Northeast Los Angeles Riverfront Collaborative

LESSONS LEARNED AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT

by Metamorphosis Project, USC Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism

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Principal Investigator, Sandra Ball-Rokeach, PhD

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For more information about the NELA RC, go to **www.mylariver.org**

USC Metamorphosis Project: **www.metamorph.org**

LA City Economic and Workforce Development Department: **www.ewdd.lacity.org**

HUD-DOT-EPA Partnership for Sustainable Communities: **www.sustainablecommunities.gov**

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Document Purpose

The Northeast Los Angeles Riverfront Collaborative (NELA RC) Project Lessons Learned and Community Engagement Toolkit provides an assessment of the essential goals and methods applied to the NELA RC project and serves as a community engagement toolkit for use in community planning and economic development projects.

In this booklet, you will find a topline evaluation of the collaborative process implemented by the NELA RC partners. The collaborative process was used to engage the local communities in the informing of a vision plan and economic development study. Through an overview of our various methods, we seek to explain what worked during the collaborative process and what are lessons learned for future interdisciplinary collaborative efforts. Ultimately, the objective of this assessment is to provide you with a toolkit of engagement practices.

The document is a complement to the NELA RC Vision Plan and Economic Development Implementation Strategy released in the summer of 2014 by the City of Los Angeles' Economic and Workforce Development Department that can be found at **www.mylariver.org**.

NELA RC Project Background

In 2012, the Los Angeles Economic Workforce Development Department (EWDD) signed an agreement with the United States (US) Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to implement a $2.25 million Community Challenge planning grant from the Federal Partnership for Sustainable Communities, which includes HUD, US Department of Transportation (DOT), and the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The grant funded an innovative, interdisciplinary partnership called the NELA RC, which sought to capture the energy of the Los Angeles River (River) revitalization as a catalyst for integrating planning efforts, coordinating strategic investments, and implementing a comprehensive economic development strategy that reflects sustainable development and will help the NELA communities to thrive.

The NELA RC's three objectives were to:

1. Engage the community in identifying a NELA Riverfront District

2. Create a comprehensive implementation strategy for community revitalization and reinvestment that links land use, economic development, and workforce strategies.

3. Create a model of engagement and public media to foster civic participation in the revitalization of communities.

The study area (**Figure 1**) chosen to explore the riverfront district was the approximately 10-mile river stretch in Northeast LA that is also known as the Glendale Narrows section of the River. Unlike the majority of the 51 miles of the River that has been channelized with concrete, the NELA River study area is characterized by having a soft bottom reach that supports a lush habitat and wildlife. This portion of the river is adjacent to the NELA neighborhoods of Atwater Village, Cypress Park, Elysian Valley, Glassell Park, and Lincoln Heights. The study area has been the focus of many recent initiatives for ecosystem revitalization and recreational use. Such revitalization efforts have also brought interest in economic development, gentrification, and other neighborhood changes. Given these factors of change and interest in the physical land assets of the area, the city chose the area as the site for the place-based efforts of the NELA RC to explore a vision for a Riverfront District that connected the adjacent neighborhoods to future co-benefits of revitalization and comprehensive economic development.

To take on the task of a comprehensive planning and economic development effort, the NELA RC was designed as a team of interdisciplinary "place and people professionals" from the fields of planning, transportation, community engagement, design, environmental advocacy, academia, media, and community economic development. The NELA RC lead partner team is led by the EWDD, and included the Department of City Planning, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, City of Los Angeles Bureau of Engineering, Los Angeles Department of Transportation, Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation, Workforce Investment Board, University of Southern California Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism's Metamorphosis Project, Occidental College's Urban Environmental Policy Institute, KCET Departures, the River Revitalization Corporation, Tierra West Advisors, and the LA Conservation Corps. For urban design and placemaking efforts, the collaborative teamed up with collaborators DakeLuna Consultants, Mia Leher + Associates, LA-Más, and The Robert Group.

Figure 1. NELA RC study area map.

GLENDALE

ADAMS SQUARE

ATWATER
VILLAGE

GRIFFITH
PARK

EAGLE ROCK

GLENDALE
LOS ANGELES

GLASSELL
PARK

MOUNT WASHINGTON

LOS FELIZ

ROWENA
RESERVOIR

IVANHOE
RESERVOIR

ELYRIA CANYON
PARK

SILVER LAKE
RESERVOIR

RIO DE LOS ANGELES
STATE PARK

CYPRESS
PARK

ELYSIAN
VALLEY

SILVER LAKE

ELYSIAN
PARK

MONTECITO
HEIGHTS

LINCOLN
HEIGHTS

ECHO PARK

ELYSIAN
RESERVOIR

ECHO PARK
RESERVOIR

DODGER
STADIUM

LINCOLN
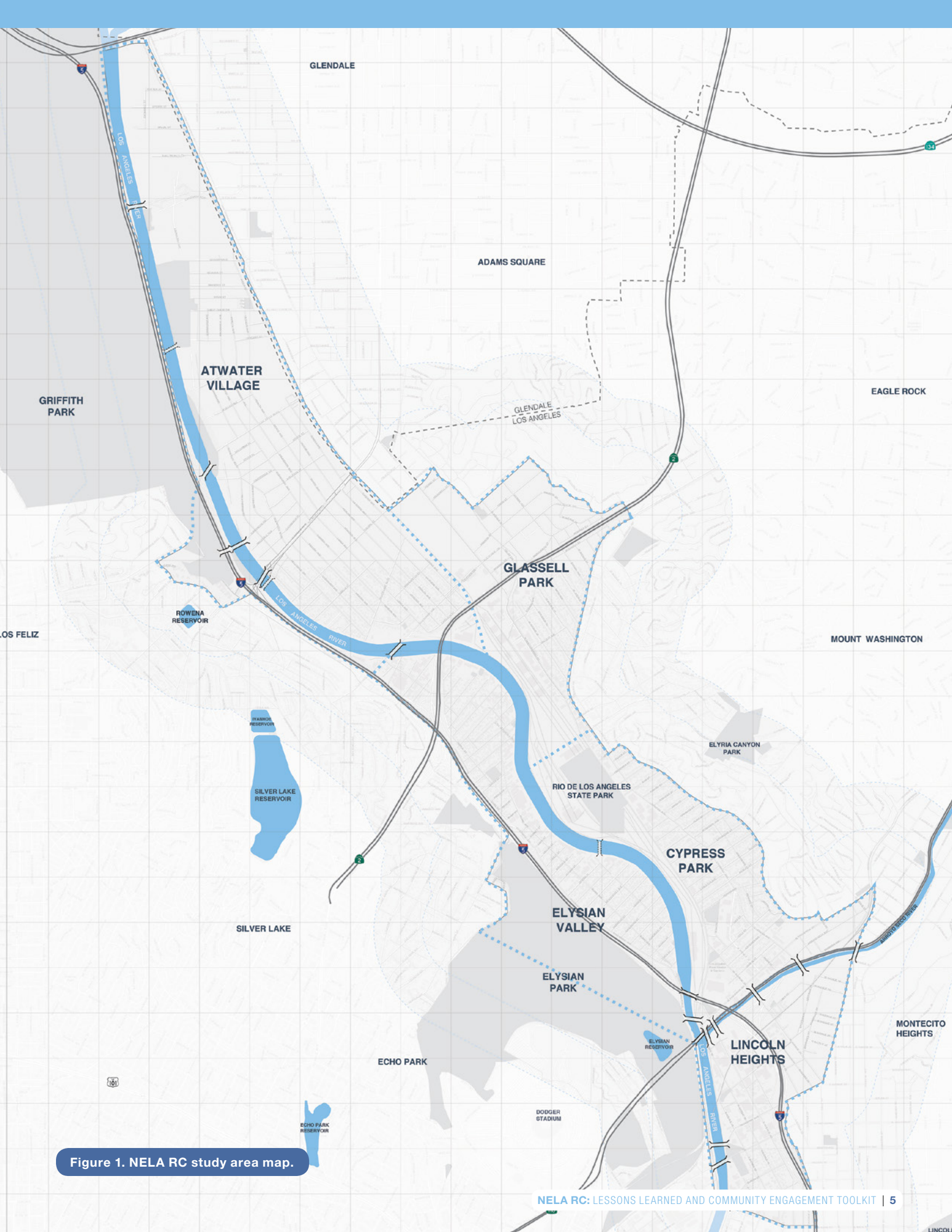
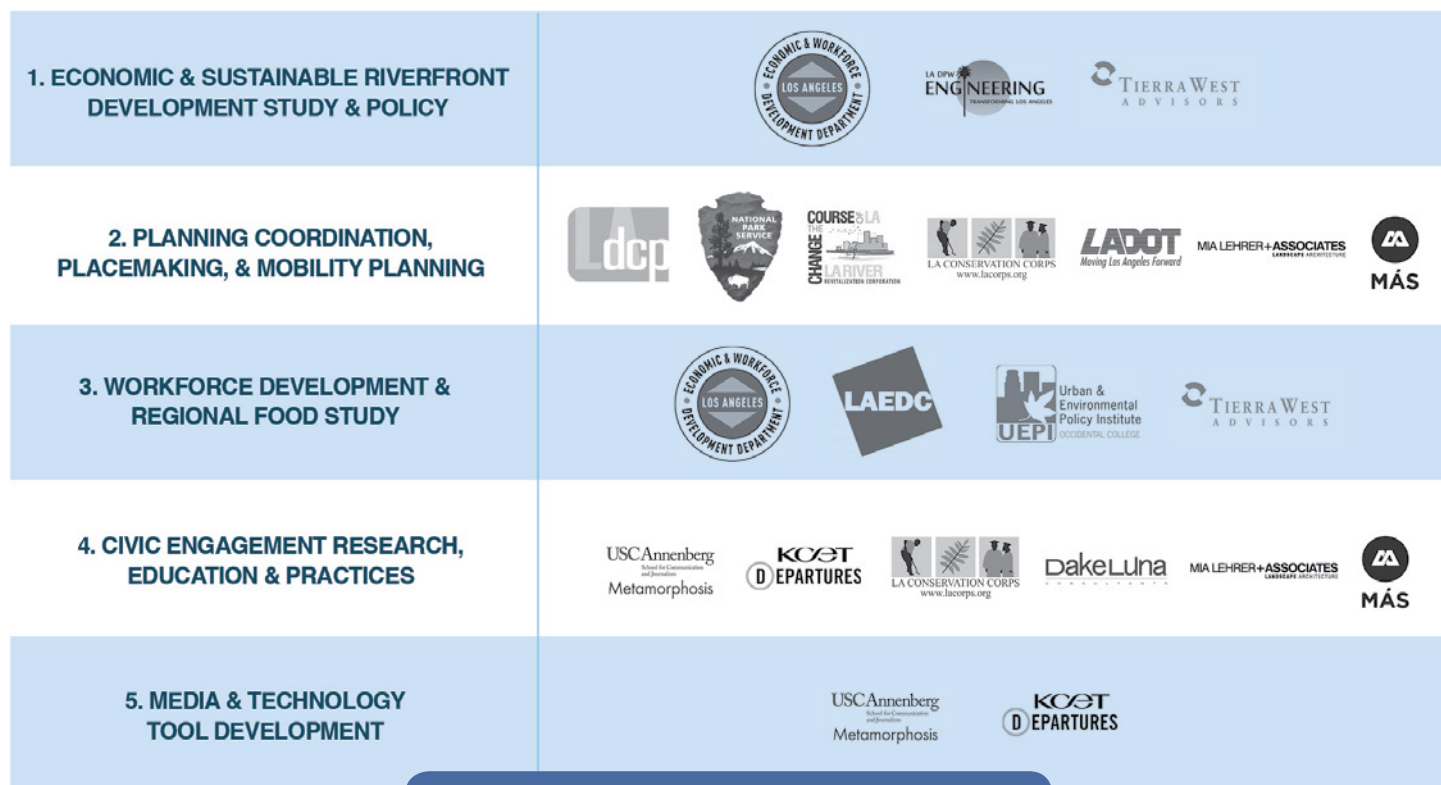# NELA RC Program, Partner Roles, and Engagement Overview

Figure 2. Five program elements of the Northeast Los Angeles Collaborative and partner roles.

Collaborative partners were assigned to 5 program elements. The program elements were not mutually exclusive as much of the work intersected, but program elements were developed to maximize each partner's strength and contribution to the NELA RC process. The five program elements and how each partner was assigned are shown in **Figure 2** above. The work within each program element was eventually synthesized into one NELA RC Vision Plan and Economic Development Implementation Strategy.

The first three program elements were created with the aim of exploring standard policy goals considered by city departments. These policy goals focused on planning, transportation, and economic development work within program elements 1-3 and included the following baseline studies: parcel valuation surveys, land-use studies, financing mechanisms studies, city plan review and coordination, a workforce market study, a food hub feasibility

study, ecosystem studies, tree vacancy reports, placemaking urban design opportunities, and river access assessments.

To inform the vision plan goals and economic development implementation strategies suggested in the vision plan, the NELA RC process was heavily shaped by program elements 4 and 5 that focused on the engagement of the community within the study area. The engagement process informed the policy goals through community policy education, placemaking and design workshops, field mapping, resident and business door-to-door surveys, installation kiosks for community input, youth engagement programs, placemaking tours, and an interactive website. Many of the engagement practices implemented in the NELA RC engagement process make up the engagement methods illustrated in the toolkit of this document.

The engagement process is mapped out in **Figure 3** on the next page and shows the two final documents that served as outcomes of the process.
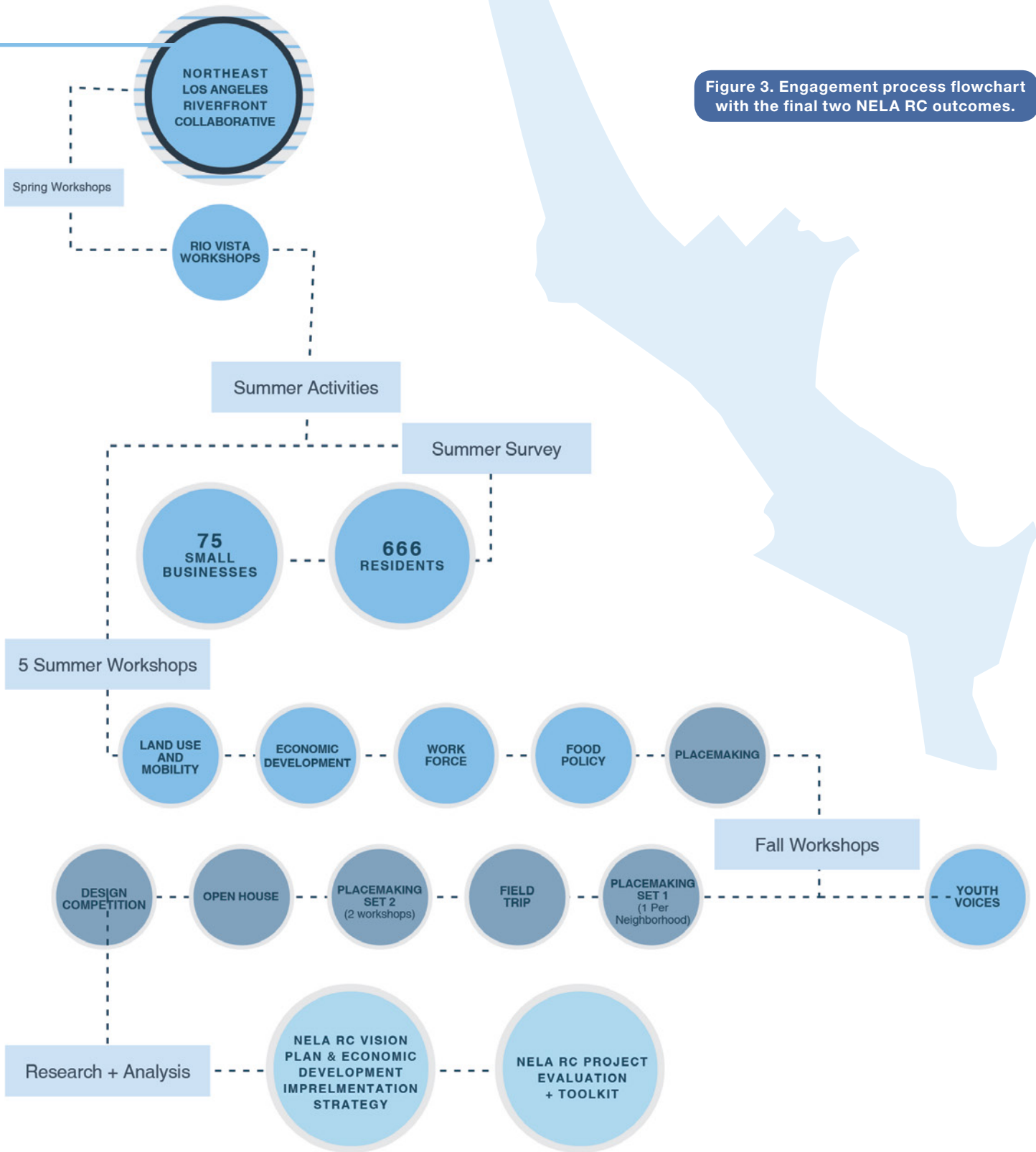
NORTHEAST LOS ANGELES RIVERFRONT COLLABORATIVE

Spring Workshops

RIO VISTA WORKSHOPS

Summer Activities

Summer Survey

75 SMALL BUSINESSES

666 RESIDENTS

5 Summer Workshops

LAND USE AND MOBILITY

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

WORK FORCE

FOOD POLICY

PLACEMAKING

Fall Workshops

DESIGN COMPETITION

OPEN HOUSE

PLACEMAKING SET 2 (2 workshops)

FIELD TRIP

PLACEMAKING SET 1 (1 Per Neighborhood)

YOUTH VOICES

Research + Analysis

NELA RC VISION PLAN & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IMPRELMENTATION STRATEGY

NELA RC PROJECT EVALUATION + TOOLKIT

Lessons Learned from the NELA RC Collaborative Approach and Process

State legislation shutdown redevelopment agencies statewide in 2011. This challenged The NELA RC from the start as the local leading agency and grant recipient of The NELA RC was the Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles. In danger of cancellation by HUD, the City's Economic and Workforce Development Department (EWDD) picked up the grant . In what was a herculean effort, and with the guidance of local City Council Districts, the EWDD stepped up and assumed the administrative responsibility as the local sponsor for the HUD grant[1] and jump-started NELA RC's work.

It took several months to position the grant through the LA City bureaucratic process and officially embed it into the EWDD. The effects of the state legislation combined with the process of saving the grant via the EWDD resulted in a reduced timeline for the actual grant work shrinking from 3 years to 21 months for completion. Even with a short extension granted by HUD to make up for the lost time, working through the process of setting up contracts with the various collaborative lead partners and invoicing took time away from the direct work and further slowed the project. Nevertheless, the collaborative started in earnest in January 2013 and aggressively worked to meet the engagement process, planning, and economic development deliverables.

Ultimately, the short timeline did not detract from the NELA RC collaborative process and approach becoming a case study for social innovation, collaboration, collective impact, and alternative approaches to economic development post the redevelopment era in the City. Through participant observation and through a focus group that explored lessons learned from the collaborative experience with the primary representatives of the lead partner agencies—**we present a discussion of 10 top lessons learned from the collaborative process and programming.**

1. Social Innovation, Not Technological Innovation Should Lead: Increased attention has been given to technological innovation as a key driver to successful economic development in cities and its local communities. Technological innovation in the form of mobile phones, social media, and information communication technologies are important and part of the process. Social aspects of innovation, however, need to lead efforts such as collaborative planning and economic development projects like the NELA RC. Examples of these social aspects are organizations within collaboratives that become more willing to partner with other organizations, build relationships across sectors, and take on community engagement seriously as a foundational aspect of their planning and economic development work. A necessary element is ensuring that any innovation within collaboratives have a direct goal and purpose.

2. Cross-Sector Partnerships are the Future of Cities: Los Angeles continues to be a case where silos across the public, private, and non-profit sectors still exist. The NELA RC became a case study that resulted in representatives from various sectors for the first time, working together on a regular basis on a specific project focused on the River and the NELA neighborhoods. It will be important that this type of collaboration across city agencies and disciplines outside of the city are not only encouraged but also mandated to convene together on a regular basis to address specific policy issues in local neighborhoods in the City. Innovative planning and economic development within cities will not be successful if city departments continue to act within silos and not work with each other on specific projects.

3. Project Management with Local Knowledge Matters: The NELA RC project experienced its first collaborative hurdle with the selection of a project manager that did not fit the collaborative management task and goals at hand. This was remedied after the first two months with the selection of a new project manager that possessed the capacity to lead the vision of the project and its collaborative goals. More importantly, was the knowledge that the new project manager possessed about the local communities within the study area, the community organizations involved, and previous work experience with the City and political climate. This local capacity became necessary as the project manager position for this collaborative required the necessary relationships and knowledge to navigate the complex issues that surround the River, its neighborhoods in the Northeast, and the political landscape that changed within the project's course due to a newly elected Mayor and City Councilmembers in the NELA RC study area.

4. Organization Branding Matters in Collaboratives: A challenge that arose in the work of the collaborative was an issue surrounding branding in regards to the outreach materials used. As an assemblage of partner organizations within an officially sponsored City project and not an official incorporated organization, the outreach materials were designed with Northeast Los Angeles Riverfront Collaborative as the umbrella project name. The non-profits and smaller private enterprises, however, expressed the desire to have their respective names and logos branded in outreach materials wherever possible. In recognition of this branding issue, the NELA RC as a collaborative agreed to include all the organization logos or names where there was room to do so—such as the website, large banners, and other materials. The branding of organizations, especially smaller non-profits and private enterprises was important as they saw the larger collaborative work as opportunities to get their names out and set them up for opportunities for future work to sustain their own existence as an organization. These tensions surrounding branding will be issues to consider when managing collaboratives.

5. Thinking beyond Real Estate Approaches to Economic Development: The history of redevelopment in Los Angeles privileged real estate and land grabbing approaches to economic development that benefited richer clientele. This approach has also taken hold in mainstream approaches to economic development around the River and its adjacent neighborhood lands. The real estate driven approach to economic development in local urban communities needs to be re-thought and cities need to consider alternative approaches to economic development. That alternative focus should value local sustainable enterprise, cultural placemaking, and community-driven development that decrease forms of gentrification that lead to displacement. A sustainable economic development approach to the River and its surrounding neighborhoods needs to consider equity and development that secure community benefits and access for populations that are not as economically affluent as the populations that are benefitting from the recent revitalization of areas such as Hollywood and Downtown in Los Angeles.

6. A Collaborative Will Not be Fully Representative: An issue that became clear as our work unfolded towards meeting our project goals was that we didn't always have all of the answers and necessary expertise. We enlisted the help of others and partnered with many other organizations and created several allies along the way. The partnerships became key to a successful goal oriented project. Our partner reflections also demonstrated how our policy areas covered by our research focus were not comprehensive, and that there were gaps we tried to fill such as working closer with education policymakers in the NELA communities. Future planning collaboratives should think about who is missing at the table and what policy area is not being represented at the outset of the project.
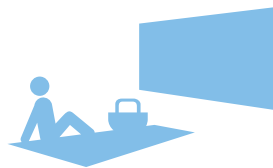
7. Learning and Flexibility is Key: While recognizing that the NELA RC was a collective expert community of practice, the strength of the collaborative really came from the willingness and flexibility of the project partners, albeit, facilitated by a strong project manager, who consistently led a community of learning that was engaged in the community engaged research through workshops and surveys. The cross-sector learning of the different approaches in conducting this work was one of the key takeaways NELA RC partners expressed they appreciated most about the NELA RC project. In their respective organizations, the process of engaging with community stakeholders are set up in a certain way that the NELA RC allowed them to try something entirely different given the strength of the resources and diversity of practices amongst the various partners.

8. Capitalize on the Expertise and Diversity of Your Collaborative Partners Strengths: A practice of the NELA RC collaborative was to give each partner their own area of expertise to focus on, craft their own research workshops, and work with their ideas so that the collaborative could assist with bringing those projects to fruition. Partner debriefs after each policy engagement workshop was key for the collaborative as a whole to learn from the perspective of the policy expert, as well as provide feedback based on his or her own area of expertise. Together these conversations created a ladder of success for each of our policy events as we learned from the first to the second, to third, and fourth and so on. Collaborations outside of the NELA RC realm of objectives were also discussed between the NELA partners as the partners learned more about everyone's work, style, and project interests outside of the NELA RC project.

9. Partner Participation and Consistent Engagement is Crucial to Collaborative Success: Bi-weekly lead partner meetings, sub group meetings divided by policy focus, and one-on-one office visits with each partner were without a doubt, the thread that wove the collaborative together again and again. Partners were constantly asked to engage in regular meetings, encouraged to participate in all the policy workshops, invited to sit in on other policy focused meetings, and rounded up for tabling at public events pertinent to the River. Without the constant and exhaustive efforts and compliance of the collaborative partners, it would be easy for partners to go back into their office culture and work in silos. Collaborative partners expressed the utmost commitment to stay informed by and connected to the project.

10. Clarity on What the Collaborative Is and Isn't: The grant was a planning project focused on economic revitalization along the LA River and NELA neighborhoods. However, NELA partners experienced some extent of confusion at one point or another pertaining to the NELA RC project. Similarly, there were also organizations that may have felt left out of the collaborative because they felt they should have been part of it due to their work surrounding the river. On another level, there were also some residents scoffing at the thought of yet another river study that produces no results they can see. While the hope is that the study will be implemented in the future, NELA RC partners realized through their experience that being able to clearly convey the purpose of the collaborative early on would be beneficial. Moreover, future collaborative considerations should have built-in next steps for the resulting "so what now?" part of the collaborative process, as well as summary reports on how the study at hand is different than any previous plans at hand, and what, if anything, resulted from previous plans. Given the various planning and development efforts that exist around the River at this current time, the City and River organizations would benefit from agreeing to better coordinate revitalization efforts. More importantly, the City and River organizations should work together to collectively educate the riverfront communities on the revitalization efforts taking shape and how the efforts impact the surrounding residents and businesses.

Community Engagement Toolkit

Summer Intern Program

Goal: To offer experiential learning to college students through an internship program that increases capacity and enhances community engagement efforts.

The NELA RC developed an internship program for college students and recent college graduates to work with the project on carrying out community-based research and popular education projects. Interns were recruited from the fields of urban planning, policy, community development, and the social sciences to participate in a summer-long program. They helped with policy education events and conducted door-to-door surveys and pop-up survey booths along the River. Interns completed 666 resident surveys and 75 small business surveys that captured the voices of a sample of Northeast LA. Survey data was used by our NELA RC partners to assist with policy analysis and recommendations.

Figure 4. Some of our interns pose holding their LA City certificates thanking them for their contributions to the NELA RC project, alongside NELA RC partners and LA city representatives.

Building, Training, and Managing an Intern Cohort

1. Recruitment: Students were recruited through idealist.org, and colleges locally, nationally, and abroad. A resume and cover letter expressing interests in planning and policy were required to be considered for an interview.

2. Training: Interns were trained in survey administration and community engagement strategies. Field trips and neighborhood mapping helped interns acquaint themselves with the neighborhood before surveying NELA residents and business owners.

3. Surveying: Door-to-door surveying took place Monday-Thursday from 4pm-8pm, and Saturday mornings from 9am-12pm, for both residents and small businesses. Interns were sent out in pairs to neighborhood sub-areas (see **Figure. 6**) that were manageable for walking.

4. Data entry: Interns were also trained in data entry methods. They helped with entering survey responses into our Qualtrics online survey platform. This was accompanied by food and a social learning environment.

5. Participation in Policy workshops: Interns participated in popular education policy workshops while assisting our NELA RC partners to facilitate workshop stations with attendees. They helped explain workshops and gather resident input from various activities.

6. Networking Opportunities and Rewards: To balance out a heavy workload, the interns were given the opportunity to connect with project partners during social networking mixers.

7. Payment: Interns received a stipend for their participation and commitment over the summer.

8. Reflections: A mid-point informal reflection on the intern experience was conducted to assess the intern program. A final reflection was assessed to assist with evaluation and future improvements.

Key Takeaways for a Successful Internship Program

1. Positive Environment: Maintaining a positive environment by managing potential conflicts or issues immediately is important for the intern team to maintain morale and commitment to the project.

2. Rewards and Recognition: By recognizing their contributions and affording the interns with opportunities to connect to professionals, they built upon their social networks and have since moved on to other internships, jobs, or graduate studies.

3. Headquarters: A dedicated workspace in the study area could have made data collection and engagement efforts smoother for the team. Additionally, a collective working space could promote more interaction and collaboration among partners working on various aspects of the project.

4. Language Capacity: In the NELA area, there is a population of monolingual Tagalog, Spanish, Mandarin, and Cantonese speaking residents. To engage with as many diverse residents as possible, we made sure to staff our intern cohort with diverse language capabilities.

5. Turnover: You may experience turnover, be sure to recruit a few more students than you think you may need to work with over the course of your project.

6. Supervision: Having a responsible supervisor is important so that the interns can receive direction, support, and address any issues with ease.

Resident Surveys & Focus Groups

Goal: Surveys and focus groups are research tools that can be used to engage residents and incorporate their voices in neighborhood planning and development initiatives.

The civic engagement component of the NELA RC aimed to engage residents and learn more about social conditions in NELA neighborhoods. Resident surveys and focus groups provided a venue for residents to talk about and reflect on their everyday experiences. The survey questionnaire was developed with NELA RC partners so that it would inform the collaborative's policy and planning recommendations. Our team of researchers and interns conducted 666 in-person surveys with residents. The survey included questions about community participation; evaluation of local resources such as grocery stores, businesses, and services; and reflections on the past, present and future of the neighborhood. Two groups of residents were invited to return for focus group discussions about themes and issues that emerged in the surveys. Focus group participants also completed a neighborhood mapping activity where they identified local resources, river access points and geographic conceptions of their neighborhood.

Figure 5. A NELA RC intern surveying residents at a pop-up survey site along the River.

Top Methodological Considerations for this Project

1. Survey Development: While a resident survey can be a useful way to document the opinions of a large number of people, it is often challenging to produce questionnaires that are not too long but still capture areas of interest. Organizing a survey by themes or goals can help balance the number of questions and plan for how the data will be analyzed. The NELA RC resident survey was collaboratively produced with the project's partners and was structured based on policy objectives.

2. Survey Administration: Methods such as door-to-door recruitment can provide a random sampling of residents that is representative of the community while facilitating outreach and engagement. The NELA RC interns walked along residential streets and spoke to residents right outside their homes. To supplement the door-to-door surveying, the team also conducted surveys at pop-up recruitment sites along the River (see **Figure 5**). After the survey, residents were provided with information about the NELA RC and upcoming community engagement events. This process was coordinated through the use of sub-area maps (see **Figure 6**). Dividing the neighborhoods into sub areas made the door-to-door survey more manageable. Because the survey administration was conducted in two different waves, maps were also used to identify which households had already refused, participated, or asked to be surveyed on another day.

Figure 6. A sub-area map of Glassell Park used to coordinate survey administration.
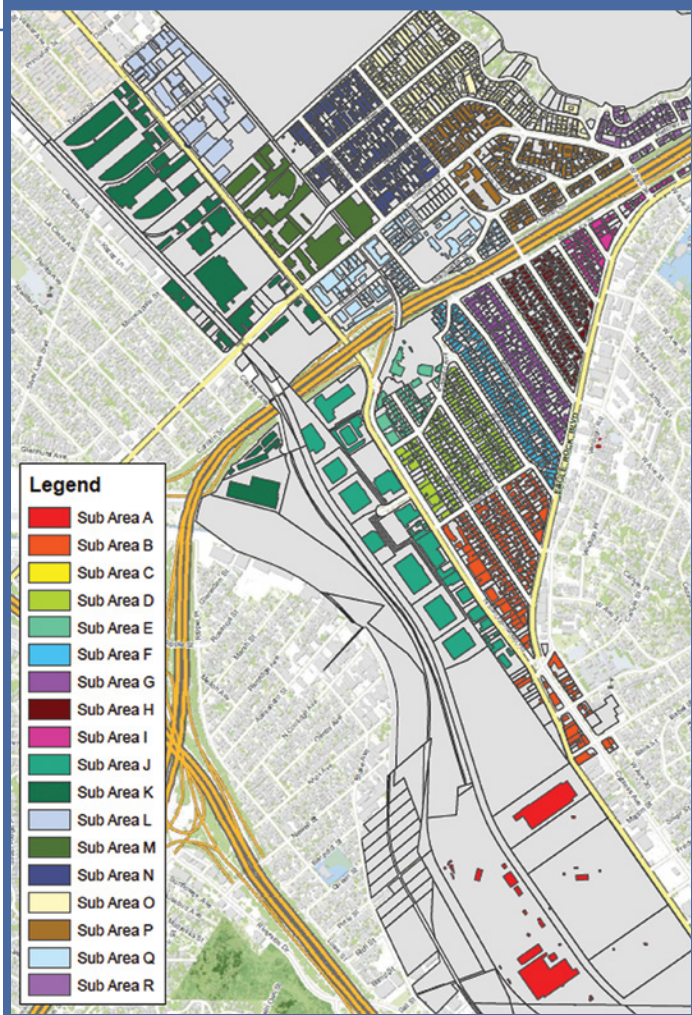
Legend
- Sub Area A
- Sub Area B
- Sub Area C
- Sub Area D
- Sub Area E
- Sub Area F
- Sub Area G
- Sub Area H
- Sub Area I
- Sub Area J
- Sub Area K
- Sub Area L
- Sub Area M
- Sub Area N
- Sub Area O
- Sub Area P
- Sub Area Q
- Sub Area R

Figure 7. Neighborhood map produced by a resident during a community focus group.

3. Resident Focus Groups: While surveys can help capture a breadth of voices, resident focus groups are a way to understand resident perspectives in a more in-depth manner. Group conversations often spur more detailed ideas and reflections about community topics. In fact, participants in the NELA RC focus groups found it valuable to meet other residents and share information about local resources. Incorporating a neighborhood mapping activity can further spark conversations among participants and make the focus group more interactive. (see **Figure 7**).

4. Team Management: Both resident surveys and focus groups require commitment and coordination from a team of trained individuals. As part of our community research, the NELA RC research team consulted with an academic advisor, worked directly with the NELA RC engagement team, and trained the NELA RC interns to ensure the quality and usability of the data. Researchers regularly reported back to the collaborative on the progress of the data collection and invited partners to come out and see the research in action. Interns were also involved in data processing, using Qualtrics survey software to enter responses, preparing data for analysis through SPSS statistics software, and transcribing audio recordings of the focus groups (see pages 12-13 for more information about the Summer Intern Program).

Key Takeaways

1. Resident surveys should be constructed in collaboration with key stakeholders of a project and organized along project goals. Conversations about the focus and capacity of the research early in the process can streamline data collection and produce useful findings. The NELA RC research team, for example, hosted a research workshop during which survey questions were brainstormed, discussed, and refined. Hands-on workshops can be particularly useful for bigger teams working on a variety of community initiatives.

2. Both surveys and focus groups serve as ways to learn more about residents and their opinions on the present and future of their neighborhoods. They can also make planning and development initiatives more relevant as they capture the voices of individuals who live in the communities that are being discussed. While it can be difficult for residents to attend a 2-hour focus group, providing incentives such as gifts, food or any other form of compensation can help recruitment. All of our research participants received either a NELA RC tote bag or water bottle as a gift for their time; these items were produced to serve as compensation and to promote the project (see **Figure 8**).

Figure 8. Promotional items

Small Business Mapping & Surveys

Goal: To learn more about the small business climate in a community through local business mapping and surveys with small business owners.

As part of the NELA RC's research to understand the physical, social, and economic conditions of NELA neighborhoods, we conducted small business mapping fieldwork and surveyed 75 small business owners/managers. We defined small businesses as those with 15 or fewer employees that are not part of national chains. The mapping fieldwork involved walking around each neighborhood's major street corridors and identifying the operating small businesses. This mapping allowed us to develop our own small business database that includes details such as the name/type of business, hours of operation, and contact information.

Using findings from our small business mapping as a road map, our researchers and interns made personal visits to business sites to recruit participants for the small business survey. The development of the small business survey followed a similar procedure as the resident survey. The survey covered basic profiles of the business, owners/managers' personal connection with the neighborhood, their perceptions of the physical, social, and economic conditions of the surrounding area, and the challenges faced by their businesses.

Top Methodological Considerations for this Project

Figure 9. A NELA RC researcher taking notes during small business mapping fieldwork.

business, business mapping can be a useful way of producing a current small business database. This process of collecting business information on a written log (see **Figure 10**) can also help you to become more familiar with the area. By walking around and identifying small businesses in person, we were able to have preliminary conversations with business owners, and thus set the stage for survey recruitment.

3. Creating Sub-Areas. The greater NELA area consists of five neighborhoods that are characterized by slightly different business climates. The overall number, size, and specific type of businesses also vary from one neighborhood to another. To make sure the survey was representative, our team of researchers and interns followed a "quota-sampling" strategy and recruited a similar number of businesses from each neighborhood. By doing so, our survey not only identified common issues emerging from the NELA area, but it also allowed for meaningful comparison across neighborhoods.

4. Establishing Rapport. When asking about the problems or challenges faced by small businesses, it is very important to develop trust with business owners so that they feel comfortable sharing their thoughts. Small business surveys may require multiple site visits and personalized scheduling. Incentives are also critical. Other than providing project-related gifts, offering professionally relevant information, such as a list of local business resources, can also help establish rapport and boost participation.

1. Business Mapping Fieldwork. In a similar fashion to the door-to-door recruitment we conducted for the resident surveys, our initial process of getting to know the neighborhoods consisted of identifying small businesses in the major corridors of each area. This small business mapping process includes listing each business, taking a photograph, and noting any description or contact information available (see **Figure 9**).

2. Developing a Small Business Database. Because official lists of businesses can often be outdated or perhaps not include more informal sites of

Figure 10. A small business mapping log, with information about each site visited during the mapping fieldwork.

Key Takeaways

1. When taking a holistic approach to community research, it can be useful to consider the economic conditions of the area, both from the resident and business owner perspective. We conducted small business mapping and surveys to better understand the local business climate and, more importantly, to become aware of the challenges that the local economy is facing. Studying the small businesses in an area can further contextualize community research and can inform policy recommendations that aim to strengthen the local economy.

2. Small business surveys are understandably more challenging in terms of recruitment; business owners and managers are often busy or difficult to reach. Keeping this in mind, it is important to consider the length and focus of the survey to capture information in an effective manner. We learned that surveys for business owners should be shorter and more specific—perhaps focusing on a few vital objectives rather than multiple themes.
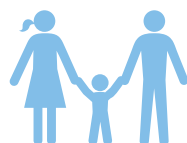
Understanding Local Media Storytelling

Goal: To understand local media storytelling about the NELA neighborhoods and the River by identifying key online and offline media in the area and drawing out common story themes.

Why local media? Local media play an important role as community storytellers by providing information to residents, bringing attention to community issues that might otherwise go unnoticed, and enhancing the outreach efforts of community organizations.

A Multi-Method Approach: The **local media mapping** fieldwork helped us to generate a list of the active media storytellers in the NELA study area, as many of the smaller, local print media are not listed in mainstream directories. **Online media monitoring**, which was conducted for about eight months, complemented the fieldwork but also allowed us to look deeper into the content of the stories. We referenced the media identified in the fieldwork and online media monitoring to identify and reach out to media producers, editors, and writers who were involved in creating stories about NELA and the River. We invited them to a **focus group discussion** to discuss the conditions and challenges of local media storytelling in the area.

Top Methodological Considerations for this Project

PRINT MEDIA & FIELD WORK

1. Local Media Mapping: Media mapping involved walking in the neighborhoods with clipboards and cameras and making observations of the different types of print media, such as newspapers, newsletters, brochures, pamphlets, and tabloids. Sometimes the media can be found inside a kiosk on the sidewalk or posted on a bulletin board inside a restaurant. We took pictures of where we found the media (see **Figure 11**), jotted down notes on what the media looked like, and picked up samples if they were free. From this database, we created media profiles of each of the **five study neighborhoods** and also reached out to and invited some of the media professionals to our **focus group discussion**.

Figure 11. Local media could be found in various forms in our mapping work. Bulletin boards with flyers and announcements, kiosks with newspapers, and magazine stands can be considered local media. Look out for unique types of media such as this free library stand we found in one of the neighborhoods.

ONLINE MEDIA

2. Collecting Stories:
We set up Google Alerts for several keywords that would help us filter through the online stories. For example, the search keywords we used included: "Los Angeles River," "LA River," "Northeast Los Angeles," "NELA," "Los Angeles Riverfront," "Atwater Village," "Elysian Valley," "Cypress Park," "Glassell Park," and "Lincoln Heights." The final sample includes 265 stories that were published during one year.

3. Creating a Codebook and Entering Data:
Spending time to create a detailed codebook and train coders (who were made up of the NELA RC interns) at the start will go a long way (See **Figure 12**). Using a codebook will help you to generate data and analyze quantitative and qualitative aspects of the stories systematically. For each of the 265 stories, three individual coders identified and entered into an electronic data entry spreadsheet the types of story themes that were present.

Figure 12. A snapshot of our codebook.

Instructions on how data should be entered. Here, we ask coders to read a news story, and assign 0s, 1s, and 2s, for each of the variables below.

Variable Name

Examples of what the variable does/does not include

Notes to clarify unclear terms or categorization issues

Coding Guidelines 09.30.13

Story Themes

Please enter the number "0" if a theme was absent; "1" if the theme was only mentioned in passing; and "2" if the theme was a primary topic of the story. Below is a list of major themes and their abbreviations as shown in the Excel file.
General note: "Local" always refers to NELA region or the LA River vicinity within the NELA region.

Var1 (Polpol) Local politicians (restricted to City Council members, Mitch O'Farrell, John Choi, Eric Garcetti, Wendy Greuel, etc. PLEASE note the name(s) of all local politician(s) mentioned in the story in the "Politis" column at the end of the coding sheet.)

Var2 (Polpl) Local politics (restricted to NELA region). Politics is broadly defined to include city politics, school-board politics, local elections, town hall meetings, etc. Policy changes or anything related to policy can be coded in var3.
Note: We're coding for local politics only. Regional, state, national and international politics will all be coded as "0"

Var3 (Polply) Local policies (restricted to NELA region). Includes policy and planning documents, like the Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan (LARRMP). Also includes laws and injunctions.

Var4 (Polinpac) Regional/state/national/international politics that may have impact on the NELA region (e.g. redistricting, local perspective on an international political issue, etc.)

Var5 (Polinpacply) Regional/state/national/international policies that may have impact on the NELA region.

Var6 (Admin) City government administration (restricted to NELA region) (e.g. appointment of new police chief, rotation of city mayor, wages of local officials, mention or identification of funds etc.)

Var7 (Pdprog) Planning and development: Progresses
Notes: If there is projected progress, this counts as "recognition." However, if there is even the smallest sign of progress including conversations taking place, planning workshops, plans or solutions being proposed, funds being secured, visible changes made, plans being implemented, these count as "progress."

Var8 (Pdprob) Planning and development: Problems

THE KEY POINT: to create a codebook that coders feel comfortable using, and yet detailed and comprehensive so that story themes can be coded consistently by multiple coders!

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION WITH MEDIA PRODUCERS, WRITERS, AND EDITORS

4. Recruiting Participants:
We identified key local media that were producing stories about the NELA region and River that appeared in our media mapping and online media monitoring work. We reached out to individual editors, writers, and producers through email and phone. Following a recruitment script, we explained the purpose of the focus group discussion and asked them if they would be interested and available to participate.

5. Moderating the Focus Group Discussion:
The focus group discussion was moderated by a researcher who followed a carefully scripted moderator guide (See **Figure 13**). The discussion was planned for 2 hours and covered the following topics: their professional and personal relationship to NELA and the River; thoughts on the pressing issues affecting the area; and their experiences and challenges of writing, editing, and producing stories. We also brainstormed ideas about what an ideal news platform for the area would look like (See **Figure 14**).

Figure 13. A snapshot of our moderator guide.

A title for each section and approximate time allotted for that section

Starting with an introductory sentence or two at the start of each section helps the moderator to transition smoothly between sections, and to maintain a conversational tone.

Main questions

Main questions

Probing questions can be used to move the discussion along if participants are quiet after hearing the first question.

Figure 14.

**THE KEY POINT: to create a guide that the moderator feels comfortable using, and that elicits engaged discussion from the participants. The moderator may not be able to cover all questions. That's why it's important to mark clearly ones that are key and must be covered, and ones that are less important.

Key Takeaways

1. Some ways that you could make the data across methods useful include looking at the types of media. For example, are some media more locally produced and targeted than others? Are there differences in the ways local vs. city vs. nation-wide news media report on your area/neighborhood of interest? Another way is to look at the content and the nature of the stories. What are the common issues that are addressed in the stories? You might also look at the geo-ethnic (or media focused on a particular geography or ethnicity) focus of the stories. Do some neighborhoods or ethnic groups get more media coverage than others? These questions may be further examined in a focus group discussion with media producers, writers, and editors who contributed to these stories to further examine the conditions and challenges of local media storytelling in an ethnically and culturally diverse area.

2. Be aware of group dynamics and how that might influence the quality of the discussions during focus groups with local media producers. If you have a mix of participants that are more invested in the local community than others (e.g. local media producer who also lives in the community he/she reports on), or work for media that are different in organizational size and scope, you might want to be sensitive to the different stakes and motivations the participants have in reporting stories about the community. Keep in mind during the discussion that media writers, editors, and producers may be speaking for themselves and based on their personal experiences and thoughts as an individual, and at times on behalf of the media organization they work for or represent.

Policy Popular Education Workshops

Goal: To gather resident input on the policy areas of placemaking, economic development, food policy, workforce development, planning and mobility through a series of interactive workshops led by local experts.

The NELA RC hosted five popular education workshops on the collaborative's policy goals in Northeast Los Angeles. Activities during the workshops ranged from community modeling with everyday objects, financial literacy games and hotspot mapping. Each workshop was led by a NELA RC partner organization with the relevant policy expertise, and other partners assisted in the development and execution of the workshops. The input gathered informed the vision plan that outlines various sustainable planning and economic development recommendations for the River and surrounding NELA communities. The methods of the workshops varied, but the objectives remained constant: to engage community members that are not traditionally included in the planning process through informal engagement and popular education.

Top Methodological Considerations for Policy Engagement Workshops

Workshop Content:

1. Focus on a clear question, prompt, or problem to be addressed

2. Begin with an introduction to the organization, project, business

3. Use both traditional and pop-ed interactive activities to engage community

4. Have an arsenal of activities: asset mapping, round tables, prompts, and building exercises

Workshop Location:

1. Use familiar spaces that can be accessible by car, bike, public transit, or walking

2. Avoid locations that can seem polarizing or uncomfortable

3. Anticipate the number of attendees in order to identify a space of appropriate size

4. Post signs in the area so that the events are visible

Workshop Outreach:

1. Communication strategies: social media, emails, newsletters, local blogs, text messages

2. Community organizing strategies: phone banks, neighborhood canvassing, identifying community leaders who can help spread the word

3. Make communication bilingual when necessary

4. Always leave contact information on fliers or postings in case people have questions

Lessons Learned from Policy Engagement Workshops

1. Q & A: Always leave time for questions and discussion

2. Moderator: Have a strong moderator that maintains organization and flow

3. Agenda: Create and publicize the program content so that people know what they are signing up for

4. Ground Rules: If involving youth or discussing sensitive topics, it is helpful to have the community set ground rules

5. Anticipate Questions: Try to anticipate questions beforehand so that you are prepared

6. Sign-in sheets: Create sign-in sheets asking for contact information

The following is an overview of our 5 popular education policy workshops, including activity and methods descriptions, and learning outcomes.

PLACEMAKING WORKSHOP

Overview: Placemaking is the process of comprehensive planning that solicits community based input to enhance the inherent and unique qualities of a neighborhood to enable and promote vibrancy within the public realm. It involves looking at, listening to, and asking questions of the people who live, work, and play in a particular space. This process helps discover their needs and aspirations, define a common vision, and identify projects that can implement that vision.

The Placemaking workshop had a **Community Expert Panel** that led a discussion on past, present, and future redevelopment efforts of the River and surrounding communities. Two engagement activities followed: a **Participatory Timeline**, an activity where participants post placemaking milestones on a wall timeline; and the interactive planning game **Plan-O-Poly** [see **Figure 15** below].
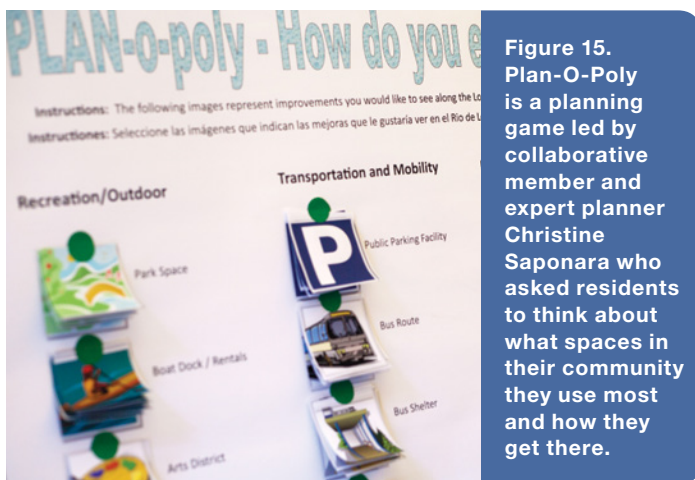

Figure 15. Plan-O-Poly is a planning game led by collaborative member and expert planner Christine Saponara who asked residents to think about what spaces in their community they use most and how they get there.

Learning Outcomes: We were able to get a sense of the **community issues** residents cared most about. Some common themes included: **gentrification**, lack of **public trust, access to the river, safe recreational routes,** and **other safety concerns in the community**.

FOOD POLICY WORKSHOP

Overview: Food policy refers to any type of public policy that has to do with the food system, which includes how food is produced, transported, purchased, and consumed. Food policies collectively influence the food that is available in a given neighborhood or community. The NELA RC Food Policy Workshop involved interactive stations meant to inform UEPI's Food Hub Feasibility Study.

The Food Policy Workshop had a **Food Mapping Exercise** where participants mapped where they purchase fresh fruits and vegetables in their community. Additionally, attendees participated in a Fruits and Veggies **Taste Test** and an **Educational Garden Walk**.

Figure 16. Residents answered the question, "where do you get your fresh fruits and vegetables?" by putting icons/stickers on a map of the NELA Study Area.

Learning Outcomes: This workshop provided insight on the state of **food accessibility** in NELA. UEPI was able to use the information as a driver for the function, impact and location of a community food hub. Some of the major topics that were highlighted by residents were: **lack of affordable grocery stores** in the NELA area that serve **quality fruits and vegetables, affordability of farmer markets, poor quality of school food,** lack of **prepared healthy food** in restaurants, and **educational opportunities** around variety and versatility of fresh foods.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

Overview: Workforce development is an economic development approach that attempts to enhance a region's economic stability and prosperity by focusing on the community's employment challenges and opportunities. The workshop's focus on community input about their employment conditions complemented the economic research and analysis of business demographics that was conducted in the greater NELA area.

The Workforce Development Workshop featured an **expert panel** and a NELA Labor Market Presentation. A **Community Modeling Activity** called **'Build Jobs'** was led by urban planner **James Rojas**. Adapted from his 'Place It' engagement activity, the modeling activity

harnessed the power of the **collective community imagination** to **visualize job creation** along the Los Angeles River. Participants reflected on, explored, experimented, and ultimately **built their ideal economic engine to create jobs**.

Figure 17. James Rojas conducts 'Build Jobs' activity where residents use found objects to build an economic engine in their community.

Learning Outcomes: We were able to hear from residents about the kind of employment and training they are interested in seeing in the area. **Young adult training** and **work opportunities**, as well as **local living-wage** jobs were constant themes.

PLANNING AND MOBILITY WORKSHOP

Overview: This workshop allowed the NELA RC to take a closer look at land use and mobility in the Northeast Los Angeles Riverfront community. The workshop complemented city planning work in NELA by exploring opportunities for the development of a NELA Riverfront district.

The Planning and Mobility Workshop included a **policy presentation** and **3 Interactive Breakout Group Activities** centered around three themes: **access and connectivity**; **transportation and mobility**; and **experience and character**.

Learning Outcomes: We were able to **map how residents move** through the community, what components of their neighborhood they view as **assets** and how they **interact with the river** and **open spaces**. This helped shape City Planning's Vision Plan by prioritizing the community's desires for open space, bike paths, walking paths, future site uses and access to the river.

SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

Overview: Sustainable Economic Development for the Northeast Los Angeles Riverfront District is a comprehensive community implementation strategy for revitalization and reinvestment; striving to link the various components that constitute the community. This workshop focused on the discussion of

Figure 19. We gave participants a budget of make-believe funds and a map of various hypothetical projects in the study area. Participants were asked to prioritize the projects they would spend their funds on.

implementation and financing of projects that were developed through the other visioning workshops.

The Economic Development Workshop had a **panel discussion** about the various **mechanism of funding** economic development projects in a post CRA era: philanthropic, federal, and state. Residents also had the opportunity to participate in a **Financial Literacy Game** (see **Figure 19** above.)

Learning Outcomes: We were able to gauge the community's interest in pursuing **specific financing mechanisms** to fund projects that would contribute to greater **economic health and vitality** along the River.

Figure 18. Workshop Station #1. Access and Connectivity: NELA interns led activity aimed to get resident feedback on the types of activity and programming they'd like to see in the parks as well as the types of components that make a "great street" that connects to the River.

Rio Vistas (River Access) Design Program

Goal: To generate a set of youth-led and community-driven design concepts that could be developed into **shovel ready**[2] construction plans for the transformation of Northeast River adjacent cul-de-sacs into **Rio Vistas**[3].

The NELA RC engaged in a six-month student training partnership with a NELA High School (LA River School) that abuts the River along the target study area. The Rio Vistas Program was created to address some of the issues of access and safety along a 2.5-mile stretch of the Los Angeles River in Elysian Valley. The classes provided the students with design skills and focused on teaching the students how to gather input from their friends, family, neighbors, and community at-large. The students held a set of three community-design input workshops to gather information on what the local community wanted to see in the NELA Riverfront Rio Vistas in Elysian Valley. They documented the design process, captured community input, and developed project design schematics. By working to re-imagine local streets, students learned about sustainable design, project planning, and community engagement.

The Objectives of the Rio Vistas Program were to:

- Expand student knowledge, participation, stewardship and civic responsibility in their community.
- Increase student and community input on projects and issues relating to the River.
- Foster youth leadership development within diverse and underserved communities surrounding the Northeast Riverfront corridor.
- Enhance green infrastructure for water quality, clean streets, habitat improvements, and community enjoyment.
- Improve public access to and enjoyment of the River by encouraging safe routes and healthy recreation.

Engagement Methods

1. Key Project Partner: Secured local LA River School buy-in from the administration and from a dedicated teacher; the teacher would be present at every class.

2. The Cool Element: The class instructors were knowledgeable but relatable in their approach with the students.

3. Augmenting the Vocabulary: Students were introduced to new concepts and approaches, followed by proper terminology.

4. Community Resident Experts: Two NELA community resident experts were hired to work alongside the students to help them navigate community concerns. The community resident experts helped the students and the design process avoid any community landmines[4].

5. Local Students: We worked with students that lived on the same streets that were targeted for design improvements.

6. Beyond the Classroom: Programming consisted of an almost equal amount of outdoor classroom and field experience.

7. Instructor Cultural Capital: Our instructors mirrored the student ethnic and gender demographics. This was particularly important because we wanted the instructors to reflect the experiences of the youth.

8. Family Matters: We invited the parents of the students to participate in all activities. Many were present at the community workshops.

9. Community Sensitivity: We focused on the student potential to contribute to design work in the community. It was important to not address the students with disadvantaging terms, such as the word "disadvantaged".

Figure 20. Students re-imagine space.

Key Takeaways for Future Youth-Led Projects

1. Work with students during their school time, not after school. This increases **consistency in participation**.

2. Present a **syllabus** at the beginning of the course so that it gives the students insight on their **learning path and expectations**.

3. Recruit a **grade level diverse cohort**. You should mix it up with sophomores, juniors and seniors. Your seniors will lead the pack, your sophomores and juniors will carry on the information once seniors graduate.

2 Shovel Ready: (Of a building project) at the stage where workers can be employed and construction can begin: from OxfordDictionaries.com

3 Rio Vista: Rio Vista is an effective, lighter, quicker, cheaper approach to transforming single use infrastructure into a multi-benefit green open space that welcomes public access to the River.

4 Community Landmines: community issues of intense concern or heated difference

Youth Media Literacy Program

Goal: To engage local youth through media education, production, and advocacy.

The NELA RC applied Youth Voices to engage local high school youth who live in the five neighborhoods to learn about their local community and develop projects on community issues they wanted to see positively change in their neighborhood. The program focused on educating the students on media tools, community outreach, research, and media production—toward a goal of creating a community advocacy project. Youth Voices was an existing program created by partner KCET Departures and was adapted as a youth media literacy engagement program that was designed around the NELA RC project pol icy goals.

Figure 21. The Youth Voices program worked with the Los Angeles Unified School District's LA River School classrooms in NELA.

Top Methodological Considerations

1. Project Design: Design the youth program to enhance civic engagement and advocacy goals of your planning project. Transferring media literacy or any skills to youth is stronger when it is project oriented.

2. Identify Partners: Identify local high schools and teachers with a classroom of youth who can partner with your project and goals.

3. Role of Educator and Facilitator: Local youth know their neighborhood issues best. Therefore, having project partners who run media literacy/advocacy project must also play the role of educator and facilitator; a good facilitator guides the student in the development of their own community projects.

Figure 22. Student groups from the classrooms that the Youth Voices program worked with were invited to present at the NELA community meetings.

4. Validate Youth Voices: Ensure there are venues for the youth to seek information about their community advocacy project, and venues for the youth to present about their advocacy project; within the application of Youth Voices, youth were able to present at neighborhood councils, community workshops, and the online website for the NELA RC project and KCET Departures.

5. Build Capacity through Recognition: Encourage students to submit their community advocacy projects in local public venues such as design competitions. The youth were encouraged to submit their projects in the NELA RC placemaking design competition; one youth group won top prize for one of the neighborhoods, and another youth group won a honorable mention in the competition.

Key Takeaways

1. Very quickly connect youth to community residents, leaders, and planning experts that can help mentor and guide the youth in the development of their community advocacy media projects.

2. Follow-up is particularly important if you want the youth groups to sustain their interests and advocacy for their particular project developed beyond the semester. Follow-up is particularly important if the youth are sophomores or juniors, as you can continue the project in future school semesters.

3. It is not always necessary to find a school teacher who instructs a multimedia class to partner up with for a Youth Voices engagement program (The classes the NELA RC partnered up with were Government, Economics, Environment, and Art classes). It is more important to identify a teacher who is willing to connect the Youth Voices program to what they are already instructing the youth within the semester in order to build curriculum connections.

For more information on the KCET Departures Youth Voices program, go to: **www.kcet.org/socal/departures/youthvoices/workshops/**

Figure 23. The team of LA River School students and their design project in Glassell Park that won one of the placemaking design competition prizes.

Mobile Phone Participatory Mapping

Goal: To create a participatory and experiential tour of the River by harnessing everyday mobile phones.

A 'Bike + Walk Spectacular' was organized that included a bike and walk tour of the River and the neighborhoods of Elysian Valley and Atwater Village, a community fair, and a 'Bike-In Movie' outdoor screening at Marsh Park to night cap the event. The collaborative designed a mobile phone activity that allowed participants to take part throughout the activities by mapping, texting, and calling in real-time stories that were uploaded onto an internet interface. The outcome was a mobile tool that encouraged participation which allowed attendees to actively share stories throughout the event and create a digital online platform that aggregated the submissions. The stories can be viewed at **www.vojo.co/en/groups/mylariver**.

Top Methodological Considerations for this Project

1. Using an Accessible Mobile Platform.
Not everyone has smart phones that can access mobile applications or have phones that can take pictures. In order to make the mobile mapping tool accessible to as many phones as possible, we used a platform called Vojo (**www.vojo.co**). Vojo allows users to create groups that allow participants to share stories through text messaging, picture messaging, and phone calls that are later aggregated onto an online group page (in this case, our group was called Northeast Los Angeles Riverfront Collaborative, and the submission address was **mylariver@vojo.co**.

2. Training.
Group training sessions were held at the start of the event to help people become familiarized with the mobile application that we used. To assist training we also handed out pocket sized instruction sheets that participants could refer to.

3. Other Digital Tools.
To encourage the submission of stories, we brought out iPads connected to a mobile hot-spot we carried in our back packs. During the event, we would remind participants to submit stories and showed them the live feed of stories on the iPads to further encourage the submission of stories.

4. Using the Data.
The stories and images that submitted were used as complementary knowledge alongside other forms of asset mapping conducted by the NELA RC to learn about NELA and the River.
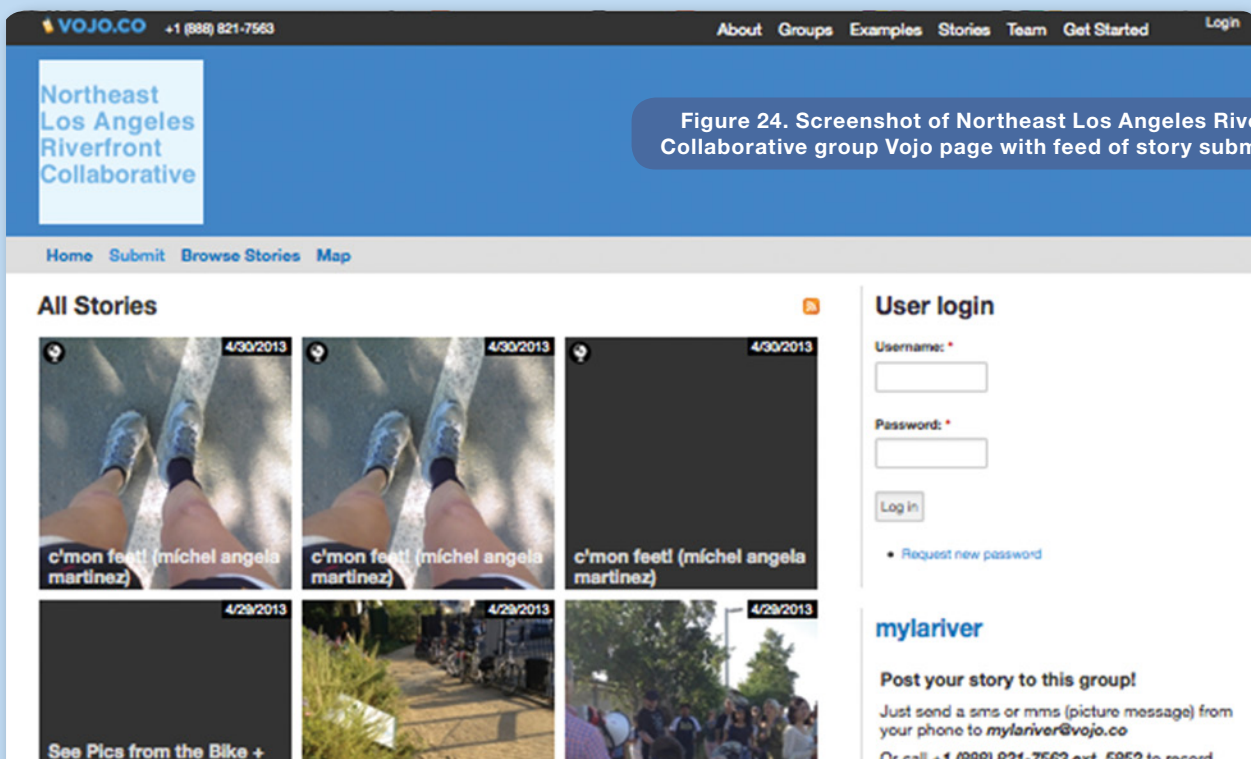

Figure 24. Screenshot of Northeast Los Angeles Riverfront Collaborative group Vojo page with feed of story submissions.

Key Takeaways

Participatory Asset Mapping: Tell your L.A. River Story

#1. To submit your story, send it to mylariver@vojo.co as a text or picture message (not as an email). Include a **title** if possible, but the title is not necessary.

#2. Make sure to say **where** you took the picture by adding "loc:" and then the intersection or address. Here is an example:
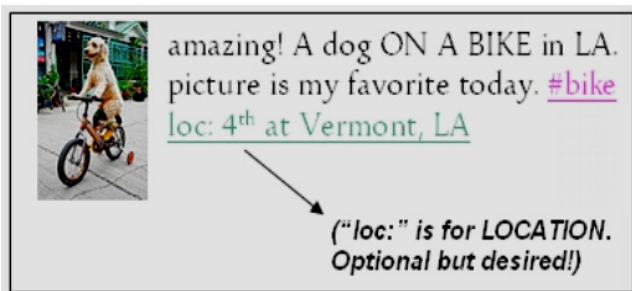
#3. Post a **voice message.** Another option is to record or listen to audio stories. You can do this while walking. They are posted online. Our voicemail: (888) 821-7563 ext. 5852.

#4. When you **get home** or **feel like sharing**, show the group pictures and map of the richness of the L.A. River and Northeast L.A. to family and friends at: http://www.vojo.co/en/groups/mylariver

...And check out more information about the Northeast Los Angeles Riverfront Collaborative at www.mylariver.org

Figure 25. Example of instruction sheet handed out to participants for the training workshop.

1. Mobile technology is ubiquitous and often offered up as strategies for many urban planning and economic development initiatives. It is important to strive harder to connect the mobile technology use to advocacy efforts. The participation benefits are the most ideal when it is connected to advocacy research, city program input, or campaigns that advocate for neighborhood changes that participants may want to see in their communities. The USC team of the Metamorphosis Project and Annenberg Innovation Lab made this connection using similar mobile strategies in their work around alternative transportation and healthy food in South LA The work can be viewed at www.ridesouthla.com.

2. Live participation through mobile phones can add significant contributions to the engagement design of any urban planning and economic development initiative. Given the 'coolness' factor of phones, it's important to ensure that the mobile data collection activities are not only seen as a one-time "fun" experience, but as part of the community engagement effort with outcomes that may potentially have an impact at larger city scales.

Placemaking Workshops

Goal: To gather community-based input on placemaking projects that would celebrate the identities of the 5 neighborhoods and develop project designs to support a NELA Riverfront District.

Placemaking is the process of comprehensive planning that solicits community based input to enhance the inherent and unique qualities of a neighborhood to enable and promote vibrancy within the public realm. To achieve this, the NELA RC conducted a series of placemaking workshops and strategies to engage the community in the identification of existing community assets and what the community felt was missing in their neighborhoods toward the goal of the development of placemaking projects for the NELA study area (see page 5).

Top Methodological Considerations

1. Interactive Maps. Mapping was foundational as it was important to print large maps of the neighborhoods with existing resources and chances for the community to identify their own assets and opportunity areas for placemaking projects.

2. Bus Tours. As a complement to workshops held indoors, it was beneficial to organize a placemaking bus tour in which we were able to bring community members out to engage with the study area's physical neighborhoods and opportunity sites. The discussions held at the sites further informed the team on the designs of placemaking projects.

3. Project Typologies. A range of project ideas can come out of the engagement process. It was important to develop a set of placemaking project typologies that condensed the ideas into a set of 4-5 project typology propositions for the study area.

4. Open House. An important step toward the development of placemaking project designs is validating the project designs with the community. To do this, an open house of proposed project ideas that came out of the input workshops was coordinated. Community members were able to vote on their top project ideas that informed the placemaking project team on what ideas to further develop as design ideas.

Figure 26. A bus tour of the NELA study area was coordinated to allow community members to have discussions about placemaking projects in the actual physical locations.

Key Takeaways

1. Paper and Post-Its: Today's technological advancement in mapping has improved the ability of communities to contribute their ideas about their neighborhoods, but large physical maps, post-its, and other paper materials play an important interactive role in workshops held in physical venues.

2. Time Balance: Community members have busy schedules and time is of the essence. It remains important to give presentations and instructions at the beginning of workshops, but these should be brief. Project teams should design activities that make workshop attendees engage in the contribution of placemaking input as soon as possible in the program schedule.

3. Policy Discussion: Placemaking workshops often focus on community input and the development of project designs. It remains an important challenge to connect the placemaking process to policy discussions that connect to implementation priorities in order to give the community a sense that placemaking projects have a chance to be actualized.

Figure 27. Large maps of the neighborhoods were used for interactive workshop purposes such as group input.

Figure 28. To make the workshops interactive, painted blocks were used to explore where to plot project ideas and yarn to gather the community's transportation routes.

Placemaking Design Competition

Goal: To engage the community through a design competition in order to support the placemaking project development goals for the NELA Riverfront District and its 5 adjacent neighborhoods.

Developed as an expansion to the goals of the placemaking workshops (see pages 30-31), a placemaking design competition was coordinated to allow the public to submit placemaking project design ideas for the NELA Riverfront District. Participants ranged from everyday community members, artists, designers, and local high school youth. Participants were directed to submit placemaking design ideas for either the NELA-wide Riverfront District or a project idea for each of the various neighborhoods.

Top Methodological Considerations

1. Open Participation: The competition stressed that no previous design expertise was required and allowed any participant who was interested to submit a design. This created an open process, and a variety of creative projects were submitted.

2. Accessible Workshops: At the placemaking Open House, placemaking design competition workshops were open to the public to access. This allowed interested participants a starting point and resource to develop projects to submit even if they never submitted to a design competition in the past.

3. Proactive Design Outreach: Outreach to potential competition participants included outreach to design schools, architectural organizations, and community-building funding initiatives that spread the competition out to more networks of participants to submit designs.

4. Evaluation Criteria: The creation of a design and evaluation criteria helped guide the project submissions and selection of winners. The criteria included: placemaking potential, social impact, implementation feasibility, sustainable physical design, design creativity, and health outcomes.

Figure 29. Community workshops held at the placemaking open house to assist community members interested in design project submissions.

Key Takeaways

1. If your goal of your design competition includes submissions from the community, the competition should be proactive and engage the community through personal asks, open workshops, school collaboration, and early outreach that will make community members feel comfortable submitting a design versus design submissions from only professional designers.

2. If your project values the voice of the community and neighborhoods you work with, the inclusion of bonus points for projects coming from the community can add value to your evaluation and selection criteria.

Figure 30: The mylariver.org website was used to showcase all the project submissions and it was further used for an online voting competition to crown the 'people's champion'.

How to Vote for the **People's Choice award**: *On the bottom of each submission page, is a ballot. Click the titles below to explore the submission, and once you've decided on your favorite, cast your vote. Feel free to vote for more than one (select several at once) and you can submit one vote per day until end of day February 27.* See all **submissions here.**

Vote for Your Favorite Placemaking Projects (Poll Closed)

Cypress and Division Lot	1.98% (58 votes)
Riverside Drive and San Fernando Road Improvements	1.26% (37 votes)
Metro Gold Line Bikeway	2.35% (69 votes)
Transportation Infrastructure	1.09% (32 votes)
Ruben Ochoa Art Installations	0.58% (17 votes)
Structures for Noise Reduction	0.37% (11 votes)
Arroyo Seco Confluence Gateway	6.78% (199 votes)
Elysian Valley Monthly Cleanups	0.72% (21 votes)
	0.68% (20 votes)
	0.85% (25 votes)
	0.34% (10 votes)

NELA RIVERFRONT

PLACEMAKING COMPETITION

Support for KCET.org provided by:

IN L.A. YOU MIGHT SEE A STAR. IN THE DESERT, YOU CAN SEE ALL OF THEM.

FIND OUT WHERE ▶

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Northeast Los Angeles Placemaking Competition: Hyperion River Plaza and River Watch
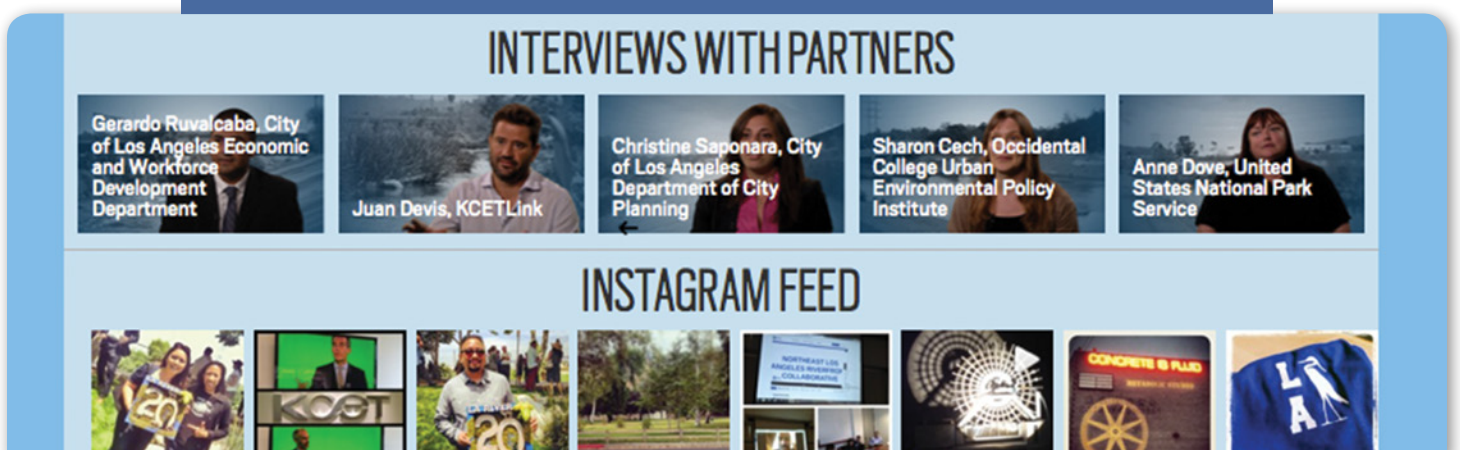
Online Communication Strategies

Goal: To engage, inform, and tell stories about the community through online communication and social media.

In today's digital age, a plethora of online communication and social media tools exist. The NELA RC started with the fundamental goal that online communication and social media application could be used to engage the community, inform the community about the NELA RC, and tell stories about the project, the NELA neighborhoods, and the River. Additionally, online communication and social media were seen as a parallel and integrative communication strategy that was combined with 'offline and face-to-face communication' (see page 36).

Top Methodological Considerations

1. Building an Integrated Project Website. The website played a crucial role in not just informing and engaging the public about the NELA RC project, but it also provided a venue to host partner contributions about their work, document the collaborative through the process, and host community contributions and voting for the placemaking design competition.

2. Using E-newsletters to Send Updates. E-newsletters were used to provide updates about the project, and they also told stories about the NELA RC study area and River. It served as a consistent communication channel to maintain contact with community members who signed up at workshops, gave their e-mails during door-to-door surveys, or who signed up through the website.

3. Identity and Brand Building. It was important to build a brand and identity around the NELA RC project that was associated with the website and social media communication. To do this, we focused on the theme 'mylariver' in order to create an engaging tagline in the minds of the community and audience. The website domain used for the address was **www.mylariver.org**. Partners, summer interns, and the community were encouraged to use the hashtag #mylariver to submit social media posts (such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook). The use of the hashtag built a community of users around the **#mylariver**, and it also allowed the NELA RC project to track social media participation.

4. Experimenting to Find the Right Engagement Tool. Because one does not know what social media tools will work best with local communities—instead of prescribing one tool at the start, the NELA RC experimented with various applications. It became apparent that Instagram was the application most widely used and followed (perhaps because the River was picturesque). The project thus pushed the use of Instagram and provided an online feed on the website of submissions that used **#mylariver**.

Figure 31. Instagram became the social media application that was used the most by the collaborative and community members. The instagram feed for the #mylariver hash-tag used for the collaborative was added to the built out website that hosted more of the content produced.

Key Takeaways

1. Initiatives should not think that one online communication channel or social media tool is the best. One should experiment with multiple uses at the start before deciding which tool(s) can be capitalized on.

2. Online communication and social media campaigns should be built around users' feedback. This will continue to build community and strengthen its audience base around the project.

3. Online communication and social media takes constant upkeep. If possible, other projects may consider hiring a web developer to update the website, and a content curator to follow up and engage with the audience on social media platforms.

Figure 32. A website was used as an engagement tool that hosted information on the collaborative and announced events.

Print and Interpersonal Engagement Strategies

Goal: To engage, inform, and gather feedback from the community through offline and face-to-face communication.

The NELA RC project was a 'place-based' project, and to its core heavily depended on offline and face-to-face communication with the local neighborhoods. Of course, such communication was designed to work in parallel with 'online communication and social media' (see page 34). Ultimately, the project learned that offline and face-to-face communication remained the essential building block for all its engagement strategies and the critical component for building presence in the communities the project aimed to develop a vision for.

Top Methodological Considerations for this Project

1. Making Effective Outreach Efforts.
Fliers for all the community workshops and events needed to be designed in simple prose that clearly expressed to the community how they would benefit if attending. Furthermore, the NELA RC implemented an outreach team that targeted neighborhood blocks where the event was to be held in order to inform the neighboring residents and get them out to the event.

2. Using Kiosk to Attract Community Engagement.
A community engagement kiosk prototype was built that was used as a traveling kiosk installed at various public spaces with high foot traffic. Blank postcards with prompts that asked residents to answer a neighborhood change question were hung on the kiosk for participants to fill out. The kiosks served as a visual interruption in the everyday life of the public space in order to creatively solicit and engage community members about what they desire to see in their neighborhoods. The project was able to collect over 500 postcards during the summer of 2013.

3. Using Consistent Visual Design and Identifiers.
In order to ensure that all the physical paper materials were tied to the NELA RC project, one needs to adhere to a consistent visual style in terms of the design. The consistent use of the Northeast Los Angeles Riverfront logo and the shade of blue created an identity for the project in the neighborhoods often flooded with various fliers.

4. Using Postcards to Promote Participation.
Postcards with prompts for participants to fill out became an effective way to have the participants fill out their answer and take a picture with it. The postcards with the participants became a form of community contribution that could be featured on the website and reports about the local community.


Figure 33: A traveling kiosk with postcard prompts was installed in public spaces around the NELA area for passer byes to submit their ideas for the River and neighborhoods.

Key Takeaways

1. In addition to placing a community engagement kiosk in a public space, it could also serve a more direct input function by placing it in or near a physical space (vacant or deteriorating) that needs community input on its future design or use.

2. Physical postcard solicitation typically means someone needs to collect the physical objects and transcribe the input into a database for digital representation. One may consider a more efficient manner of using digital mobile tools to complement the physical materials. It could improve the collection and transcription of such offline communication.

3. Do not underestimate the critical need of face-to-face contact in local place-based projects. In order to support such work in the field, budgets should reflect the large workload and extensive hours needed.

Figure 34. Postcards with prompts were used to take pictures with stakeholders. These were later used as digital content on the website.
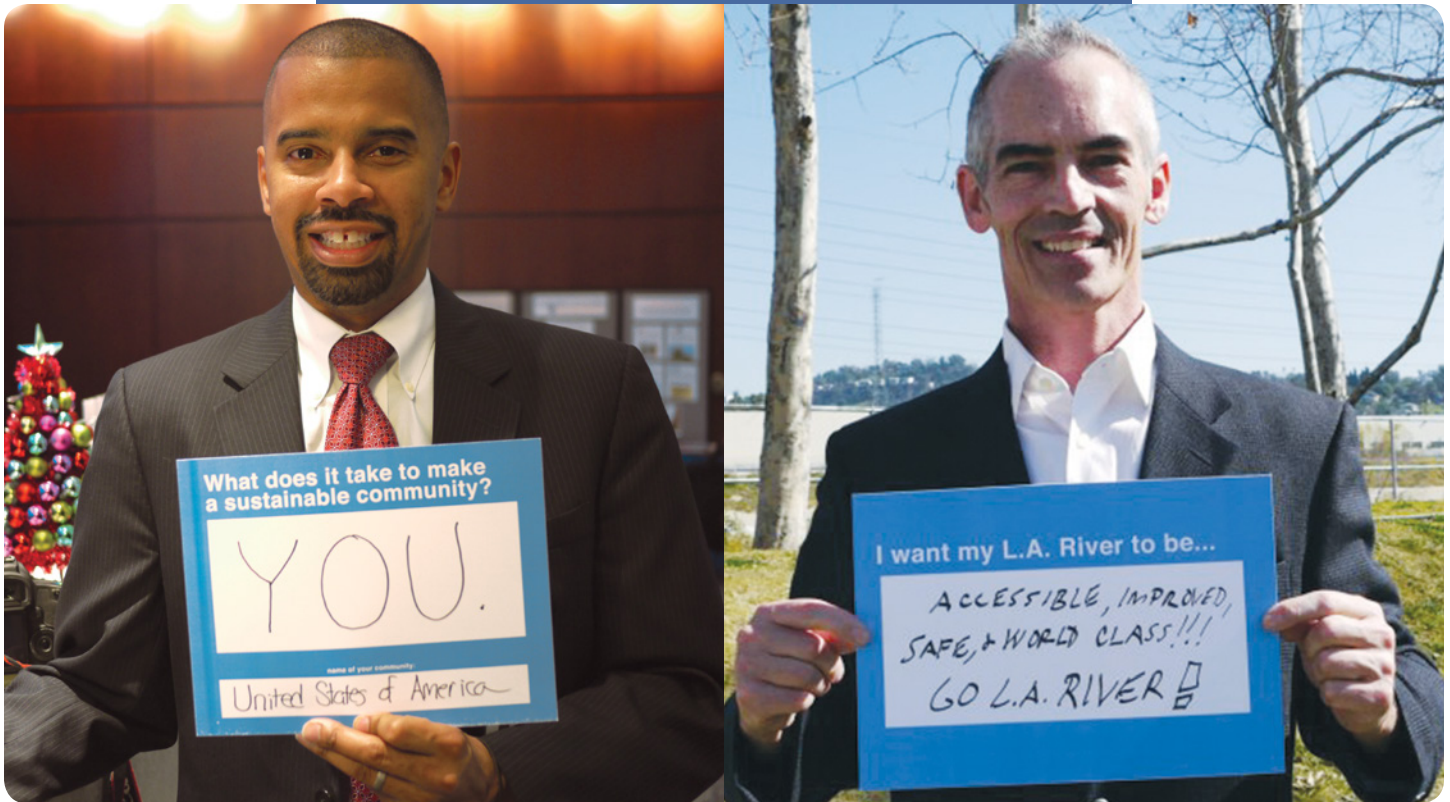
NELA RC Partners' Websites

City of Los Angeles Economic and Workforce Development Department **www.ewdd.lacity.org**

Los Angeles Department of City Planning (DCP) **www.cityplanning.lacity.org**

Los Angeles Department of Transportation (DOT) **www.ladot.lacity.org**

City of Los Angeles Bureau of Engineering (BOE) **www.eng.lacity.org** and **www.lariver.org**

City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP) **www.ladwp.com**

University of Southern California Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism's Metamorphosis Project **www.metamorph.org**

Occidental College's Urban Environmental Policy Institute (UEPI) **www.uepi.oxy.edu**

Los Angeles River Revitalization Corporation (LARRC) **www.larivercorp.com**

Los Angeles Conservation Corps (LACC) **www.lacorps.org**

Mia Lehrer + Associates (ML+A) **www.mlagreen.com**

DakeLuna Consultants **www.dakeluna.com**

KCET Departures **www.kcet.org/socal/departures**

LA-Más **www.mas.la**

The Robert Group (TRG) **www.therobertgroup.com**

Tierra West Advisors Inc. **www.tierrawestadvisors.com**

Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation (LAEDC) **www.laedc.org**

United States (US) Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) **portal.hud.gov**

National Park Service **www.nps.gov**

US Department of Transportation (DOT) **www.dot.gov**

US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) **www.epa.gov**

Federal Partnership for Sustainable Communities **www.sustainablecommunities.gov**

NELA RC