Continuity and Change in Community-Based Leadership in Downtown San Jose, California

STUDY FINDINGS REPORT TO COMMUNIVERCITY
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Table of Contents

Part I – Summary Material

- Project Summary ................................................................. 1
- Executive Summary of Findings ........................................... 2
- Methodology ...................................................................... 4

Part II - Leader Types, Attributes, Skills, and Resources

- What are different types of leaders we might need or find in our communities? 5
- What are different attributes of effective community leaders? ....................... 7
- What are the skills and abilities associated with effective community-based leadership? 9
- What are the most important resources for community leaders? ...................... 11

Part III - Leader Relationships: Social Capital and Social Networks

- Introduction to Leader Relationships ........................................ 13
- What types of organizations are most important to community leaders? .... 14

Part IV – Community Issues

- What are the most important issues your community and leaders need to organize for? 20

Glossary ................................................................................ 22

Citation and Acknowledgements .................................................. 25
Part I
Summary Material

The San José Council District 3 neighborhoods are home to roughly 96,000 residents, the majority (nearly 2/3) of whom have been identified as low income. This diverse and largely immigrant section of the city represents a key part of the shifting demographic profile of San José. This part of San José is also home to many grassroots leaders with ties to CommUniverCity and who have been engaged in protecting and developing their communities. Yet, as generations of community residents succeed one another, so too do generations of leadership. Concerned with the future of grassroots leadership in the partner communities, CommUniverCity partnered with the Department of Anthropology at San José State University to develop a study of community leadership in the Fall of 2015.

This study was designed to understand: (1) the attributes, capacities, and resources of established and emerging community leaders identified by CommUniverCity and partners; (2) community leadership needs; and (3) the degree alignment between community leadership needs, established leadership, and emerging leadership.

This study attempted to determine how community members and leaders can best work to foster the development of leadership to meet community needs. Because recent work on leadership has highlighted that there are different types of leaders in terms of the roles they play in the community network (e.g., conveners, thought leaders, and process facilitators), this study was designed to inductively determine what kinds of leaders exist in the community, what kinds of leaders are emerging, and the extent to which emerging leadership profiles correspond to established leadership profiles. Also, because leadership capacity is largely a product of community capacity and institutional and political contexts, this study identified key factors that facilitate or inhibit leadership capacities. Finally, because leadership capacities are appropriate to different needs, objectives, and contexts, this study identified community needs and objectives and explored the extent to which established and emerging leadership profiles correspond to these needs and objectives.
Executive Summary

Rethinking Neatly Bounded Categories of Leadership

Because the CommUniverCity-sponsored Community Leadership Program and the present study have used the terms “emerging” and “established” leaders, one could easily get the impression that there is one set of full vessels (established leaders) and one set of empty (or half full) vessels (emerging leaders). Following this logic, the sensible approach to fostering the development of leadership in San José District 3 would be to facilitate the imparting of knowledge, skills, and resources from established leaders to emerging leaders; to draw upon the fuller vessels to fill the others. The study findings outlined in this report do not support such a way of thinking. Instead, this study uncovered a combination of unique and shared skills, resources, and priorities within and between the established leader, emerging leader, and community cohorts. We therefore suggest studying the correspondences and distinctions between groups outlined in this report in order to identify opportunities to promote a critical and informed approach to community-based leadership.

Motivation is Key

Participants viewed motivation as vitally important to effective community leadership. Respondents emphasized the importance of leaders who can motivate others to action and innovation, and to be people who are willing to accommodate and respect the needs of others. Established leaders and community members do not believe their communities have strong motivational skills, attributes, or leaders. In contrast, emerging leaders ranked the strength of motivational leaders as equal to their importance. This divide might be indicative of an optimism among emerging leaders. If leveraged properly, this quality of emerging leaders might eventually help compensate for the lack of perceived motivation reported by the other cohorts.

Generating Knowledge

Participants frequently emphasized the importance of learning and education; all three cohorts identified thought leaders and educators as important leader types. Emerging leaders ranked educators and knowledge as the most important leader type and resource, respectively, as well as citing education as a key issue in the community. Established leaders and community members placed greater emphasis on experience over formal education.

Planning Ahead, Accountability, and Patience

All three cohorts ranked the strength and importance of planning skills very highly, though they did not necessarily rank planners as important leader types. While the community feels that effective planning is important for good leadership, it does not seem that planners are viewed as leaders themselves. Rather, established leaders and community members seem to prefer charismatic leaders who can act as bridgers, and who perhaps work with planners to effectively organize the community. Conversely, emerging leaders prefer knowledgeable leaders that take accountability for their choices and who plan for contingencies.

Additionally, emerging leaders and community members want their leaders to be accountable and to be able to adapt to changing circumstances. Established leaders ranked patient attributes as an important quality for leaders to possess, which may be an informed viewpoint based on their direct experience in leadership roles.
Social Capital

All three cohorts ranked social capital highly in both strength and importance, and in our discussions with participants we found that interpersonal and professional connections were considered vital to effective leadership. Connections to institutions and to knowledgeable individuals were stressed as means for accessing the resources needed to keep things running smoothly. Building strong relational networks can result in easier access to the kinds of services and resources necessary to get things done in the community.

Bridging and Empowerment

Bridgers—individuals who connect different groups—are in high demand in the District 3 communities. Emerging leaders identified bridging and empowerment as the most important issues in their communities. In subsequent interviews, respondents stressed maintaining connections within their communities as a means of establishing community cohesion through cooperative behaviors, helping with local projects, and supporting local establishments as much as possible.
Methodology

The primary methods in this study were focus groups that included listing exercises, and short background surveys. A focus group is a semi-structured interview of a group of participants that elicits collective feedback on general concepts or situations in the interest of identifying basic study domains. We conducted a total of six focus groups with: (1) established leaders (two separate groups, total participants = 18); (2) emerging leaders (two separate groups, total participants = 13); and (3) community members (two separate groups, total participants = 15). We hosted focus groups at the Roosevelt Community Center and participants were provided with light refreshments.

Focus group questions included: (a) What are different types of leaders we might need or find in your community? (b) What are different attributes of effective community leaders? (c) What are the skills and abilities associated with effective community-based leadership? (d) What are the most important resources for community leaders? (e) What relationships do community leaders need to have in order to be effective? (f) What are the most important issues your community and leaders need to organize for?

Listing exercises asked participants to provide individual rankings of each of the factors identified in focus groups. These exercises helped us determine the degree of cultural consensus on particular issues and domains and provided an interactive means to convert qualitative themes into quantitative data conveyed in charts throughout this report. Once focus group respondents indicated concepts in response to each question, we used listing exercises to learn about the relative strengths and perceived importance of these factors for each participant and participant cohort (established leader, emerging leader, and community member). By asking participants to stack cards with leadership types and community resources and issue areas, in order of their perceived importance and strength, we determined the extent to which these factors and their relative weights correspond across different participants and participant groups.

Background surveys collected basic background information on each participant, including organizational affiliations and some nominations of other key leaders and leading organizations in the community. We report on selected survey variables in the relationships section below.

Analysis

We thematically coded responses from each focus group into shared themes (see Appendix A for a list of themes and definitions); that is, we identified themes that individual comments fit into (e.g., writing and persuasion both fit into “communication skills”). We calculated the percent of “votes” for each concept (based on the rank of a given concept in each list exercise), which enabled us to compare trends across all focus groups. In this report, we describe the variation of the themes we identified between and within groups.

We note that, especially given the diversity of the communities in question, the sample of participants in this study was not representative and we therefore cannot consider the results reported here to be representative in the strictest sense. However, we are confident that the patterns we identify are indicative of community-based leadership knowledge and practices in San José District 3 neighborhoods.
Leader Types

As an indicator of the relevant leadership roles in their communities, participants were asked to indicate and rank the types of leaders that were most important to effective community leadership. The following graphs depict six categories of leader types identified by focus group participants: educators, planners, motivators, authoritative, bridgers, and specialists (see Appendix A for definitions). Participants then ranked categories of leader types based on their perceived importance and strength in their respective communities.

Established Leaders

Bridgers were ranked as both the most important and the strongest of all leader types. Educators and authoritative leaders were the least important and the weakest. Generally, strength and importance for each leader type were ranked equally among established leaders.

- Established leaders did not mention any leader types that corresponded to the specialist category.

Emerging Leaders

Compared to established leaders, there was less consensus about the strength and importance of leader types among emerging leaders.

- Bridgers and planners ranked as both the weakest and least important of leader types.
- Authoritative leaders were ranked the strongest and third most important, nearly equally important as motivators.
Community Members
This cohort perceived higher strength than importance in authoritative leadership. Both motivators and bridgers ranked as most important and strongest, and both were slightly higher in importance than strength.

- Educators were ranked weakest and the second least important.
- Planners were not mentioned at all by community members.

Patterns across Cohorts
- Both emerging and established leaders ranked each category evenly in terms of importance and strength (with the exception of educator and authoritative in the emerging group).
- Established leaders and community members ranked bridgers as both very important and strong; however, the emerging leaders ranked this leader type as one of their lowest in both strength and importance.
- Motivators were ranked very important and strong by emerging leaders and community members, but comparatively somewhat lower by the established leader group.
Leader Attributes

We often look to particular personal attributes an individual may possess that contribute to their leadership effectiveness. In order to better understand how individual attributes play a role in the leadership of San José District 3 communities, our team asked participants to identify attributes of effective community leaders. Respondents identified eleven categories of leader attributes: patient, accommodating, charismatic, motivating, responsible, adaptable, knowledgeable, accountable, supportive, communication, and innovative (see Appendix A for definitions).

Established Leaders

The established leader cohort ranked patient, accommodating, charismatic, and motivating as the most important attributes for community leaders. This cohort did not identify attributes that correspond with adaptable or innovative attributes. Most attributes were ranked very closely for importance and strength, with a few notable exceptions:

- Charismatic attributes ranked appreciably higher in strength than importance
- Motivating attributes ranked almost five times greater in importance than strength
- Knowledgeable, accountable, and supportive attributes ranked the lowest in importance

Emerging Leaders

Emerging leaders ranked accommodating, motivating, responsible, and accountable as most important. Most attributes are ranked very closely for importance and strength, with a few exceptions:

- Patient and innovative are ranked lowest in importance and patient has a strength rank notably higher than its importance
Community members ranked charismatic and motivating attributes as highest in importance. Most attributes ranked very closely for importance and strength.

- Adaptable attributes ranked notably higher in strength than importance
- Accommodating, supportive, and communication ranked lowest in importance

Patterns across Cohorts

- Motivation was the most important attribute across all cohorts.
- Established and emerging leaders agreed that accommodating attributes are important for a leader to possess.
- Established leaders and community members ranked charismatic attributes highly for importance and strength.
- All cohorts ranked supportive, communication, and innovative leader attributes low in importance and strength.
- Established leaders ranked patient attributes strongly in importance, while emerging leaders and community members ranked this attribute as low in importance.
Leader Skills

When discussing the skills most important to community leadership, respondents indicated eight distinct domains of skills: communication, planning, collaboration, problem solving, motivation, technical, knowledge, and mediation (see Appendix A for definitions).

Established Leaders

Established leaders ranked communication, planning, collaboration, and motivation as the most important skills for a community leader. Communication, collaboration, and problem solving skills ranked highest.

- Problem solving, mediation, technical skills, and knowledge skills were ranked least important
- Most skills ranked very closely in importance and strength, indicating that established leaders believe their needs are being met in each area

Emerging Leaders

Emerging leaders ranked the planning skills highest in importance and strength by far. Most skills ranked roughly equally in importance and strength or show greater strength than importance, except planning and mediation.

- Skills with greatest room for improvement are communication, planning, and mediation
- Collaboration, problem solving, and technical skills ranked as least important
- Technical skills ranked notably higher in strength than its importance
Community Members

Community members ranked many skills as important, with communication, planning, problem solving, motivation and knowledge skills ranking highest.

- The skills with the most room for improvement are collaboration and knowledge
- Mediation and technical skills ranked least in importance
- Most skills ranked closely for both importance and strength, which indicates that community members generally believe their needs are being met in these leadership skills

Patterns across Cohorts

- Overall, cohorts felt that the important leadership skills for their community are well-represented by their leadership.
- Skill importance differed by each cohort. Established and emerging leaders disagreed about the importance of particular skills, with established leaders rating communication and motivation as highly important, while emerging leaders stressed knowledge and mediation skills.
- Planning was considered generally important to all cohorts, with leaders indicating the greatest room for improvement in that area, while community members saw it as sufficient
- Motivation was considered important to all three cohorts, with all agreeing that there was some room for improvement in this area
- Technical skills are considered to be of little importance to all cohorts, and emerging leaders felt that those skills are very well represented already
- Established leaders and community members agreed about the importance of communication and collaboration
- Emerging leaders and community members agreed about the importance of knowledge skills, and agreed that there was some room for improvement in this area
**Leader Resources**

Focus group participants were asked to indicate resources that a person may need to be an effective community leader and then to rank these resources in order of importance and then their strength in their respective communities. These rankings were then organized into six overarching categories: social capital, finance/accessibility, knowledge, spatiotemporal, institutional, and technological (see Appendix A for definitions).

**Established Leaders**

Established leaders ranked social capital and institutional resources as both most important and the areas in which they were strongest. In general, this pattern is repeated for established leaders across all categories. Social capital was noted as an especially critical resource. One participant stated, “everybody cooperates, everybody helps out.”

- Each resource category is ranked roughly equal in importance and strength
- Social capital and institutional resources ranked highest
- Technological resources ranked lowest
- Finances/accessibility were less important and ranked low in strength

![Established Leader Resources](chart1.png)

**Emerging Leaders**

Emerging leaders ranked knowledge as both the more important resource as well as the resource in which they are strongest. Emerging leaders, like established leaders, paralleled their ranking of importance and strength. However, emerging leaders and established leaders differed in how they ranked resources.

- Institutional resources ranked less important than others
- Social capital was both important and strong
- Knowledge ranked as the most important resource and the perceived strength of knowledge ranked even higher than importance

![Emerging Leader Resources](chart2.png)
Community Members
In general, community members followed the pattern of the previous two groups of equating importance and strength. However, community members deviated from this pattern slightly in the rankings of their top two resources: social capital and institutional resources.

- Social capital and institutional resources ranked as almost equal in strength
- Spatiotemporal resources ranked as both least important and weakest
- Knowledge ranked as a fairly unimportant and weak resource

Patterns across Cohorts
- All groups listed social capital high in importance and strength, indicating that relationships and networking were more useful for leaders attempting to address needs in these communities than any other resource.
- All groups ranked technological resources as less important than other categories. Yet many mentioned various technologies (digital platforms, Google, translator software, phones, etc.) when discussing leadership activities, indicating that certain technologies had become implicit resources for leaders.
- All three graphs exhibit a clear pattern between importance and strength, indicating that leaders and community members either perceive themselves as sufficiently prepared in the most important resources or else have room for improvement in assessing these factors.
This section reports on the types of relationships important to leaders. In the first section on social capital, we learn about the organizations in which study participants were members. Following that, we see what organizations were featured when respondents are asked to nominate people in their communities whom they would turn to for organizing a critical mass, bridging to outside groups and organizations, and inspiring a collective vision. Following this, we look at the types of relationships study respondents thought were most important for them to be effective leaders. Overall, these questions give us a pretty good indication of the types of relationships—with individuals and organizations—that are most important to different groups in the San José District 3 communities.
Social Capital

As an indicator of social capital, which can refer to resources accessible through ties to organizations, respondents were asked to list all of the organizations or groups in which they were currently members. This information can tell us both about organizations and individual leaders; that is, we can conclude that the importance of a given organization for community leadership is indicated by how frequently it is named, while we can also conclude that the number of organizational memberships a person has can be an indicator of their level of social resources. In this analysis, we look at the type of organization, rather than specific organizations.

Overall, community members (n=15) named a total of 27 organizational memberships, while emerging leaders (n=13) named 39, and established leaders (n=15) named 51. This pattern is roughly consistent with our expectations that more experienced leaders will have more organizational memberships. Here we explore patterns in the types of organizations respondents in which participants were members or participants.

Patterns across Cohorts

- CommUniverCity, education, environmental, food, leadership, neighborhood association, and youth service were represented by all cohorts
- Neighborhood association was the strongest category across cohorts (26 respondents)
- Emerging leaders claimed more ties to business, disaster preparedness, neighborhood associations, and transportation groups than all others.
- Established leaders had more ties to cultural, social justice, urban development, youth service organizations, but these were all by very small numbers.
- Community members exhibited the most ties to CommUniverCity, education, and public safety organizations.
Ties to Organizers

As an indicator of respondents’ ties to individuals with community organizing capacities, respondents were asked to list the names and/or titles of up to three people and their associated organization/group (if applicable) they felt would be the best person to organize a critical mass of community residents for an important issue. By looking at the types of organizations nominees were affiliated with, we can see which are perceived as central to community organizing in District 3. This could assist community efforts to support organizations central to organizing and/or develop capacities of organizations that are not particularly central in this domain.

We received a total of 16 nominations from community members (n=15), 13 from emerging leaders (n=13), and 29 from established leaders (n=15). Again, this is consistent with expectations that established leaders would generally exhibit more organizing capacities in their social networks. It is interesting, however, that community members named slightly more ties than emerging leaders.

Patterns across Cohorts

- Education, municipal government, and unaffiliated community residents were represented in all cohorts
- CommUniverCity is the only category with only one connection (with established leaders). CommUniverCity and Neighborhood Watch are only represented by one person in each cohort where they appear.
  - It is possible that CommUniverCity is underrepresented because most participants felt that their ties to the organization were implicit.
- Neighborhood Associations were the strongest category overall, but emerging leaders did not list anyone in this category.
Bridgers

Bridging actors connect disconnected actors and groups in a given network. Bridging processes fundamentally entail working across boundaries—specialization, organizational, sectoral, racial, ethnic, class, and often geographic. Information sharing is associated with increased learning capacity in partnerships and cooperation can be more effective if there are ties that span multiple boundaries of geography, expertise, and ideology. Actors who serve as bridges in networks have proven critical in facilitating the flow of information and influence and have access to more diverse resources beyond their organization, group, or jurisdiction than do other members of the network. In order to learn more about the bridging resources of participants in this study, we asked them to list the names and/or titles of up to three people and their associated organization/group (if applicable) that they felt would be the best person to secure support for an important issue from outside organizations or agencies. By looking at the types of organizations nominees were affiliated with, we can see types of organizations are perceived as central to community bridging in District 3. This could assist community efforts to support organizations central to community bridging and/or develop capacities of organizations that are not particularly central in this domain.

We received 9 nominations from community members (n=15), 13 from emerging leaders (n=13), and 24 from established leaders (n=15), again conforming to standard expectations that leaders would be more connected and established leaders more connected than emerging leaders.

Patterns across Cohorts

- The category represented by all cohorts is the municipal government (13 respondents), which indicates that this organization is central to connecting otherwise disconnected stakeholders in District 3.
- The category only represented by one cohort is food (Olinder Food Program).
- Neighborhood associations was the second strongest category but was not represented by community members.
Visionary leaders are those who often serve as thought leaders in groups, communities, and organizations. To learn more about ties to such leaders, respondents were asked to list the names and/or titles of up to three people and their associated organization/group (if applicable) that they felt would be the best person to inspire collective vision about organizing for important local issues in their community. By looking at the types of organizations nominees were affiliated with, we can see types of organizations are perceived as central to visionary leadership in District 3. This could assist community efforts to support organizations central to visionary leadership and/or develop capacities of organizations that are not particularly central in this domain.

We received a total of 11 nominations from community members (n=15), 8 from emerging leaders (n=13), and 21 from established leaders (n=15). Again, this is consistent with expectations that established leaders would generally exhibit more ties to visionary leaders in their social networks. It is interesting, however, that, as with ties to organizers, community members named slightly more ties than emerging leaders.

Patterns across Cohorts

- The categories represented by all cohorts were CommUniverCity, education, and community resident.
- The categories only represented by one cohort were environmental and neighborhood associations.
- Education, religious, social justice, and transportation were only represented by one person in each cohort where they appear.
- The strongest categories overall were CommUniverCity and community resident (7 respondents each).
In examining the trends across all analyses of leader ties to organizations in this study, a number of patterns stick out as particularly noteworthy:

- Neighborhood associations appear more important to established leaders than other groups.

- Organization types appearing in nominations for all leader type nominations—community organizing, bridging, and visionary leadership—are CommUniverCity, education, food, municipal government, community residents, and neighborhood associations.

- There are more categories in the visionary leadership graph than any other graph. This category has the most unique responses, such as environmental, religious, social justice, etc.

- In every graph, food is only represented by established leaders and community members, but not emerging leaders. This could point to an important gap in a resource that could be a major organizing draw; that is, bake it and they will come!

- Transportation is represented in bridgers and visionaries, but not organizers.

- Established Leaders nominate the broadest range of categories. Between the three leader type nominations, the only category that they do not appear in is food among bridgers.

- It should be noted that the number of nominations for organizers (58) is appreciably higher than bridgers (46) and visionaries (40). This might be due to the respondents spending more time on the first question, and less time on the subsequent questions.
Relationships Important to Leaders

In our focus groups, we asked participants what kinds of relationships were most important to be an effective leader. There were some distinct and interesting patterns that emerged in the variation in types of relationships with people and organizations across the three cohorts of emerging leaders, established leaders, and community members. The complete tables of the relationships reported by cohort can be found in the codebook addendum to this report. Here we report the most salient trends in the types of relationships that emerged in our analyses.

**Important Relationships with People**

- By and large, emerging leaders appeared to be more focused on personal relationships—support from partners, family, friends—than others. This was true even in professional and political ties (colleagues and ethnic leaders).
- Established leaders and community members focused on political and professional connections.
- In this, there are perhaps opportunities to facilitate: (a) more personal support networks around leaders, as both established and emerging leaders explained the risks of burnout; (b) increased contacts between emerging leaders and professional and political contacts in San Jose.

**Important Relationships with Organizations**

- Interestingly, in comparison with established leaders and community residents, emerging leaders did not mention many ties to organizations. Most of their relationships fell into personal ties above.
- Emerging leaders principally focused on private business organizations, while established leaders and community members emphasized nonprofits and government organizations.
- Here, too, there are opportunities to close gaps in both directions. We might look to facilitate more ties between emerging leaders and the public and nonprofit sectors, but we should consider looking to this group for novel ideas for working with the private sector.

**Complex Relationships**

- “Complex” relationships refer more to sectors and issue areas than particular types of individuals and organizations.
- Between all three cohorts, there is a balance of emphasis on media and the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Importantly, community members were interested in working with schools and universities.
Part III
Community Issues

In order to better understand some of the primary community needs of the communities in District 3 and to see the extent to which leadership abilities, resources and priorities aligned with these needs, we asked focus group participants to list the types of issues that were priorities in their communities. We grouped responses to this question into twelve domains of community issues: enforcement, safety, environment, housing, jobs/employment, infrastructure, crime, services/accessibility, blight, health/wellness, education, and bridging/empowerment.

Established Leaders

The established leader cohort ranked service/accessibility highest in strength and importance, followed by blight and environment. Most domains ranked closely in importance and strength with a few exceptions:

- The environment, infrastructure, service/accessibility, blight and health/wellness domains ranked slightly higher in strength than importance
- Importance ranked slightly higher than strength in the housing and jobs/employment domains
- Enforcement ranked the lowest in importance and, along with jobs/employment, ranked the lowest in strength

Emerging Leaders

The emerging leader cohort ranked bridging/empowerment the highest in both importance and strength, followed by safety, health/wellness and service/accessibility. Most domains ranked closely in strength and importance with a few notable differences:

- Housing and infrastructure ranked high in importance and low in strength
- Education ranked lower in strength and higher in importance
- Enforcement and jobs/employment ranked lowest in terms of both strength and importance
Community Members

The community member cohort ranked the bridging/empowerment domain the highest in strength, followed closely by service/accessibility and infrastructure. They ranked the service/accessibility domain as highest in importance, followed by housing. The lowest ranking domains in both importance and significance are enforcement and crime. Education ranks also ranks low but mostly in strength. Enforcement ranks the lowest in strength.

The ranking in the community member cohort are the most varied between the groups, where five domains (safety, environment, crime, service/accessibility, and health/wellness) were ranked equally in strength and importance while the other seven domains varied greatly between strength and importance. Unlike the other two graphs, where importance tended to rank slightly higher than strength, in the community member issues graph, more than half of the domains—including jobs/employment, infrastructure, blight, and bridging/empowerment—ranked higher in strength, while enforcement, housing, and education ranked higher in importance.

There is an appreciable degree in difference between importance and strength for:

- Housing ranks very high in importance but relatively low in strength
- Bridging/empowerment ranks high in strength, but noticeably lower in importance

Patterns across Cohorts

- Established leaders and community member cohorts agreed that blight was high in importance and felt they were strong at dealing with it.
- All cohorts considered enforcement and crime to be of little importance
- Emerging leaders and community members felt they were strong in bridging/empowerment.
- All cohorts considered housing moderately important but found it hard to deal with, with the greatest importance expressed by community members.
- Of all the cohorts, community members were the most confident that their communities were strong at dealing with infrastructure.
- All cohorts, but particularly the established leaders, generally agreed that service/accessibility was decidedly important and felt they were strong at dealing with it.
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