



Comprehensive Community Development

## CASE STUDY

# Community-Led Solutions Aim to Measure Systemic Barriers

MISSION ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

## CCD PRINCIPLES HIGHLIGHTED:



INTENTIONAL  
APPROACH



COMMUNITY  
DRIVEN



LAYERED  
STRATEGIES



GUIDING  
VISION & PLAN



STRATEGIC  
PARTNERSHIPS



COORDINATED  
LEADERSHIP



LAYERED  
INVESTMENT

## KEY INSIGHTS

- Mission Promise Neighborhood's (MPN) advocacy for resident-led design led to the development of a better way to understand and respond to community experiences.
- By valuing and nurturing safe spaces for sharing information, MPN's design team fostered the trust that allowed community members to engage.
- MPN's app development prioritized accessibility and transparency, facilitating community healing and strengthening support networks.

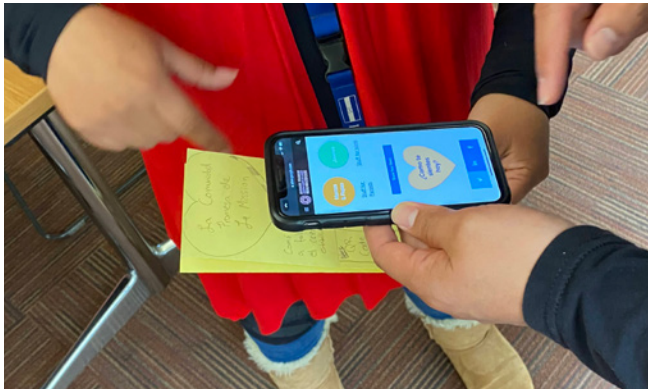
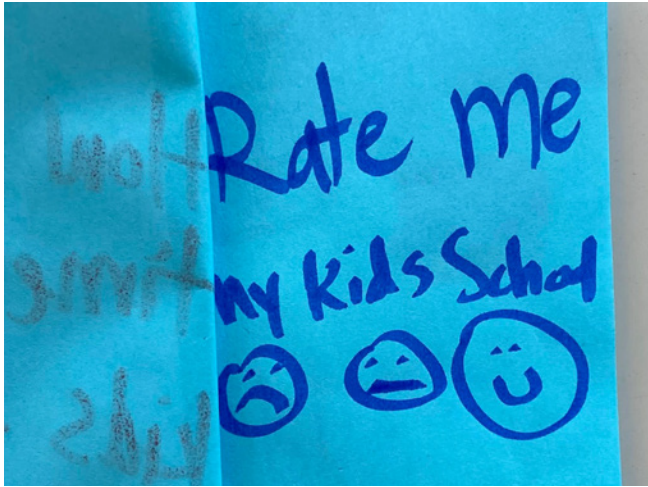
## Improving Student Outcomes

Supported by the Mission Economic Development Agency (MEDA), the Mission Promise Neighborhood (MPN) is a place-based collective impact initiative in the Mission District of San Francisco, an area with a high population of Latino immigrants. MPN is part of a national network of Promise Neighborhoods, initially funded by the U.S. Department of Education that collaborates with partners to improve student outcomes by providing a continuum of support for children and families from prenatal stages through career development.

To better address structural barriers preventing student achievement, three years ago, MPN was tasked with developing a report card to address how data on these barriers could be collected and analyzed.

## Reimagining the Report Card

Traditionally, community report cards measure children and their families across systems like education. Knowing these



reports are traditionally lengthy documents filled with dense text and charts, MPN team questioned whether that model would create the most useful impact. Instead, the team envisioned creating a tool that could provide greater community engagement and inspire advocacy. Flipping traditional reporting techniques and letting the community members take the lead on evaluating their experiences with the systems they navigate would result in data they could better relate to and build from.

### Community-Led Design Process

To develop a tool where those navigating the systems would also be making decisions about how they are measured, it was important for the community to lead the report card's design. In late 2021, MPN began engaging the community using the human-centered design approach. This approach prioritizes the end-users' needs, perspectives, and experiences—in this case, the community members—throughout the design process. A design team consisting of community members and staff-initiated dialogue and gathered information through one-on-one interviews and focus groups. It was imperative

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—MARIA

*Community Team Member*

that the design team resist the temptation to decide at the beginning what or how to measure the community experience. Only after engagement with the community did a strategy come to light.

Through this process, several themes emerged, providing valuable insights into the community members' experiences navigating systems. Many families reported that obtaining legal status is crucial for their ability to thrive and that they often receive low-quality translation services. Without legal status, parents struggle to find stable, well-paying jobs, and without English-language skills, navigating systems like schools, city agencies, and employment becomes even more challenging. As a result, parents are often forced to work multiple low-wage jobs, leaving little time for quality family interactions. This cycle negatively impacts both parents and children.

### Piloting the App

Through iterative brainstorming, prototyping, testing, and feedback cycles, the team developed a mobile app using Google Suite products. Community feedback emphasized the importance of survey accessibility. They also expressed that they rarely receive information on the outcome of surveys they have completed, so it was important that the surveys, while anonymous, also be transparent. Users can access information and survey results in real time through the app, fostering inclusion and engagement. Additionally, using Google Suite products ensures that staff or community team leaders can change the site or surveys at any time, rather than relying on a web designer. With a large Latino population in the community, all surveys are provided in Spanish, with an option to easily translate the content into English. The app integrates audio as a way of sharing stories amongst community members and enhancing advocacy efforts.

The MPN community design team was integral to addressing early failures in the project. For example, MEDA was reminded how the sensitive nature of the information being provided required that more support be offered to make community members feel comfortable submitting surveys to the app. Having residents lead the research made sure that challenges like these were identified and addressed with better solutions.

### Creating Safe Spaces

While the app development and survey collection are tangible outcomes of the community report card process, they are only one of the initiative's many successful and ongoing outcomes.

"The app is just a repository for the real solution: creating a space for people to feel safe. To know that they're among people with shared experiences in order to start sharing their stories behind the systems and their biggest barriers so that we can collect the best data possible," says Michelle Reiss-Top.

These safe spaces fostered by the project have led to an unexpected and significant outcome: community healing and empowerment. Through conversations, community members have been able to share their issues, confront questions they aren't typically asked, and find support within a network of peers.

"All immigrants have needs, and sometimes we don't express them," said community team member Maria. "The way I could express so many years of oppression that I hadn't been able to unload was by sharing and conducting surveys. So, personally, it was an opportunity for me to grow."

Another community team member, Mirian, spoke about the empowerment that came with the survey process and access to information about what others also face. "I am a Latina voice within the school district, where I fight for my rights,"



she said. "I fight for the well-being of my children, ensuring that my children's safety is taken care of. Being informed about everything that is happening is enriching. It feeds my brain with positive things that I can put into practice."

### Planning for the Future

MEDA's policy team will leverage insights from the community discussions, supported by data collected from the app, to inform their creation of a comprehensive policy platform to guide the organization and its network of partners in implementing strategies to address the identified barriers. Additionally, the evaluation team will facilitate the upcoming strategic planning process, ensuring that the community's needs and insights are at the forefront of the organization's future plans.

MPN's innovative approach exemplifies how rethinking existing tools and integrating technology can create an additional pathway to leverage community-driven solutions in achieving sustainable development. The pilot program's success not only provides a vehicle to create a stronger Mission District, but it also creates a replicable model for other communities to use, demonstrating the potential for a widespread impact far beyond the Mission District Community.



### LEARN MORE

- Learn about **MEDA** and **MPN**.
- Read more about their community report card project.
- Preview their ratings app.