



Fresno Worker Voice: Findings and Insights

New America CA

Summer 2020

Contents

- About Us
- Context
- Process, Questions, and Interviewees
- Findings
- Pain Points and Opportunities
- Observations
- Recommendations

About Us

About Us

New America is a **civic enterprise** confronting the challenges of rapid **technological and social change**.

New America CA **connects and activates** people around issues of **place-based economic equity**, helping communities **drive transformative change**.

Our team has deep expertise in **stakeholder engagement, and human-centered research**, as well as **convening, design labs, and facilitation**.

Research Team



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Context

Economic and Racial Disparities

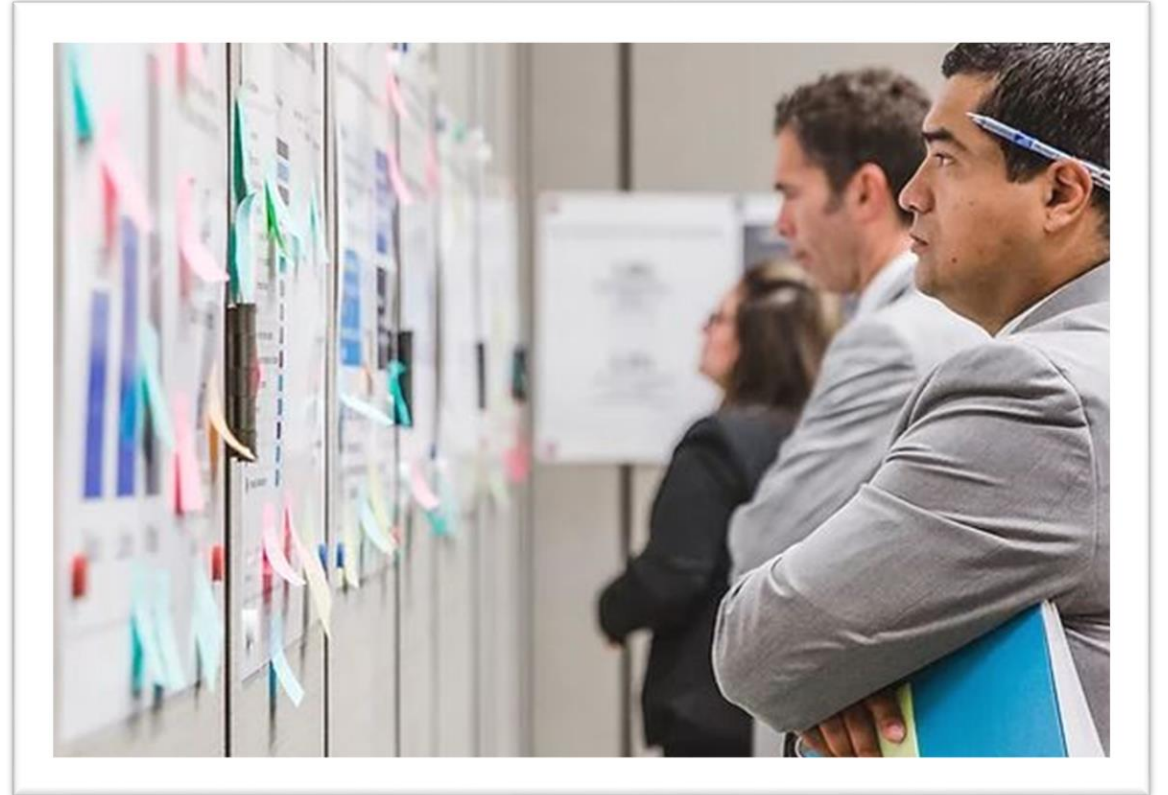
Fresno's economy features too few quality jobs, a human capital pipeline that leaves too many behind, and the largest racial and neighborhood inequalities in California.



The Fresno DRIVE Initiative

Fresno DRIVE has engaged over 150 organizations to identify the supports Fresnans need to thrive, and attract major investment to those projects

With racial equity at its core, it “envisions an inclusive, vibrant and sustainable economy so all residents can move from poverty to prosperity”



Filling Key Data Gaps

In 2019 DRIVE leaders indicated that they lacked data highlighting worker experiences of economic insecurity and automation-related job change, and asked New America CA to provide it

Our worker-centered research in Fresno addresses data gaps

Adds **nuance and depth to existing data** being utilized by DRIVE leaders

Provides **insights into issues not fully addressed** by existing DRIVE data, such as health and workplace safety

Can **help regional partners** focused in other counties compare their own community needs to priorities in Fresno

Supports authentic **voice-based policy-change** efforts by providing content that **can bridge divides between decision-makers and residents**

To date, little **future of work** research has explored the constraints on and perspectives of workers themselves. The nature of work is changing and the lived experience is changing with it. **Worker voice is a critical missing piece** to unlocking solutions for both the present and future of work.

New America and the Future of Work

The Fresno Worker Voice Research builds on NA's robust body of work in **economic precarity** and the **future of work**, including programs like:

- ❑ **ShiftLabs**, convenings of local cross-sector leaders to understand automation trends, set priorities, and scale community-led innovations
- ❑ Research documenting new approaches and data-driven solutions that prepare people for the future of work, through the **Center on Education & Skills**

New Depth and Focus

New America's focus on worker voice includes a [Fall 2019 report*](#), funded by Google.org, highlighting the voices of automation-vulnerable workers in [Oakland](#), [Washington DC](#), [Indianapolis](#), and [Buffalo](#). Three members of the Fresno Worker Voice team also participated in that research.

The **Fresno Worker Voice** research reflects new depth in our work, [focusing significantly more on economic precarity](#) and including a [new focus on the health-wealth connection](#), not previously a topic included in New America's research approach.

*<https://www.newamerica.org/work-workers-technology/reports/worker-voices/>



Building a More Equitable Fresno

Our findings were received positively by DRIVE leaders, who stressed their importance in helping:

Secure future funding, including imminent asks for pending DRIVE priorities, like small business development and wealth creation in communities of color

Support DRIVE's racial equity committee in understanding and combatting the health and economic impacts of racism on Fresno residents

Engage corporate stakeholders, helping them understand the urgency of DRIVE's work and their own critical role in making change

Deepen community engagement, modeling how DRIVE might pursue substantive community participation in policy and program development

Process, Questions, and Interviewees

Research Goal and Process

Goal:

To better understand the **lived experiences of workers** at risk of automation in Fresno, specifically those in **retail, food service, agriculture, warehouse, & administrative roles.**



Summer - Fall 2019

Fall 2019

Winter 2020

Winter - Spring 2020

Automation-Vulnerable Work

The industries we chose are in the top ten occupations available in Fresno, and are at medium or high risk of automation.

Some **69%** of Fresno's workers are in jobs at medium or high risk of automation.

Category	Example	Automation Risk	Occupation Rank	# of Interviewees
Agriculture	Farmworker	Medium	#1	4
Food Service	Cashier	High	#4	9
Retail	Salesperson	High	#5	6
Administrative	Office clerk	High	#8	5
Freight Movers	Warehouse worker	Medium	#9	11

Questions: What We Wanted to Know

1. Tell me about yourself
2. How long have you been at this job?
3. Walk us through a typical day (both before and at work)
4. Tell me about your current job
5. What does your job mean to you?
6. If you weren't doing this, what would you be doing?
7. How has your job changed?
8. What's it like to live in Fresno? Do you like living here?
9. What comes to mind when you think of the word "health?"
10. If you were in charge, what would you do to make life easier for people at your company? People in Fresno?

1/ GENERAL

This stage of questions is about (1) making people comfortable, and (2) getting to know them.

Tell me about yourself.

- Who lives in your house?
 - = Does anyone else live with you?
- Do you support (or provide for) anyone other than yourself?
 - = Are there people who you help out regularly?
 - = Does anyone help you regularly?
 - = If relevant: how do you handle child/elder care?
- Do you have family nearby?
- Who would you call in an emergency? (for personal/emotional support)
- Is there a community you are active in?
- What do you like to do when you're not at work?
- What would you do if you won the lottery?

2/ DEEP

This stage of questions is about getting to the core of our research questions.

How long have you been in this job? At this company?

- Are you FT? PT?
- Do you have other sources of income?

Walk us through a typical day. (both before and at work)

- What happens before you even get to work?
- How do you get around? To work? Does that work well for you?
- What makes your life harder? Easier?

Participants

We spoke with 35 Fresno County residents – 15 women and 20 men



Race / Ethnic Background

- *Latinx* 11
- *White* 10
- *African-American* 6
- *Asian* 3
- *Bi-racial* 4
- *Native American* 1



Industry

- *Retail* 6
- *Food Services* 9
- *Agriculture* 4
- *Warehouses* 11
- *Office Administration* 5



Understanding Human-Centered Research

Human-Centered Research is:

- A way to center and lift up the voices and experiences of particular groups of people
- A qualitative research method that can point to actionable insights, trends, and recommendations
- Focused on open-ended questions, allowing participants to direct the conversation
- Helpful for revealing issues or hypotheses for further research and exploration
- A way to actively solve problems in partnership with the people affected by them

Human-Centered Research is not:

- A way to reach statistically-significant “answers” – the focus is not on identifying a scientifically-sized or representative sample

Equitable Human-Centered Research

Best practices include:

Acknowledge researcher positionality: keep data objective by asking open-ended questions and recognizing where researcher perspectives might affect interpretation

Differentiate where ideas come from: draw clear lines between direct worker voice and the researchers' observations, prioritizing worker perspectives throughout

Pre-interview principles: Compensate participants fairly, establish consent, allow participants to end the interview at any time or skip questions if they are uncomfortable

Keep data “thick”: noting a person’s full life experience helps findings remain rich while avoiding misunderstanding/misquoting

Findings

Color-Coded Findings Categories

Our findings fall across **five major themes**, which are color-coded throughout this presentation

Within each theme, the data is nuanced, and **findings in all categories are interrelated**, connecting with and impacting each other

WORK AND INCOME

FAMILY

HEALTH AND SAFETY

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

EXPERIENCES OF FRESNO

Work and Income Finding Themes

WORK AND INCOME

Stability

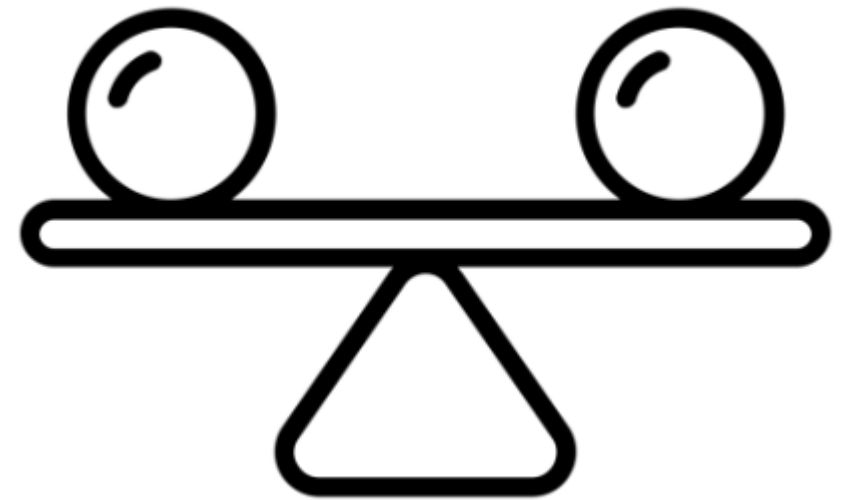
Thrivable Compensation

Profit Over People

Technology

Stability

Most people are seeking stability in their work lives, including predictable schedules, work, and income



Stability

Most people are seeking stability in their work lives, including predictable schedules, work, and income.

Many want greater schedule predictability (knowing that they will get enough hours, and knowing when those hours will occur), as well as the flexibility to amend their schedules when emergencies arise

Many of Fresno's dominant industries feel particularly unstable

Stability

“I do not plan on staying at Subway forever. They’re kind of awful with my schedule...I will not know if I work the day before. I’ll know the morning of most days...Trying to plan stuff, it’s so hard.”



Stability

You work at a job site six, seven, eight, nine months, however long it takes...we built the Amazon Distribution Center here in Fresno, we were working 12 hours a day, 6 days a week, and then on Sundays, 8 hours a day. So, I mean...they work you to death. And, then, when you're too tired and you ask for time off, they're like, 'Sure, go ahead. Take a few days off.' You go home, you come back to the job site, they're like, 'what are you doing here? We called somebody else on the out of work list, so you're off the job site now.' They will give you time off eventually, just they don't want you to ask for it.

You'd get brought in and they ask you if you want to come back and you sign the contract for a year...And every year you'd go in and sign a contract....Because it's seasonal business. So everybody knew- I mean, you could be let go at any time.

A lot of people in general that work in retail and fast food are working there because it's stable and they have a family, it's flexible hours. It's hard to chase a career when you have so much pulling you back.

Thrivable Compensation

Fresno has many job opportunities, but not enough good ones



Thrivable Compensation

Fresno has many job opportunities, but not enough good ones

Fresno's economy provides many short-term, lower-compensated job opportunities

Many people feel that they can find work, even across diverse industries, but that few jobs put them on pathways to sustainable income

Many workers feel that one job is not enough to cover their needs. A lot of interviewees worked more than one job, and believed it was the only way to make ends meet.

Thrivable Compensation

Fresno has many job opportunities, but not enough good ones

Many interviewees estimated that Fresnans need to make a bit over \$15/hr or \$2000/month to live comfortably

Some workers couldn't get more hours at their jobs because of active hour suppression by employers, in order to avoid paying benefits

Thrivable Compensation

“I worked in the ag industry building farm equipment...before that I worked in the restaurant business; I worked as a dishwasher, short order cook. I've worked in a warehouse. I've worked in a sales department for a parts company in the ag industry. So I've done a lot of different types of work, but none of them have really been what I would consider career-orientated...I can't see spending five, seven years at a place to finally get maybe up to \$20 an hour and benefits packages weren't really that good.”

Thrivable Compensation

"It's cool, but the pay is not great, the benefits are not great, I like it because it's a positive atmosphere, like the co-workers that I work with, we kind of joke with each other, keep everything it's fun you could say, it's a fun environment but as far as everything else it sucks...I don't expect much out of [my employers], because I know basically what they're about, up front what is, I don't see no future in it. They're not misleading me in any way, telling me this is gonna be your career and all these various other things. There's really no thought about moving forward in that direction. This is at best, a temporary tool to get me where I need to be. Just to be able to get me some financial support."

Thrivable Compensation

For two of my jobs we are considered freelance. So when you're freelance you don't have as much benefits as you would like. A lot of reasons why I think we get paid so much is because it is part-time and they don't want to put you on more than part-time because then they have to start giving you more benefits...I'm like well I'm really good at what I do why can't you just put me on full-time?

35 hours or more usually entitled you to those benefits. But a lot of times we would get a phone call from HR if somebody was hitting too many hours for too long a period of a time. "Hey, cut them down on their hours. They're costing us too much."

Thrivable Compensation

Our family struggles to make ends meet. Sometimes that means working two, three jobs to make it and you still have three, four dollars left in your bank account after you pay your bills and you buy food for your family.

I'd like to make at least 20 an hour, and jobs are paying the minimum or 16-18 to start but they want you to have a bachelors degree and its like dude you serious, you want someone to go through 4 years of school to make 16 an hour?

Profit Over People

Many workers feel that their employers value profit more than employees' wellbeing



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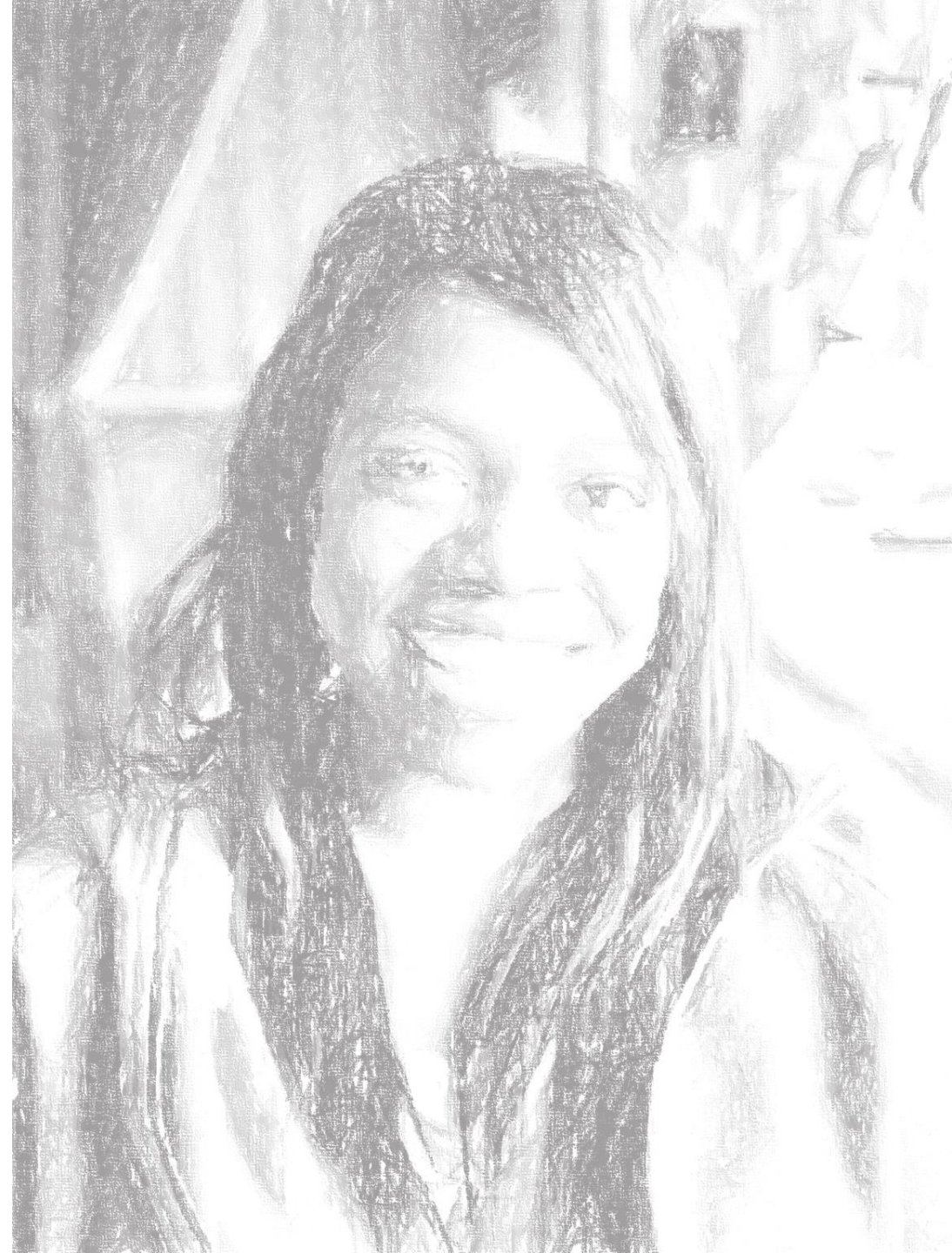
Many are seeking respect in the workplace, including both material and relational recognition of their work

People feel replaceable at work, including a worry that employers will replace them with technology in pursuit of efficiency and profit

Some people thought that prioritizing profit was what corporations were supposed to do; that it was the boss' prerogative

Profit Over People

“I expect mutual respect. I expect to also have a voice...I want to feel like I'm included. I want to feel like I'm not just someone making you money. I want to feel like...you need me as well, as much as I need, you know, the job.”



Profit Over People

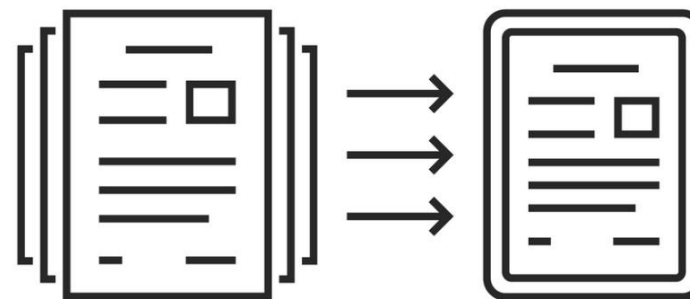
It's small business owners and they're always looking to just do what's right for themselves...They're all the same. I mean, it's just "what can you do for me?"

[In a packing house] they will...tell you that to your face. "You can't do this? Bye. I have five more people behind you."...You know that you're replaceable and you know that you do not matter.

They signed up to be a business owner. It's like, don't take it out on me because if it was easy then everybody would own their own business.

Technology

A diverse range of feelings were shared on tech & automation, including their impact on respondents' work & on future workers



Technology

A diverse range of feelings were shared on tech & automation, including their impact on respondents' work & future workers

People's feelings on technology are nuanced: positive when it helps them do their job, negative when it complicates their ability to do a task

Workers had a spectrum of beliefs about automation risk: some don't anticipate much impact on themselves or future workers, while others foresee workplaces with many fewer humans

Technology

A diverse range of feelings were shared on tech & automation, including their impact on respondents' work & future workers

Many of those who do not foresee that working alongside new technologies might translate to fewer jobs available instead focus on technology making workers more productive

In some cases, fear of technological change led to reactivity or paralysis, resulting in repercussions at work

Technology

“[Tech makes the job] easier...it's just easier, a lot faster. But harder, I guess, because you're having to learn it, and memorize it.”



Technology

[If the owners knew how to use technology] I feel like we would probably be a better store with more business. We're pretty slow especially at nights. And I think that is...the old generation and the new generation. Like they don't really know how to work technology. And I feel like if they were more savvy, that we could probably be a really good [store.].

A lot of guys at my job are getting hurt, already back problems, they have to wear back braces and all of that. So I feel like in the sense of taking care of your workers technology is doing a better job at that.

Technology

We've actually had three older guys, younger than me in their 40s just quit, and they're afraid of that technology coming in... They didn't show for the class... they're paying you to train, I was going to grab that opportunity in a heartbeat. But some weren't, right... they were scared. Yes, I'm scared too but we got to do it... I see them now and then and two of them are still unemployed.

We're humans. We make mistakes; these robots don't, they do it perfect, you know what I mean? So it's scary to think that.

All these owners out there are thinking about getting rid of employees. They want robots to get the fruit, put it in the cold storage and have these sort of self-loading racks and they come down and pull them.

Technology

20 years from now you might have robots that can set up tables or at least pick up the dishes or something. I think things would be a lot easier depending how-the industry of technology goes toward that side.... I'm pretty sure there will be some benefit aside from that. Just depends what they're actually trying to create or what they're trying to benefit from or what can be more of a helping hand. Have a third arm that's robotic. You never know. You can serve three cups at the same time

I would say it would be mostly operated online. I wouldn't even say that in 20 years it would be a regular storefront anymore. Definitely- I mean if not that, then just a lot more technology involved in getting things done. There's still stuff now that I'm like "wow, this would be so much easier if this was a part of this iPad and this would be done so much faster."

[In 20 years] people are [still] going to need somewhere to stay, if they're just passing by a new hotel... There's a coworker of mine has already been there for seven years and she's still in the same position. The same job title, the same position, the same shirt, so I don't think it's going to change.

Family Finding Themes

FAMILY

Families as Support Systems

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Extended families are critical support systems for many Fresnans, serving as “anchors” that keep them in the region



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Extended families are critical support systems for many Fresnans, serving as “anchors” that keep them in the region

Extended and multigenerational households are often a means for receiving and providing the resources needed to survive

Many people lean on family for childcare, housing and financial support

Families As Support Systems

Extended families are critical support systems for many Fresnans, serving as “anchors” that keep them in the region

A crisis for one person can ripple out to affect multiple members of the family unit

Many Fresnans are supporting people outside of their immediate family

Family can be a major anchor to the region, bringing people back to Fresno who had moved away, or keeping them there even if they have considered leaving

Families as Support Systems

I would like to move eventually. But we're very family-oriented, very close. So if I leave, I would have my mom and my sister with me.

Family support [is what brought me here.] My mother, she is there to help me with my child and I moved out with my son's dad so I was very vulnerable at the time so I needed my mother for support.

My folks sold the house that I grew up in in Fremont when they retired and they bought a house out in Madera Ranchos, which is kinda out in the country, and that's what got me familiar with the area. And I've pretty much been back and forth since 2002, and for about the last seven years I've pretty much been grounded here.

Family Support Systems

“My niece, she's not my niece by blood or anything, but I've known her since before she was born, and she lost her mom a few years ago, and she's of age...she doesn't have a house. She got on heroin, and so, we're helping her and getting her off that.”



Families As Support Systems

“There's times that my mother-in-law stays with us. She's in a not too healthy relationship with her husband, so that can be anywhere from a couple days to a couple months. Not only does that mean I'll be financially responsible for her at that time, I am financially responsible for my father-in-law who lives in Mexico. If it wasn't for our financial health he would be destitute. So we have a lot of people that we take care of. But just kind of depending what goes on, there's times I have nieces and nephews that stay with me. Their family home life isn't the greatest. So I could have anywhere from my three children to another five on top of that at times.”

Health and Safety Themes

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Safety in the Workplace

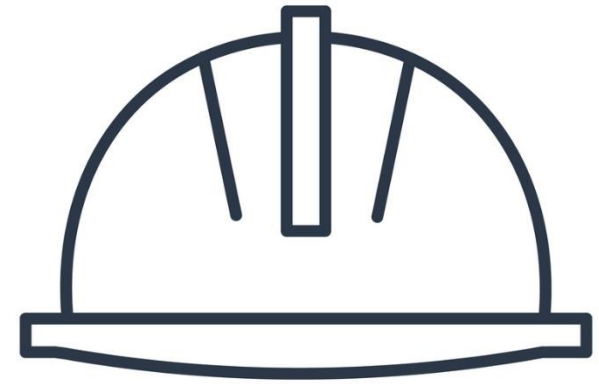
Community Health and Safety

Domestic Violence

Drugs and Addiction

Safety in the Workplace

Some felt updated regulations improved safety at work, but many still experienced brutal or unsafe work environments



Safety in the Workplace

Some felt updated regulations improved safety at work, but many still experienced brutal or unsafe work environments

The nature of many Fresnans' work is physically taxing and/or dangerous

A number of respondents had witnessed or experienced physical or sexual violence in the workplace

Safety in the Workplace

Like I say forklifting is good but the thing is your back. You're right next to a propane tank or a gas tank so it's - you're inhaling sometimes fumes, dirt, debris. I could mess up my lungs and my nostrils. Welding, I know I can get zinc poisoning. Stuff like that. Health, to answer your question, it is in the back of my mind but it's - they have it regulated to a point where I don't have to worry about it so much. Like the tanks are far back enough to me not to smell so much but I do get a whiff of it. When I think of it, I think, I don't know.

It's 14 an hour but it's backbreaking work. You're standing in a stationary position for 8-10 hours, chopping.

I had to unload this humungous truck, like one of the huge trucks full of the animal cages like bird cages and whatnot, so that was a huge job. Tires, a lot of gruesome labor jobs pretty much. Eight to twelve hour days...just like hard labor.

Safety in the Workplace

There's a lot of Northerners* that work at a certain Foster Farms and then there was one Southerner* dude that worked over there and they would always harass and always try to fight him. And that's not cool, you shouldn't have that in the work environment.

I don't have health insurance. So it's just pushing through [work-related pain]. Sometimes, [my girlfriend's] family, they have like...morphine pills or Norcos or something, I'll take like half of one and it will help me get through a shift.

To move up within the company...what I'd seen, and I saw, you either have to - I'm using [this for] a lack of a better word, but you really have to be sucking something or dating somebody or flirting with somebody or finessing somebody in order to move up, and I am not going to do that. If my hard work is not going to prove to you that I could do this and keep doing it, then I don't want to be here, and I'm not going to do that.

* "Northerners" and "Southerners" are references to gang affiliations

Community Health and Safety

Issues stemming from poverty negatively impact many Fresnoans' physical and mental health



Community Health and Safety

Issues stemming from poverty negatively impact many Fresnans' physical and mental health

Economic precarity negatively impacts mental health, with interviewees' experiences ranging from light stress to severe anxiety

Many felt pressure to get by on their own, and stressed by proposition of solely supporting themselves and/or their families

Community Health and Safety

Issues stemming from poverty negatively impact many Fresnans' physical and mental health

Many of the lowest income workers can't access the healthy food that they help grow, pick, and package

A number of interviewees noted concerns about bad air quality impacting their health and the health of family members

A connection was noted between health insurance & financial stability, but even with insurance, many felt pressure of healthcare costs

Community Health and Safety

I remember I had developed IBS...and having a lot of problems with my stomach. And my coverage wouldn't even cover a simple medication when I would try and go in. And it was \$180 or something.

I think in order to have good health, you need to have good insurance program policy that you're involved with and then that'll allow you to...make better choices for your future. Based on your income and how much you're paying for insurance and then that allows you to purchase a home or- some of those things are...that deciding factor.

I feel like I'm about to have a mental breakdown, honestly. That's how working in the night makes me feel...work, how it affects my life it makes me feel really sad. It sucks that I have to go to work and I can't spend time with people that I love or relationships.

Community Health and Safety

I'm surrounded by farms, I'm surrounded by farms. But my milk is almost \$3.50 a gallon, \$4.00 sometimes for a gallon of milk. But I'm surrounded by dairy farms. But there's times I can't put milk in my fridge for my kids. But yet we live in the fruit basket of the world. It makes no sense.

All three of my children have asthma. We get bad air quality days, it can be days that we try not to leave outside. There's days when my son misses school because of the air quality, especially when - Fresno has a very large population. There's days when we already have bad air quality days and then we get the burning of the trash and the recyclables or what have you, and it just sets a fog over Fresno, and the air is rancid, it's dense, it's bad. The air quality here is just bad, and it's bad for my kids. My son gets headaches. I've been told by my doctor I live in the worst area for my kids to have asthma. There's a possibility if we left the area, my kids wouldn't even have asthma. So we leave to go to the coast, my kids don't have problems.

Drugs and Addiction

Drug use and addiction are common, impacting many Fresnans directly or indirectly



Drugs and Addiction

Drug use and addiction are common, impacting many Fresnans directly or indirectly

Multiple interviewees perceived substance use as a growing issue, some attributing it to cheap and easy access to drugs

Some interviewees perceived a connection between mental health, drug use, and homelessness

Multiple people had experience with addiction recovery programs, including referencing them as local communities they're active in

Drugs and Addiction

I hate that we live in a drug culture where drugs are actually glorified...I also think that Fresno, really, really needs to focus more on funding for drug rehabilitation programs because I do see that they do make a difference.

I would take methadone off the streets...Methadone's awful. People take synthetic heroin to get off heroin and it's just- it's terrible. I don't know what's going on with the heroin in town- black is everywhere in this town.

I know a lot of people. I just tend to stay away from them. Not good people, you know? Kind of lifestyle, let that happen, years ago, so most of the time people that I know, do drugs.

Because I didn't go to college I stopped going to school, I was around drunk people and I started making wrong choices and it took me off course for a few years. I already had my son so my mother had had him for two years and I actually went to rehab in 2015 which is where I met my husband now. And we've just been two recovering drugs addicts trying to better our lives.

Drugs and Addiction

“The [homeless encampments have] people out there smoking crack on the side of the - every day I see it on the way to work. Every single day. They're out there, totally hopeless, sitting on the side of the road, smoking - right out in the open. Smoking the crack, cops just drive by. They don't stop. They've got like whole streets that are just full of tents. It's mental health, it's crazy. I can't believe that they allow it...It's gotten worse over the last five years...I think it's about drugs, really. And mental health. There's a breakdown in mental health I think. It seems like they lost their health. Settled for a crack pipe or a meth pipe or whatever it is that they're doing...Meth especially. It's gotten real bad here in the Central Valley. They've been addressing the issue right here in Fresno County. With town halls and stuff like that, trying to figure out what to do. But it's just gotten real bad. [Meth] got cheaper. I think they're paying like \$200 for an ounce of it now. An ounce is a lot. Every homeless person in the world can buy it now. It's really, really cheap. And it's like - it's just out there everywhere. It's all over the place. Half the guys I work with are on it.”

Domestic Violence

Issues of domestic violence impacted many households with serious economic and job implications



Domestic Violence

Issues of domestic violence impacted many households with serious economic and job implications

Lives can be upended by abuse, requiring unanticipated employment shifts

Relationship conflict/violence & economic precarity work in a vicious cycle

Domestic Violence

Me and my wife got into a huge, huge fight and I ended up punching a wall and...the neighbors heard that hit and they thought that was me laying my hands on my wife...and they called the police and it was just a huge mess. They held me for a few days and my manager didn't know what was going on. No one was able to call him and tell him. So as soon as I got out, I went straight to the hospital, I called my manager and stuff, but it was already too late. I was gone from work for like three days, so he had to do what he had to do.

It was an ugly divorce. I ended getting locked up by that..that's how I lost [my job.] And then I took a break from work and then I lost my house through that too.

Post-Secondary Education Findings

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Values

Access

Values

Many value higher education & see it as a means of upward mobility



Values

Many value higher education & see it as a means of mobility

When considering a career change, many were interested in medical care, care jobs, apprenticeships, and technology, with some evidence of gender differences across interests

Fresno State University is seen by many as a good resource, including as a place to work

Many interviewees were taking advantage of on-the-job training and apprenticeships opportunities

Values

I'm really good with computers and stuff so I'd probably find some web design to do. I'd probably go to school for that. Well first I'd probably talk to a counselor or something. That's something I have been thinking about. I would probably talk to a counselor first. I would want to get a degree but at the same time I don't necessarily know exactly what I'd want so I'd want to talk to someone first just to make sure so I know I'm not just blindly going into something.

I wouldn't mind learning more because things change so fast and then I just- once you become a working stiff, you don't have time to keep up on anything. So to go back and find out what's relevant coding, and bin language, and that sort of thing in the computer industry. That'd be pretty cool.

I feel like the campus is really wonderful. So it's like once you get in there, you're in there, until you retire. So you can easily, if you decide to move up, in there, to another position and everything, they'll more likely choose people from the inside than they do from the outside.

Access

Many don't feel post secondary education is accessible to, or feasible, for them



Access

Many don't feel post secondary education is accessible to, or feasible, for them

Almost all respondents valued education, but didn't always in practice see themselves as able to attain it

Many people's post-secondary education had been disrupted by life events, leaving some with student debt but no degree

Many experienced barriers to post-secondary access at all stages of their careers, resulting in education feeling unrealistic for many

Access

I've got like 20 units in right now so far through West Hills. But I had financial (problems) - I was paying for my own schooling because I'm in default on a student loan from when I was in Florida, so no financial aid. And I can't afford, at this job, to continue.

I tried going to school, a trade school for aesthetician but it got hard because of family time, family issues. My dad got sick so I couldn't finish my school.

I got homeless and so things just kind of - I stopped doing education for a bit and start making money.

When I got out of the military I had a marketable job skill as an aircraft mechanic but working on civilian airplanes didn't interest me and I didn't really want to go to school and that's how I ended up getting into sales because I wanted to be able to still earn a good living but I did not want to go to school to do it. Kind of wish I had that bachelor's degree now and I've looked at online schools for that but I have a block in my brain on the school for some reason.

Experiences of Fresno: Themes

EXPERIENCES OF FRESNO

Racism and Discrimination

Geographic Disparities

Housing and Homelessness

Racism and Discrimination

Most interviewees had experienced discrimination, that often limited their opportunities for economic mobility or access to critical resources



Racism and Discrimination

Most interviewees had experienced discrimination, often limiting their opportunities for economic mobility or access to critical resources

Disdain for people of other races leads people to experience hostility in communities and workplaces

Workplace discrimination based on main language stifles opportunities

Racism and Discrimination

Most interviewees had experienced discrimination, often limiting their opportunities for economic mobility or access to critical resources

Racial discrimination among Fresnans can eliminate potential ladders to opportunity

Many reported age-related barriers at work, from suspected age discrimination to beliefs that older workers are not adaptable to technological change

Racism and Discrimination

My girlfriend, her parents live down there. So she staying inside the house. I can't go inside the house, so I just stay out in the car. Her dad back in the 80s was a shot caller for the Aryan brotherhood. So it doesn't really mix like that.*

My manager is in the back obviously busy. I'm up at the register just smiling, ready and he [a customer] clears his throat. I go "Are you ready to check out sir?" And he goes "Excuse me sir?" And got my boss' attention and goes "I need to be helped". And my boss goes "She can help you, she's right there". And he kind of went like that to his [confederate flag] belt buckle and goes "I need your help."

* Interviewee is African-American

Racism and Discrimination

“When I got the job as a sales rep in the parts department...I was the last person to inquire for that position. They said they wanted someone who is bilingual. I'm not. I was the only white person that worked out in the plant. And all the owners and the people that worked in the office were all white. Everybody was trying to get that position, especially because they were all bilingual. They all basically got turned down, and after the thing still being up by the time clock for a little over a month, I decided, I'm just gonna go ask about it. So I went in there and asked and it was like, 'Atta boy. We were waiting for you. When were you gonna come in here?' And it was just this real good ol' boy attitude, and they offered me the job just like that, and the following week I was starting there. And then once I went in there, I remember feeling that way when I would go back out into the shop to talk to the guys, they looked at me different, they didn't talk to me the same, and I could only imagine how they must've felt about it because they had all tried for that position. They had been there way longer than me, knew way more about the parts and the stuff than I did, but yet I walk into the office and it was just like a pat on the back.”

Racism and Discrimination

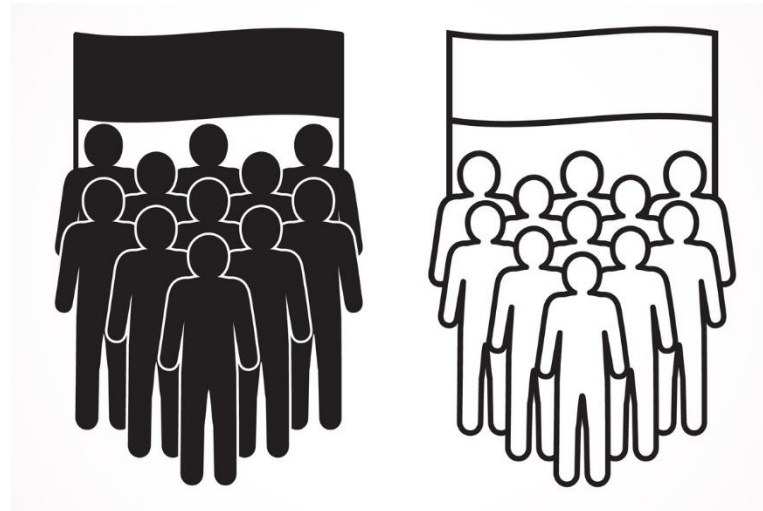
I would get the interview and for whatever reason, it just wouldn't pan out... I kind of want to think that my age may play a factor in all that...I think they're hiring younger people. In the positions that I applied for, this-basically, that's what I'm seeing. Oh, this is my new co-worker, and they seem to be younger.

The last position that I held that was substantial and a manager of Mountain View Cold Storage, I had groomed the kid and they just gave him my job. And you get age discrimination, that sort of thing....He was a lot younger...I felt like I got looked over, passed over, for promotions.

There's a lot of opportunities here, its just scary being my age and looking for it

Geographic Disparities

Many find Fresno to be racially and financially segregated – there is North Fresno, and there is everywhere else – which is reflected in public spaces, as well as access to jobs and other resources



Geographic Disparities

Many find Fresno to be racially and financially segregated – there is North Fresno, and there is everywhere else – which is reflected in public spaces, as well as access to jobs and other resources

There are differences in *air quality, violence, access to nutrition, and access to work* based on where you live in Fresno

Geographic Disparities

Right now, I'm currently living in Fresno and the area I live in, you'd wouldn't want to leave your child at the daycare around there just, I think it was two weeks ago, in my apartment complex, there's a daycare there. And a car got chased and the car went into the- where you could drive through, to the gates of the apartments and he was gunned down and shot in the head. And the daycare is right there, and the one- everything got blocked off, and we were actually about to go check the mail. Like we're 100 feet away while this is going down.

If you look in North Fresno, the approach to health in a lot of the community there is like, oh they're able to run. That's a big thing, being able to run outside in your neighborhood. Somebody in South Fresno, nobody is going to walk out middle of the night and feel comfortable with a run.

Geographic Disparities

“Depending on where you are, it can be light and day. For example, I went to a high school called Central West. I was in FFA, which is Future Farmers of America. Literally across the street from the school was a grape vineyard and it was really far from everything, and then when my mom and my stepdad got divorced, moved to the other side of town, ended up finishing high school at McLane High, and that’s inner city school, so I went from cowboys to gangsters. It was scary for me, I was freaked out. But then I got involved in student government and I felt more comfortable, did a lot of extracurriculars...If you talk to anyone going from...Central Unified School District and then there’s Fresno Unified School District, so I was terrified, genuinely like “Oh my gosh, I’m going to the ghetto.” And when I went there, I just realized it’s just like any other school, the people are the same.”

Geographic Disparities

“South Fresno, a lot of the jobs nearby are like fast food, so that’s available too. But when you’re looking for a job that works with your school and being able to get to school on time. A lot of my friends are living in South Fresno, and a lot of them are lower income so they have to take the bus and they have to count on that. Wait about, a lot of the buses are late sometimes...A lot of my coworkers too about like married, have like three kids and they still have to count on the bus. Wake up two hours before they even go into work...When people are looking for, let’s say someone’s looking for an office job, a lot of them will go to downtown Fresno. Or if you’re looking for a retail job, you’re going to have to go to North Fresno.”

Geographic Disparities

“I feel there's a lot more access to fast food than there is to healthier eating styles, and I say so specifically on the west side of town, you don't see a Trader Joe's, you don't see, you know, a Sprouts, or something like that. You see-you pretty much on the west side of town, you have one grocery store...and then you have so many fast food restaurants: Pizza Hut, KFC, Wendy's, all that's down there, but, you know, there's nothing for them that's affordable, like a Grocery Outlet and everything. I feel, you know, it's a grocery store, but it's-I feel like the prices are cut down a lot compared to Food Max and everything. So I feel like they need more options like that, more grocery stores and less fast food restaurants.”

Housing and Homelessness

Housing and homelessness are at the forefront of many people's minds



Housing and Homelessness

Housing and homelessness are at the forefront of many people's minds

Many people strive for home ownership to provide a stable future for their families and themselves

Many people are increasingly impacted by homelessness in Fresno, whether by witnessing it in the community or by experiencing it themselves.

Housing and Homelessness

I would love to secure the future for my kids. Make sure they have what they're going to need and have like a house paid off, so in case anything, they have somewhere to go at the end of the day. Even when they're grown, make sure the house has plenty of rooms for each one, for each kid. The deed is under their names and go from there. Secure the future of mine, I will say my family tree.

On the north side of Fresno. We call it the rich side, the north side, because there's so many beautiful houses and they're building more on Herndon Street. If you guys ever drive by Fresno, drive on Herndon Street, all the way from 99, all the way down Herndon Street. It's a beautiful street. The houses that you guys see on there, it's just mmm, mmm. I just look at those houses and I tell myself, "one day."

Housing and Homelessness

Downtown Fresno...the homeless has set up camps, and I know that...the city had ordered a cleanup crew to go down and just kind of- whether you had belongings there or not, they just kind of didn't care about the homeless, and took everything, cleaned up everything. And I don't think that was the solution for it, but that's what ended up happening.

Just now I had to go clear on the other side of Fresno, from the south side of Fresno almost in Fowler, and I'm just like way out there and there's just homeless people wandering around all over the place. And some of them look like they're high school aged kids and stuff like that. So I don't know if I would actually tell anybody to move here, to be honest with you.

Pain Points and Opportunities

Using Pain Points & Opportunities

Workers identified many **pain points** – issues in their lives that are especially challenging

Our team identified potential **program & policy opportunities** to address those issues

Following are [ten highlighted pain points](#) particularly relevant to DRIVE; actions that support improvements in work and community life in Fresno

We recommend exploration of the extensive full list found in the appendix

Top Pain Points and Opportunities

PAIN POINTS

OPPORTUNITIES

Disrupted Education

Loan forgiveness; employer-led training

Inflexible Work Schedules

Better access to existing Paid Family Medical Leave

Domestic Violence

Assess current resources; fund innovative community solutions

Segregation and Neighborhood Violence

Poverty-fighting programs like Basic Income

Housing Insecurity

Land trusts like the Central California Land Trust

Top Pain Points and Opportunities

PAIN POINTS

OPPORTUNITIES

Hour/Benefit Suppression

Social screens for Second Office Fresno; **worker co-ops**

New Tech at Work

Move responsibility for learning from workers to the employers or state

Low Wages

Workers build own businesses with the ability to create thriving-wage jobs

Access to Healthy Food

Expansion of WIC/SNAP benefits

Affordable Childcare

Co-locate childcare facilities in colleges and/or workplaces

Researcher Observations

Bright Spots

Interviewees commonly referenced aspects of Fresno that they appreciate, including:

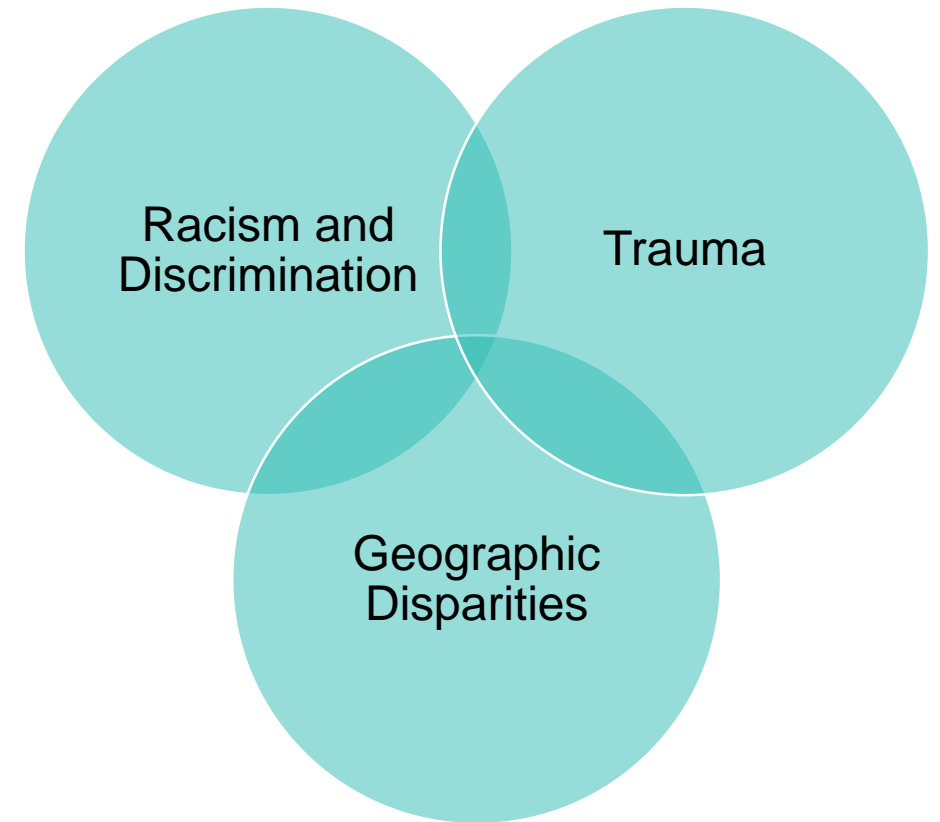
- The **diversity** of its residents
- The **public library** system
- Resources provided by **Fresno State University**
- Work made safer and easier by **technological advances**
- Its thriving **arts and culture** scene
- Seeing **new development and renovation** in public spaces

Through-lines: Race, Place, Trauma

Three interrelated root causes underpinned many of the challenges we heard from Fresnoans

- **Racism and discrimination**
- **Trauma**
- **Geographic disparities** related to race & socioeconomic status

These underscored the importance of DRIVE's **racial equity focus**, and may indicate that embedding **trauma-informed** and **place-based approaches** could also be important for the success of each DRIVE investment initiative.



Immigration Status and Fear

Challenge:

- We consistently heard that potential interviewees were worried about sharing their stories due to their **immigration status**.
- This may indicate that **fear is a broader barrier to understanding and meeting the needs** of undocumented Fresnans.

Despite weeks of partnering with trusted CBOs & working through interviewee personal networks, we were able to **interview only 1 monolingual Spanish speaker**

Opportunity:

- Inclusive/sanctuary policies** within government and CBOs may prove important.

Precarity and Mental Health

For some, **daily trauma and challenge...**

~ from low pay, experiences with racism, or needing to choose between equally critical priorities ~

...may aggregate into **toxic stress** with multiple life impacts

Many noted **the importance of mental health**, indicating some public acceptance of the issue from which to build interventions.

Employers Enact Policy Differently

Some anecdotes suggest that **workplace safety regulations, compliance, and best practices** (such as equipment updates and limiting heat exposure) may be better adhered to in:

Manufacturing industries

~ *than in* ~

Agriculture

Larger companies

~ *than in* ~

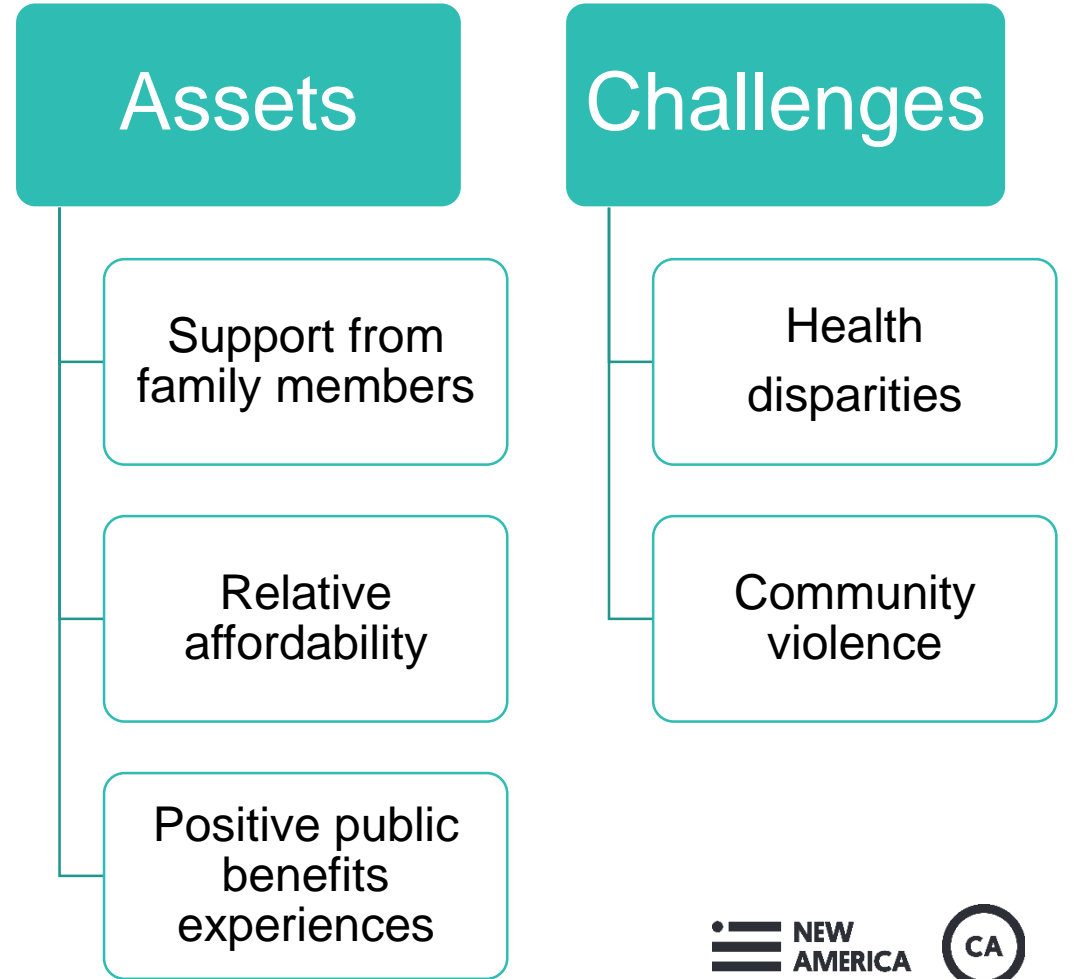
Smaller ones

This may have implications for where local enforcement of safe workplace practices – and compliance supports for employers – could be of best use

Is Fresno Good For Families?

Interviewees reported **community assets** that make Fresno good for families, as well as **major stressors** that local families experience.

Some live in Fresno for **key family supports** (i.e., help with child rearing), yet issues like **violence and health disparities** can temper those benefits.



Precarity and Incarceration

Many interviewees were previously incarcerated or were impacted by the incarceration of a family member. Incarcerations were disruptive, leading to:

Inability to:

- get better-paying/safer **work**
- receive post secondary **financial aid**
- legalize **immigration status**
- receive **child support**

Loss of:

- jobs
- housing
- relationship w/ children

These impacts were often **long-lasting** and **compounded the economic precarity** of respondents and their families. Many perceived Fresno policing practices as **disproportionately targeting communities of color**.

Synergistic and Additive Findings

Our observations both *aligned with existing* DRIVE data & foci, and suggested *additional approaches*

Findings **synergistic** to the DRIVE plan

Abundance of low wage jobs

Housing as a critical priority

Entrepreneurship for women & POC

2nd-office Fresno social “scorecard”

Findings **additive** to the DRIVE plan

Improve existing jobs in the short-term

Critical role of community health

Need for childcare & full-family supports

Workplace safety, especially in agriculture

Recommendations

Respondents: If I were in charge...

We asked people what they would do to make life better for their coworkers and fellow Fresnans. They said:

At Work

- Higher **pay**
- Pathways to **good jobs**, including for people with employment barriers
- **Work/family balance**, incl. better benefits & more time w/ loved ones
- **Updating old technologies**
- More **support from managers**

In the Community

- Housing and other resources for **homeless Fresnans**
- Access to **healthy food, exercise, and transit to medical offices**
- Neighborhood-level **solutions to drugs and violence**
- Reduce discrimination, **promote integration**

Recommendations

Interviewees have much to teach decision-makers about how California communities might change for the better.

We recommend that advocates use their platforms to ensure these voices are heard, through projects like:

- ❑ *Social media campaigns* highlighting stories and solutions
- ❑ *Websites sharing stories, quotes, and photos*, including links to policy options and action steps that address the concerns shared by interviewees
- ❑ *Webinars, podcasts, and journalism* featuring workers telling their own stories
- ❑ *Engaging workers in designing solutions* to the problems they know best

Appendix

Synthesis



Pain Points & Opportunities

Workers identified many **pain points** – issues in their lives that are especially challenging

Our research team identified potential **program and policy opportunities** to address those issues

In the main deck we highlighted ten pain points especially relevant to DRIVE. The following includes all pain points and opportunities identified during our process. We hope the complete list will help not just to lift up worker perspectives, but also to support actions to improve work and community life in Fresno

Stability

Pain Points

- Inflexible work schedules
- Lack of employment stability

Opportunities

- Tech applications supporting schedule swapping between employees for when personal needs arise
- Paid time off (PTO) to allow employees to care for selves and loved ones when necessary, while still keeping their jobs
- Ensuring that people understand their rights to Paid Family Medical Leave, and can actually claim them

Thrivable Compensation

Pain Points

- Under-employment
- Hours/benefits suppression
- Pathways to sustainable compensation

Opportunities

- Incentives for businesses to supply full-time work
- Worker representation on corporate boards
- A jobs guarantee program allowing everyone who wants to to work full-time
- Supporting the local entrepreneurship ecosystem for workers to forge own paths to sustainable income, outside of the opportunities provided by others

Profit Over People

Pain Points

- Lack of training on the job
- Feeling replaceable
- Hours/benefits suppression

Opportunities

- Address dehumanization and isolation through workplace engagement projects incentivizing face to face time
- Portable benefits
- Social screens for Second-Office Fresno opportunities
- Incentivize cooperative/worker-ownership models
- Encourage employers to provide full-time work tied to benefits

Families As Support Systems

Pain Points

- Accessibility and cost of childcare

Opportunities

- Universal childcare
- Tax incentives for starting childcare businesses
- A domestic worker bill of rights
- Partnerships with colleges to provide childcare
- Workplace-provided childcare options

Safety in the Workplace

Pain Points

- Dangerous work
- Lack of enforcement of labor law; lack of laws sufficiently protecting worker health

Opportunities

- Better enforcement of employment law (ensuring clear differentiation showing these are not ICE raids to avoid increased worker anxiety)
- Worker representation on corporate boards
- Anonymous complaint platforms
- Ombudsman programs

Community Health and Safety

Pain Points

- Access to affordable, healthy food
- Air quality (including trash burning & emissions)
- Neighborhood violence
- Hours/benefits suppression

Opportunities

- Expand recipients and utility of WIC & SNAP benefits
- Carpool incentives to reduce driving
- Explore and address root causes of trash burning
- Portable benefits
- Expand healthcare coverage

Community Health and Safety (cont'd)

Pain Points

- Mental health challenges
- Healthcare costs
- Relationship conflict

Opportunities

- Provide therapy through university and library collaborations
- Expand online mental health services, as affordable alternative
- Assess current domestic violence resources & ways to better market them within communities
- Men's groups teaching healthy conflict management
- Portable benefits or healthcare expansion

Education: Values and Access

Pain Points

- Educational options (e.g., for-profit colleges) that go out of business, wasting students' credits and money
- Inability to transfer credits between institutions
- Student debt without getting a credential
- Insufficient supports to help student parents stay in school

Opportunities

- Better credit transfer agreements between local institutions
- Resources to aid in post-secondary decision-making, including accurate information about for-profit options
- Guidance to help young adults identify post-secondary goals and action steps, even after they leave high school
- Childcare and financial supports for student parents

Racism and Discrimination

Pain Points

- Language barriers and racial segregation
- Misinformation about access to programs & benefits
- Physically taxing and/or dangerous work conditions
- Fewer supports (such as union membership) for older workers in physically taxing jobs
- Barriers to employment and housing opportunity
- Fear/trauma

Opportunities

- Enforcement or creation of anti-racist/ anti-discrimination policies
- Partner with anti-racist training organizations like National Equity Project or The People's Institute
- Centering different cultures at arts festivals
- Trauma-informed lens in designing new services, policies, and initiatives

Geographic Disparities

Pain Points

- Access to resources, such as affordable, quality food, outside of North Fresno
- Segregation leads to additional racist and discriminatory action
- Neighborhood violence

Opportunities

- More affordable, high-quality grocery options throughout all Fresno neighborhoods
- Poverty-fighting programs such as Basic Income
- Desegregation efforts

Housing and Homelessness

Pain Points

- Housing costs

Opportunities

- Designate mixed housing zones for lower and middle-income households
- Housing innovations like tiny homes and ADUs
- Community Land Trusts for permanent affordable housing
- Impact fees on developments to fund affordable housing