[People] need the Affordable Care Act because they can’t afford to take their kids to the doctor when they get sick,” she says. “A lot of people ... don’t go to the doctor. They think, ‘Should I

[go] to the doctor or pay rent?’ or ‘Should I take my daughter to the doctor or buy food?’”

According to Charlie Eaton, assistant professor of sociology at UC Merced and CNC Education Fund founding board member, getting neighborhood residents involved in local policy-making helps ensure they have access to resources like medical care, quality education, community programs and facilities.

“Residents and community members know their own health struggles and have a firsthand perspective on those struggles,” says Eaton. “To come up with solutions that will actually work for low-income residents, low-income residents need to have a seat at the table.”

Through canvassing neighborhoods, Cordova says that talking face-to-face with people is an effective way to reach residents and get them involved with issues that affect their everyday lives — as well as the lives of their families — such as health care, voter registration and accountability for elected representatives.

“The community is getting involved in how they want to see it,” she says. “A vote makes a difference [and] your opinion does count.”

‘A VOTE MAKES A DIFFERENCE [AND] YOUR OPINION DOES COUNT.’

MARIA CORDOVA
Canvasser with CNC Education Fund

What are the most important health issues in *your* neighborhood?

More than 300 Coachella Valley residents were canvassed during a recent community health needs assessment conducted by CNC Education Fund. Their concerns included:

- » Safety
- » Neighborhood investments
- » Police responsiveness

“If you can prevent being sick or injured by making neighborhoods safe, community members intuitively think of those things as priority health issues,” says Charlie Eaton, CNC Education Fund founding board member and assistant professor of sociology at UC Merced. “CNC Education Fund has pioneered fixing neighborhood infrastructure as an important way to improve health.”

Data from assessments like these helps the organization design policies that make neighborhoods safer and healthier. Other issues CNC Education Fund has focused on include:

- » Relocating the Darling Ingredients rendering plant — and air-polluting emissions — out of southwest Fresno.
- » Educating residents about Medi-Cal expansion and accessing benefits.
- » Securing \$37 million for neighborhood investments from Gov. Jerry Brown’s climate change initiative.

Similar surveys are slated in Fresno and Merced in 2018. For more information, visit www.cncedfund.org.



A Walk in the

PARK

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER HELPS CREATE #PARKS4ALL IN HER NEIGHBORHOOD

BY ANNE STOKES



Fresno resident Jennie Ramirez enjoys trips to her neighborhood park with her great-grandchildren, especially now that the City of Fresno has made significant improvements to the park's facilities and maintenance, which were in large part prompted by CNC Education Fund's efforts.

PHOTOS BY CLAIRE TAKAHASHI

**'WE'RE THE ONES WHO SEE IT
FIRSTHAND. THAT'S WHY I THINK
IT'S IMPORTANT FOR PEOPLE TO
GET INVOLVED.'**

JENNIE RAMIREZ
CNC Education Fund volunteer

When her eight great-grandchildren come to visit, Jennie Ramirez needs plenty of play space. Ideally, nearby Nielsen Park would be a good place to spend an active afternoon outside, but until recently, it lacked many amenities residents take for granted in more affluent neighborhoods. Ramirez says they would find trash everywhere but no trash cans, bathrooms were never open and water fountains didn't work. There was little shade and nowhere to sit, which was a problem for Ramirez, who finds it difficult to stand for long periods of time due to her arthritis.

"Children need a place to play, people need a place to unwind, just to go play basketball, to run, to walk. It needs to be someplace accessible to anybody and everybody," she says. "To me, that's important."



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention agrees with her. More than 80 percent of adolescents don't get their recommended 60 minutes of daily activity, and over 25 percent of adults report no active leisure time. Over one-third of adults in the U.S. have obesity, putting us at risk for cancer, heart disease and diabetes. Parks provide a venue for exercise and other activities, and access to parks has been associated with decreased rates of diagnosed depression and stress. But such access is a problem, particularly in low-income neighborhoods.

Ramirez didn't know where to address her issues with the park until CNC Education Fund canvassers knocked on her door four years ago. They asked what kinds of neighborhood improvements she'd like to see — and she's been a volunteer with the organization ever since.

Together with a group of other residents and volunteers, Ramirez met with Councilman Oliver Baines to discuss positive neighborhood changes.

"He got right on the phone — right there! — and made a few phone calls and said, 'We'll get this going,'" she says. "And within a week we had our benches."

Today, Ramirez says going to the park is a much more enjoyable experience. She says it's cleaner, better maintained and she feels comfortable there with her family.

"I think because we went as a group, he might have noticed it was more people wanting this than just one person. We went as a group and he listened to all of us, and we all wanted the same thing," she says of her activism. "We're the ones who see it firsthand, that's why I think it's important for people to get involved."



A Voice for Every Neighborhood

CNC Education Fund is helping neighborhoods take an active role in their recreational resources through participatory budgeting, a democratic process that gives residents a say in how public funds are spent. Merced County District 2 Supervisor Lee Lor has recently allocated \$40,000 toward participatory budgeting for community projects. CNC Education Fund is canvassing District 2 asking people how they want to see those funds used, as well as inviting residents to propose their own projects. Residents have expressed a need for things such as:

- » Water fountains
- » "Little free" libraries to promote literacy
- » Community events
- » Youth programs, including internship opportunities

The next step in the process involves taking those ideas and developing proposals.

"We're working to help the community get engaged so they can get involved in this process," says Manuel Rodriguez, CNC Education Fund community organizer in Merced. "I'm really looking forward to seeing how Merced will look after the projects are done."



Anna Lisa Vargas has worked to make life better for her fellow Coachella Valley residents both in her capacity as school board member and as a community organizer with CNC Education Fund.
PHOTO BY RODRIGO PEÑA

LOCAL COMMUNITY ORGANIZER
WORKED TO IMPROVE LIVES
THROUGH **QUALITY EDUCATION**

Planting Seeds of **CHANGE**

BY ANNE STOKES

An Education in Representation

Education has always been seen as a potential equalizer.

"It is the one thing that once you attain it, no one can take it away from you," says Dr. Venise Curry, CNC Education Fund San Joaquin Valley regional director. "For families living in unfinished neighborhoods, it is the best opportunity to improve the quality of life."

At a time when California schools were losing teachers and services while class sizes were increasing, CNC Education Fund educated voters on election issues and the importance of using their vote in support of their values — such as ensuring young people have access to quality education. The passage of **Proposition 30** allowed **\$6 billion** to be reinvested into schools, stemming issues such as teacher firings, increased class sizes and the steady drain of resources from the educational system.

The initiative provided funding stability for schools and paved the way for Gov. Jerry Brown's Local Control Funding Formula (and Local Control Accountability Plans), giving parents, students and other stakeholders a say in how funding was used. The initiative changed the quality of education for students across the state and also helped put the decision-making process back in the hands of those who are affected by it most.



Anna Lisa Vargas grew up in Thermal, a rural, low-income town in the eastern Coachella Valley. From an early age, her parents stressed the importance of an education. Vargas, the eldest of five, was the first in her family to graduate with a degree in political science and anthropology from UC Irvine. She returned home wanting to make a difference. She did so as co-founder and community organizer with CNC Education Fund — focusing on health, housing and empowering residents to make social changes in their own neighborhoods. She also ran for and won a seat on the Coachella Valley Unified School District's board.

Thermal is one of southern California's unfinished communities. Many residents lack basic infrastructure like potable drinking water, sewer connections and affordable housing in their neighborhoods. As an unincorporated community in its county, Thermal has no city council. Instead, schools have become the place where the community comes together. The Coachella Valley Unified School District is also one of the area's largest employers. Vargas served on its board from 2010 to 2014.

"I never really wanted to be an elected official or serve on the school board, I did it because I believed in the people. I believed that being a voice for them could help them to articulate their

needs and I could help lift their voices that weren't being heard," she says. "In our community, our biggest asset, our greatest treasure is our children. What better way to plant those good seeds for them?"

Vargas helped address the technology gap that separated students in her district from other high-achieving districts. In 2012, the board passed a bond measure that gave every student — from kindergarten through high school — a mobile device and provided Wi-Fi signals that give students in rural areas internet access.

"We're one of the most impoverished school districts in the nation but I don't see that," she says. "I saw the students be able to engage in a different way and demonstrate learning. It's a tool to uplift them."

Today, Vargas is still a community organizer with CNC Education Fund, helping raise awareness on issues that affect marginalized residents' everyday lives: education, access to resources and community infrastructure, health care, voting and how to harness their collective power to effect social change.

"Rural communities throughout California face the same challenges and it needs to be a collective effort," she says. "We have to make changes that are about justice, that are about the truth, and that are based on our values and principles."

**"WE HAVE TO MAKE
CHANGES THAT ARE ABOUT
JUSTICE. THAT ARE ABOUT
THE TRUTH. AND THAT ARE
BASED ON OUR VALUES AND
PRINCIPLES."**

ANNA LISA VARGAS
CNC Education Fund co-founder and former
Coachella Valley Unified School
District board member

How **YOU** Can Change YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

Since 2013, Ganaya Flemings has volunteered her time with CNC Education Fund as a canvasser, going door-to-door to engage residents in the local issues and policies that affect their lives, including voter registration, education and funding for community resources. When the organization pairs this canvassing action with its cutting-edge technology, CNC Education Fund is able to amplify its efforts to thousands of voters — bringing results that neighborhoods can see. Ganaya says that while many residents believe their voice doesn't matter, she hopes to inspire them otherwise.



Ganaya Flemings, Volunteer with CNC Education Fund
PHOTO BY CLAIRE TAKAHASHI

Q. Why is it important for people to get involved in neighborhood issues?

A. It's very important to get involved and be engaged because you can give your input on things you'd like to see happen in your community and in your neighborhood.

Q. What do you do with CNC Education Fund and how does that help you improve neighborhoods?

A. We register people to vote, make sure they get out and get involved, and that they're exercising their rights, as they should be. We want to make sure that we put people into office that are for the *people* and they're working on issues that are important to us.

Q. Why are you involved with CNC Education Fund?

A. There are a lot of things that we work on that I can relate to, things I deal with on a day-to-day basis. Things that we work and strive for are things that help benefit me, my family, friends and my community.

Q. How does going door-to-door help CNC Education Fund volunteers connect with neighborhood residents?

A. Door-to-door, face-to-face contact is personal because we get to talk with them and show them that, 'I'm one of you and it only takes one of me to reach plenty of you. If we all come together and become one, we can make a difference.'

Q. Why is it important to organize to best express a neighborhood's wants and needs?

A. It takes a group of people to stand for the same thing to show that it's important. If we come together as a whole we're able to have a stronger voice and be heard, as opposed to one person trying to speak for everyone.

Q. How do you hope to empower people through your work with CNC Education Fund?

A. They lack hope, they tend to think that their opinions and voice don't make a difference. But if one comes together with many, that accumulates into a lot of strength. You have power when you're able to come together.



BY ANNE STOKES

PHOTO BY CLAIRE TAKAHASHI



PHOTO COURTESY CNC EDUCATION FUND

CNC EDUCATION FUND VOLUNTEERS UTILIZE THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY, LIKE TABLETS CONNECTED TO THE VOTER FILE, TO ENGAGE NEIGHBORS ON ISSUES AFFECTING THEM AND THEIR FAMILIES.

A Foundation for the Future

CNC Education Fund gives residents a voice in policy-making by engaging voters and creating neighborhood committees — ensuring residents have the basic resources needed for families to thrive.

"We shouldn't be ignored because of the zip code we live in," says Samantha Valadez, lead community organizer in CNC Education Fund's Sacramento Office. "We built these committees because we want to make sure they're part of the decision-making process."

Recent victories include:

- » Measure T, which converted Merced's elections from at-large to district voting
- » Channeling \$37 million dollars in funding from Gov. Jerry Brown's climate change initiative into southwest Fresno community improvements

Current efforts include civic engagement programs such as:

- » Defense of the Affordable Care Act
- » The Make It Fair campaign to close corporate tax loopholes that deny California neighborhoods \$9 billion annually

Future issues include:

- » Working with Sacramento City Unified School District to help develop after-school, tutoring and recreational programs that give all students access to a quality education
- » Implementation of the California Voter's Choice Act pilot program in Sacramento County

Our Voice, Our Choice

In order to enact change, the residents and families of low-income or minority neighborhoods must have a voice.

CNC Education Fund is empowering neighborhoods throughout Coachella, Fresno, Merced and Sacramento — transforming its residents into leaders. When neighborhoods organize into one cohesive power, critical issues that affect these areas are given the attention they need, leading to resolutions that improve lives.

The strength of a neighborhood comes directly from its residents. Through CNC Education Fund, your voice can transform California — **one neighborhood at a time.**

OUR CALIFORNIA!



Action Matters

"Community-based organizations are critical to the success of school districts like ours working to advance equity, access and social justice. Community-based organizations play a critical role in helping to ensure students are healthy, emotionally stable and ready to learn. In instances where barriers to student success fall outside the purview of the educational system, we rely on the help of community-based organizations to provide students with basic needs so they can be successful in the classroom.

For example, in Sacramento City Unified School District, we partner with a number of local nonprofit organizations to connect our students with vital services they need but may be lacking, including health insurance, foster care, homeless services, parent engagement and other important areas. Each of these services, while not directly related to student learning, plays a critical role in the student's ability to focus on learning."

-Jorge A. Aguilar
Superintendent,
Sacramento City Unified
School District



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