



**EAST BAY ASIAN LOCAL  
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION**  
BUILDING HEALTHY, VIBRANT AND SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS



Comprehensive Community Development

**CASE STUDY**

# Empowering Communities Through Grassroots Journalism

**EAST BAY ASIAN LOCAL  
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION**

**CCD PRINCIPLES HIGHLIGHTED:**



INTENTIONAL APPROACH



COMMUNITY DRIVEN



LAYERED STRATEGIES



GUIDING VISION & PLAN



STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS



COORDINATED LEADERSHIP



LAYERED INVESTMENT

## KEY INSIGHTS

- EBALDC leveraged the time-tested strategy of print media to reach a diverse community, including seniors, multilingual households, and small businesses, distributing 2,000 copies to local residents.
- By prioritizing community involvement, EBALDC strengthened resident leadership, supporting eight residents to shape all aspects of the newspaper's content, production, and distribution.
- EBALDC countered displacement pressures by celebrating local assets, spotlighting hyper-local issues, and informing and engaging residents about developments impacting their future.

## A Collaboration Brings Creative Change

Once bustling with African American culture and thriving businesses, the San Pablo Corridor (SPC) in West Oakland now grapples with disinvestment and rising crime amidst Oakland's rapid economic growth and soaring housing costs. Established in 2014, The San Pablo Area Revitalization Collaborative (SPARC) has been committed to enhancing the lives of over 10,500 residents along the corridor.

Through a partnership of over 25 residents, organizations, and institutions, SPARC focuses on creating sustainable health benefits for low-to-moderate income and long-time residents. The collaborative emphasizes community leadership as a core priority.

"There was a culture within the collaborative of using arts, culture, and creativity to work directly with residents and advance community priorities," stated Annie Ledbury, Associate Director of Creative Community Development.

Through the newspaper, SPARC has amplified existing issues and driven engagement within the community. The newspaper serves as a catalyst for resident-led advocacy efforts, while its true impact lies in the engagement it has fostered among team members and the community.

### A Vision Comes to Life

In an effort to stay connected during the pandemic, the collaborative produced a video series showcasing creative projects, local businesses, and resident leaders. Although well received, as the early COVID era passed, community engagement needs evolved from digital to physical and in 2022 the team contemplated alternative avenues to increase engagement.

EBALDC assembled a team of resident leaders to brainstorm strategies aligned with community empowerment, equitable pandemic recovery, and resident leadership. Discussions centered on leveraging art and advocacy to address key neighborhood issues that would inform and engage the community in important decisions of which many residents were unaware. Initially, a group of architects from a local college presented the idea for a potential newspaper project, but EBALDC presented the concept to the resident leaders and pivoted to supporting the community in its own newspaper initiative.



In an era dominated by digital media, traditional newspapers have faced decline, marked by shrinking staff, loss of local perspectives, and shuttered doors. Amidst this landscape, the newspaper team defied conventional wisdom, using print media to unite, mobilize, and engage the neighborhood through community-driven journalism.

Using print media as a platform began to make sense as the idea evolved. Community events like Town Nights drew large crowds and provided ample opportunities for distribution and to generate excitement for the project. Many of the community's residents are seniors who can find digital platforms challenging to navigate. Additionally, print supported small businesses through physical coupons and the opportunity to secure a copy at local establishments.

### The San Pablo Avenue Community News

In fall 2022, they launched a call for community members to join the newspaper team, ultimately recruiting eight individuals. Team members wrote articles in their focus areas before gathering for a collaborative meeting to organize, agree on content and place their pieces in a mock-up layout. A graphic designer then formatted the content before final editing.





In spring 2023, the first edition of the San Pablo Avenue Community Newspaper was launched during the Hoover Foster Resident Action Council's Community Healing Block Party. Two thousand copies, highlighting SPARC's "Holding Space" priority, were distributed, urging residents to foster community-based businesses, resources, and affordable housing along the SPC.

Throughout 2023, they published three newspaper editions with community-led content reflecting the diverse interests of the team members. Their approach relies on information sharing, aligning with their "keeping you informed of the changes in your community" tagline and seeking the community's vision and voice. The publications are also available online in English, Spanish and Chinese.

### A Catalyst for Community Empowerment

Through the newspaper, SPARC has amplified key community issues and deepened engagement. The newspaper acts as

a catalyst for advocacy, facilitating connections among team members and the broader community. This collaborative approach has sparked new networks and engagements that may not have otherwise been realized.

"I think it's important to have fun at the meetings, make sure everyone is excited about what they're working on, and support people in trying new things," said Project Coordinator Raine Robichaud. "We try to balance being a newspaper and keeping it relaxed, avoiding perfectionism so the team stays motivated. We've benefited from the relationships team members bring, involving people who are rooted in the community with different interests so that we get lots of different types of content that appeal to all kinds of people."

The community newspaper represents an evolution in SPARC's approach, distinguishing it from traditional one-time creative projects like murals or events. It is a dynamic platform for diverse expressions and perspectives, stimulating dialogue across community groups and resident generations. These interactions not only ignite important conversations about local issues but also empower the community to hold elected officials accountable.

### A Hopeful Future for Amplifying Resident Voices

As funding for the newspaper relies primarily on grants, the team continues to explore alternative revenue streams to sustain it. However, the impact of the project in supporting community advocacy and strengthening community bonds is visible far beyond the newspaper's pages. The outcome is more than just creating a vehicle for grassroots journalism; it is a tool to support the San Pablo Corridor in enhancing community cohesion, building trust, and creating a resilient, thriving community.

## LEARN MORE

- **Learn about** the San Pablo Area Revitalization Collaborative (SPARC).
- **Read more** about the Oakland San Pablo Ave. Community News and access the newspaper archive.
- **View a summary** of EBALDC Neighborhood Collaborations: Our First Ten Years.