

**Unincorporated Communities in the San Joaquin Valley:
New Responses to Poverty, Inequity, and a
System of Unresponsive Governance**

**Framing paper for the first convening hosted by
California Rural Legal Assistance and PolicyLink**

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I. Summary

The low-income unincorporated communities of the San Joaquin Valley face uphill struggles to attain basic features of a safe and healthy environment that residents of most other places have long taken for granted. These communities range from remote settlements in farm country to neighborhoods that have been surrounded by, but are not part of, the San Joaquin Valley's fast-growing cities. There are at least 220 such low-income unincorporated communities in the eight county region. Whether it is a lack of storm drains, streetlights, and sidewalks or an inadequate residential water supply, these communities outside of the San Joaquin Valley's cities are often systematically underserved if not neglected in the overall allocation of public resources. This neglect prevents these places from realizing their potential as livable neighborhoods and threatens the health and security of their residents. These disparities can be dangerous, such as the illnesses caused from unsafe drinking water, the heightened likelihood of mosquitoes carrying West Nile virus as a result of standing water arising from inadequate storm drains, and the higher rates of traffic accidents on poorly maintained roads. Or, they can chip away more slowly at the prospects for building a strong community, when there is illegal dumping, poor sanitation service, few or no recreation facilities for youth, and dilapidated schools. When the official lack of attention and resources becomes standard practice, it can create an overall discouraging cycle of decline that is hard to break. The fact that governance structures are not organized to ensure meaningful political representation for residents in decision-making only adds to the challenge.

This may be a grim picture, but it has never been taken as inevitable by residents of these communities and their allies. Instead, there has been a continual ferment for change in the unincorporated communities and an array of grass-roots organizing campaigns, lawsuits and efforts to promote legislation. These efforts have brought some tangible improvements, and they have run up against some barriers. Notwithstanding some important individual victories, the broad patterns of inequity have not yet been shifted, and the San Joaquin Valley's *colonias*, as they are sometimes called, are still getting a bad deal.

This paper is a step in a year-long effort to think through new strategies for addressing the inequities faced by the unincorporated communities. It has been written at the mid-point of a project in which California Rural Legal Assistance, PolicyLink, and leaders from around the San Joaquin Valley are examining issues, assessing past efforts, setting priorities, and creating new approaches for community organizing, legislation, litigation or other methods for social and policy change. It is a modest framing paper in that it does not attempt to overwhelm the reader with copious evidence of the problems or a detailed analysis of the literature. We at PolicyLink owe a large debt to those who have labored for years on these issues in community-based practice and in research, and we base our understanding on their work. The value added by this paper will hopefully be in the framing itself: the recasting of

familiar issues and evidence in new and different ways; the tracing of a path toward a larger, more robust and integrated movement for change. But this framing will be presented not as a roadmap or strategic plan, for that would be premature, but simply as challenging questions for Valley leaders to sort through and build on, beginning with our convening in Fresno on November 27, 2007. The results of that discussion, in conjunction with the background research that has been conducted, will set the stage for the next phase of the project, to develop a coordinated action plan. More detailed information about these communities will be available at the convening on November 27th.

a. The Building Blocks of a New Frame for Understanding Unincorporated Communities

Our approach to framing the issues and opportunities for change includes four broad elements:

1. Identifying the Communities of Interest. There have been, over the years, several different ways of defining and naming the unincorporated communities. For different reasons, the definitions and names used, whether by local residents or government officials, have not always served to help further research, assessment, and planning to improve conditions in these communities. For example, all the settlements in San Joaquin Valley commonly referred to as *colonias* are unincorporated but not all unincorporated communities exhibit social and economic conditions associated with *colonias*. To account for these differences, we have chosen to refer to the subset of San Joaquin Valley unincorporated settlements that meet the criteria for inclusion in this project as “**Communities of Interest**,” (or COIs). To begin to systematically identify our Communities of Interest, we started with the 122 Census Designated Places (CDPs), the term Census 2000 used to identify unincorporated communities in the eight counties of the San Joaquin Valley. Using an index that sorted CDPs according to key economic and social indicators and their racial and ethnic composition we were able to identify 83 CDPs that fit our criteria of unincorporated settlements with multiple indicators of concentrated poverty—our Communities of Interest. We have augmented this list of 83 COIs with 134 additional settlements that have been identified by various public documents and by the advisory committee to this project. To be sure, as this project continues other unincorporated settlements will be added to the initial set of Communities of Interest we identified in this report.

The Communities of Interest we have identified to date fall into three distinct types of unincorporated settlements, based on their location in relationship to cities. There are 118 “islands,” neighborhoods that may once have been semi-rural but have now been literally surrounded by the city limits of the large and medium-sized cities of the Valley such as Modesto, Visalia, Porterville, or Fresno. Then, there are 35 of what we have labeled “fringe” communities, to indicate that they are on the outskirts of a city that is, in many cases, expanding, but whose borders have not yet

reached it. Finally, there are 66 rural settlements, labeled “hinterlands” to reinforce that they are far enough away from any cities to be viewed as independent small towns, at least for the foreseeable future. With the continued rapid sprawl of the cities in the Valley, today’s fringe can become tomorrow’s island, and today’s hinterland can become tomorrow’s fringe, so while the three types are distinct, the pattern is always evolving and even the most isolated communities are part of a larger regional system of land development and conversion. Overall, more than 400,000 people live in the lower income unincorporated settlements of the eight counties.

The term *colonias* literally means simply “settlement” but also carries a host of legal consequences and informal connotations, and its use in the context of the Central Valley is a subject of active discussion. Most, but not all, of the residents of most of the settlements are Latino, and the conditions embody the racialized nature of poverty and inequality in the country. There are unmistakable similarities to certain conditions in the border-region settlements in Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and California officially designated by the federal and state governments as *colonias*, and important lessons to learn from their experiences. One of the policy discussions will no doubt address whether there are advantages to seeking some kind of analogous government recognition for San Joaquin Valley settlements. However, there are also important differences with the border areas, as well as some reactions to negative images associated with the term.¹ We will employ it on limited occasions in this report and continue to encourage the constituencies for this project to develop a consensus regarding the strategic use of the term.

2. Documenting conditions in the communities. The unincorporated settlements have a host of conditions that present threats to health and safety, maintain economic and educational inequity, and prevent the flourishing of more complete communities. There are deficiencies of physical infrastructure, such as water systems, storm drain and sewer lines, sidewalks, roads and streetlights, and of public buildings of all kinds. These are joined by substantial deficits in resources for decent affordable housing and for adequate public human services, health care, and education. Some of these issues have been relatively well-documented, while for others, information and data is either not available or uneven. Many of the strongest efforts to improve these conditions have taken up one issue at a time, such as the need for a new water system in a particular community or group of communities, and thus some of the best data have been generated as part of those efforts. For this project so far, we have collected and summarized many reports about the San Joaquin Valley community conditions done by research and planning bodies across the state and tracking recent developments as they are reported in the news media. While this information does not represent a major breakthrough with regard to new evidence, reorganizing this information can help to frame and sharpen the issues and tell us what new kinds of data would be needed to guide and inform

future activities. There are several different aspects of services and facilities that can be documented. First, there are absolute *shortcomings and deficiencies* in the provision of infrastructure and services, as noted above, when measured against standards of basic performance. Then, there are also *disparities*, which refer the relative differences between the unincorporated areas and other parts of the region. These can be disparities of *inputs*, such as how much is being spent per capita on infrastructure and services, and disparities in *outcomes*, as measured by public health and economic statistics or other measures. The measures of public finance conditions, which we have only started, can include a wide range of information about revenue capacity, tax rates, local expenditures, shares of county budgets, and resources from state programs.

The absence of good data about conditions and about the performance of local government can itself become a potent political issue. The fragmented, under-resourced way in which unincorporated communities are governed has limited the collection of useful data about their conditions compared to those of neighborhoods in California cities. Information about conditions and resources in these communities is uneven, scattered, inconsistent, not transparent and generally insufficient for assessment and planning. Some of the public entities are so small or so rarely queried that they have not created the systems for providing data to the public that are seen in larger units of government.

3. Documenting the system of governance. Being unincorporated – not being part of a city – has a particular legal and administrative meaning in California and this has serious consequences on the ability of residents to take part in the decision-making process about how services, utilities, and infrastructure are provided, and how public funds are raised and allocated. The San Joaquin Valley unincorporated island, fringe and hinterland communities are caught up in a perplexing, complicated, fragmented, and dysfunctional array of local service providers: special districts, community service districts, joint powers authorities, and municipal advisory councils, as well as numerous county agencies. Furthermore, Local Area Formation Commissions (LAFCOs), Metropolitan Planning Organizations, and other entities overseeing the growth of cities and counties and, more generally, regional development determine the fates of many unincorporated communities. All of these bodies exist within a complex system of state government financing and regulation of taxation, land subdivision, public health, and other components of local government.

Any solution to the problems of unincorporated communities will require a high degree of knowledge about this thicket of structures, rules and interests, for it must be untangled and revised, if not rebuilt, in order to better serve low-income residents. This set of complex public entities will need to become much more responsive to residents through their direct and active involvement in decision-making. In this first phase of our research we are creating an inventory and guide to the

structure of local government operating in the *colonias*. Because the governance structure we are contending with is so decentralized and complex, we chose to start by developing a clearer picture of the situation in three counties with different patterns. It is our hope that this analysis will be useful as community leaders develop approaches for engaging local government in addressing their infrastructure needs.

4. Identifying a strategic approach for combined action, and policy targets for change in the system of governance and public finance. The various problems which residents of unincorporated communities confront are interconnected, and there can be power in building several kinds of connections and relationships. The project, through its reports and convenings, will explore five kinds of connections that should be made:

- Linking people in individual communities across the region that are experiencing similar problems.
- Linking the efforts of researchers and advocates who have specialized in a particular issue or service area, such as water, infrastructure, housing, or environmental health, so that they can see where there is a basis for common or parallel actions.
- Exploring the extent to which the experiences and policy options for the three types of *colonias* – island, fringe, and hinterland communities – overlap and can be the basis for common action.
- Examining the opportunities for coordinated action at four levels of geography and governance: the community, the county, the region and the state.
- Identifying opportunities to link the challenges in *colonias* to existing and planned community improvement efforts at the local and regional level.

If some or all of these bases for common activity are confirmed as valuable, then a wide range of collaborative strategies can be developed. The toolbox for policy change has many instruments, and it may be best not to choose the specific tool before working through the issues and strategies thoroughly. To be sure, there will be a place for several kinds of legal action, for grass-roots organizing, and for legislative advocacy. There also will be opportunities to build new alliances to generate sufficient support for certain the various strategies. Various kinds of research and forms of communications will be employed in support of each approach.

Our discussion to identify and select broad policy objectives to improve basic infrastructure and services in *colonias* will be informed by a “lay of the land” discussion about policy targets (that is, the decision-making organizations and individuals responsible for addressing the various issues), the unique challenges the policy making bodies currently face, opportunities to tie-in to related advocacy efforts

currently underway, and our capacity to undertake different organizing methods, and build new alliances. As a starting point for those discussions, this paper will present a set of questions about four key factors:

- **The Complexity of Jurisdictional Issues.** How can the fragmented, unrepresentative, often poorly functioning system be reorganized, and what are the viable initial focal points for change? How can such change bring about an increase in civic engagement as well as improvements in the delivery of services and infrastructure?
- **Challenges of Public Finance.** The needs of these communities will take substantial new investment, and it will not be sufficient to simply demand improvements without helping to identify the sources of revenue. What are the strategies for finding new public capital and operating funds for facilities and services in unincorporated communities, and how can we emphasize solutions that are more than a “zero-sum game” within local governments?
- **Opportunities to Reframe the Problem.** Complicated jurisdictional issues and public finance policy/practices present formidable challenges for small groups of community leaders and their allies to build the organizing capacity and power to hold accountable the complex array of public entities responsible for maintaining basic infrastructure. What are the prospects and possible benefits of reframing the problems faced by residents in the low-income unincorporated communities as planning and development challenges also facing their counties as a whole and the nearby cities? If they are currently seen as primarily problems affecting politically isolated, low-income Latinos, can we recast the racialized disparities in access to infrastructure for healthy community development as a barrier to a goal of broader regional prosperity and equity? For example, would emphasizing the threat posed by the high percentage of Communities of Interest residents that rely on aging and leaking septic tanks to ground water that supplies all city and county residents (and the greater costs associated with cleaning up contamination) serve as a motivation to spend city and county funds to connect Communities of Interest to the sewer system?
- **Alliance-building on Behalf of the Colonias.** Efforts to change policy, practice, and investment related to infrastructure development in the Communities of Interest are likely to take place within local and regional policy deliberations about water and other environmental concerns, economic development, transportation, health and human services, and other issues related to urban growth. Given all these dimensions to the issues, what new opportunities exist for alliance building? Or put differently, how can community leaders engage a more diverse and powerful set of constituencies to break through long standing patterns of resistance on the part of local governance structures? Most substantial changes take the combined efforts of many groups. Some coalitions or collaborative arrangements will come naturally, while others might be unexpected.

II. Identifying Our Communities of Interest

The San Joaquin Valley is the primary region for understanding the issues and challenges facing small unincorporated communities in California. It contains the largest relative concentration of number of small unincorporated communities of any region in the state.² The fourth largest region in the state, the Valley is anchored by a string of urban areas that runs along California State Highway 99 from Stockton to Bakersfield and includes the cities of Modesto, Merced, Tulare and Fresno, in eight counties (Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Tulare). Of the 3.9 million residents, more than one in four live in unincorporated areas; more than 400,000 of those residents live in unincorporated settlements with multiple indicators of concentrated poverty.

The universe of unincorporated communities is much larger than that of the *colonias* which we are interested in for this project. The San Joaquin Valley has 122 unincorporated areas (Census Designated Places) with an average population size of 3,101. Only four of these areas (Oildale, Rosamond, Lamont and Salida) have populations greater than 10,000 people. Most of the Valley's unincorporated communities are smaller and more isolated, with much smaller tax bases and more challenges in securing the resources needed for infrastructure and public services.

The eight counties in the Valley share a number of similarities that bind them together as a coherent region. Importantly, however, their unincorporated communities evince a number of differences in their size, type, and geographic distribution, as well as the governance structure in place to respond to their service and infrastructure needs.

a. The Types of Communities that Comprise Our Communities of Interest (COIs)

There are three distinct types of unincorporated communities in the San Joaquin Valley that present distinct issues and circumstances and require investigation in their own right:

1. **Islands** are unincorporated county areas that are fully or partially enclosed within the boundaries of a city. For the purposes of this report, an island is defined as an unincorporated geographic area that is surrounded by a city's geographical boundaries on at least seventy-five percent of its sides.³ Since islands are not Census Designated Places, we do not have the same demographic and housing data on islands that we do for most other unincorporated communities that are CDPs.

Table 1. Islands by County

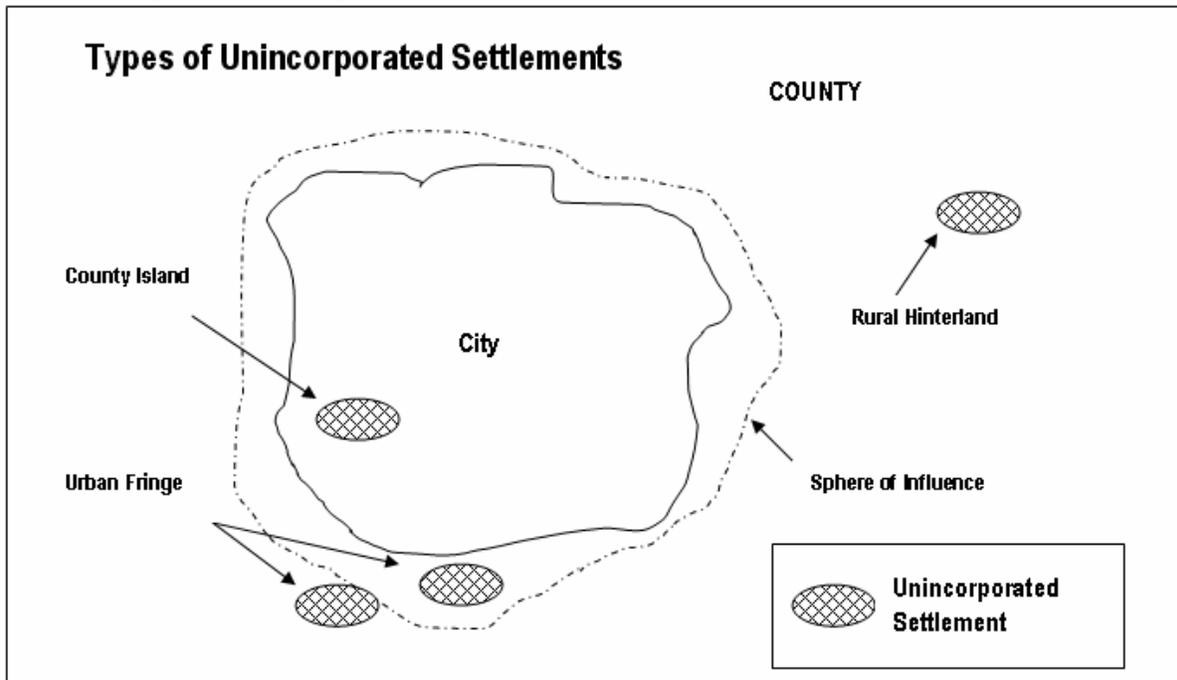
County	Islands
Tulare	28
Stanislaus	23
Fresno	24
San Joaquin	20
Kern	9
Kings	7
Merced	6
Madera	1
Total	118

2. **Fringes** are unincorporated county areas that are located adjacent to or within 1.5 miles of a city’s geographical boundaries. Some fringes may be located within an adjacent city’s “sphere of influence” which allows that city to exercise influence over how that unincorporated area develops.⁴ Fringes that are outside the sphere of influence of a city may lie within the potential growth footprint of that city within the next few years.

3. **Hinterlands** are unincorporated county areas that are located more than 1.5 miles beyond any city’s geographical boundaries.

Each of these types of communities needs to be mapped, documented and understood in order to grasp the nuanced policy circumstances of unincorporated communities in the Valley. Some circumstances and strategies may be relevant to all, while others will be specific to one type.

Figure 1. Types of Unincorporated Communities



A combination of publicly available data sources, local government documents, online GIS databases, and interviews with key informants was used to identify each of these types of communities for all the eight counties in the San Joaquin Valley. Together, all of the communities identified constitute our “**Communities of Interest**” and are what make up the total counts of unincorporated communities for each county and the Valley as whole that we have identified to date in **Table 2.** below.

b. Identifying Fringe and Hinterland Communities Using Census Data

Data from the 2000 Census offered the primary means for identifying most of the fringe and hinterland unincorporated communities analyzed in this report. As part of the 2000 Census, the U.S. Census Bureau collected data on unincorporated communities that it identified in partnership with local county governments. Known as **Census Designated Places**, or **CDPs**, these communities can range widely in population size. Although 2000 Census data is now more than eight years old, it is the only publicly-available data source with demographic and housing information specific to these communities.

c. Filtering Census-Designated Places to Identify Colonias

Some unincorporated communities have residents with high incomes and expensive homes. To focus our research on communities that are most likely to face the infrastructure and service deficits of interest in this report, it was necessary to filter the complete list of 122 Census Designated Places in the San Joaquin Valley based upon a number of key characteristics.

In order to filter out more affluent CDPs from those that are less affluent, a simple index using five indicators developed from 2000 Census data was used. On each indicator, all CDPs were compared to their counties using the following questions:

1. **Poverty**: Is the CDP poverty level higher than the county?
2. **Median Income**: Is the CDP median household income lower than the county?
3. **Home Value**: Is the CDP median home value lower than the county?
4. **Age of Housing Stock**: Is the median year that CDP housing was built earlier than the median for the county?
5. **Proportion of Mobile Homes**: Is the percentage of CDP housing that is mobile homes higher than the percentage for the county?

Each CDP was assigned a score based upon how many answers to these questions were “yes” versus “no”. Only those CDPs with three or more “yes” responses are included in our Communities of Interest (COIs) and analyzed in this report. After applying these criteria, we were left with 83 CDPs that

qualified as our Communities of Interest, with an average population of 3,323. (See **Table 2.** below for a count of these communities by county).

- At least 50 percent or more of all CDPs in each of our eight San Joaquin Valley counties met the criteria to be included in our Communities of Interest as did nearly 7 in 10 CDPs in the Valley as a whole.
- Kern and Tulare counties have the highest number of CDPs in the Valley and contribute over 50 percent of the total Communities of Interest for the entire region.
- Twenty out of 21 CDPs in Tulare County met the criteria to be included in our Communities of Interest, while 63 percent of Kern County’s CDPs were similarly qualified.
- Madera, San Joaquin and Stanislaus had the lowest proportion of their total CDPs that met our filter criteria.

Table 2. Total Census Designated Places that are our Communities of Interest, by County

County	Total CDPs (2000)	Total CDPs that are COIs (2000)	% of all County CDPs
Kern	41	26	63%
Tulare	21	20	95%
Stanislaus	14	10	71%
Fresno	16	9	56%
San Joaquin	13	7	54%
Merced	6	4	67%
Kings	5	4	80%
Madera	6	3	50%
Total (San Joaquin Valley)	122	83	68%

The share of each county’s total population living in CDPs that met our criteria to be included in our Communities of Interest varies significantly by county. More than 1 in 7 residents in Tulare County live in our Communities of Interest as do more than 1 in 10 in Kern County. The total population in the 83 Communities of Interest is roughly 237,000. (If the 134 other Communities of Interest, mostly smaller islands, had an average population of half that of the CDPs, they would be home to another 220,000 residents.⁵)

Table 3. Share of County Populations Included in our Communities of Interest

County	County Population (2000)	% in CDPs that are COIs (2000)
Tulare	369,727	15%
Kern	665,376	11%
Stanislaus	450,982	8%
Merced	211,231	8%
San Joaquin	568,932	6%
Kings	130,090	6%
Madera	124,544	4%

County	County Population (2000)	% in CDPs that are COIs (2000)
Fresno	804,342	1%

d. Identifying Additional Unincorporated Communities with Public Documents and Key Informant Interviews

For a number of reasons, the U.S. Census may fail to identify all unincorporated communities that are known to exist. Therefore, we utilized public documents from local government agencies as well as interviews with key informants who live or work in three of these counties.⁶ Utilizing all the research methods described above for three of the counties, we have identified a total of 219 Communities of Interest for the San Joaquin Valley, and a number of additional ones will likely be added once the public documents and advisors in the five other counties have been utilized.

III. Spatial, Demographic & Housing Characteristics of Communities of Interest

The eight counties that make up the San Joaquin Valley show significant variation in the number of their residents that live in unincorporated areas, the spatial distribution of those areas within the counties themselves, and their demographic and housing characteristics. Because the Census Bureau does not collect data on unincorporated areas other than officially recognized Census Designated Places (CDPs), the demographic and housing data reported in this section only refers to the 83 CDPs identified in the 2000 Census. There is no publicly available data on islands or unincorporated fringe and hinterland areas that were not recognized by the U.S. Census Bureau as of April 1999.

a. The Spatial Distribution of Unincorporated Communities within Counties

The number of Communities of Interest identified for each county in the Valley varied considerably, from a high of 64 in Tulare to a low of 4 in Madera. Fresno, Kern, San Joaquin and Stanislaus (the four most populous counties in the region) had the next highest number of Communities of Interest, ranging from 27 to 35. (See **Table 4.** below).

Table 4. Total Communities of Interest by Spatial Geography: Island, Fringe and Hinterland

County	Islands	Fringe COIs (within an SOI)	Fringe COIs (outside an SOI)	Hinterland COIs	Total COIs
Fresno	24	*	4	7	35
Kern	9	2	5	19	35
Kings	7	N/A	2	2	11
Madera	1	N/A	2	1	4
Merced	6	*	*	4	10
San Joaquin	20	6	*	1	27
Stanislaus	23	4	3	3	33
Tulare	28	*	7	29	64
Total (San Joaquin Valley)	116	12	23	66	219

A more detailed county-by-county analysis will be available soon, but a few facts illustrate the considerable variation:

- Tulare (29) had the highest number of Communities of Interest located in areas distant from cities (hinterlands), followed by Kern (19) and Fresno (7).
- Tulare had the highest number of Communities of Interest (28) circumscribed within the boundaries of cities (islands) followed by Fresno (24), Stanislaus (23) and San Joaquin (20).
- Given its total population size, Kern County has relatively few islands in its cities. Bakersfield contains 6 of the county’s 9 total islands.
- Fresno’s unincorporated communities tend to be smaller on average than the communities in other counties.
- The unincorporated communities are highly Latino, White or a mix of both. Although currently African-American and Asian populations are relatively smaller percentages of these communities, historically both groups have faced similar challenges in the San Joaquin Valley. For example, in the early in the 20th Century Allensworth, a predominantly African-American town faced significant discrimination in efforts to secure water. The unincorporated settlements of Allensworth (Tulare)⁷, Home Garden (Kings)⁸, Fairmead (Madera), Easton (Fresno), all have significant number of African American residents.

A summary of racial composition, income, housing and other demographic characteristics of the *colonias* will be provided at the November 27th convening. A few more basic facts are outlined in the following charts.

Table 5. Racial and Ethnic Composition

County	CDPs that are COIs	Greater than 65% Latino	Greater than 65% White	Latino-White (neither group over 65%)
Kern	26	4	19	2
Kings	4	2	0	2
Madera	3	2	1	0
Fresno	9	5	1	3
Merced	4	3	0	1
San Joaquin	7	1	0	4
Stanislaus	10	3	2	5
Tulare	20	15	2	3
Total (San Joaquin Valley)	83	35	25	20

Table 6. CDP Poverty Rates, 2000

County	CDPs that are COIs	# CDPs with Poverty Rates > County	CDPs with Poverty Rates 150% County Rate	CDPs with Poverty Rates 200% County Rate
Kern	26	9	5	1
Kings	4	4	2	2
Madera	3	2	1	1
Fresno	9	7	1	0
Merced	4	4	2	0
San Joaquin	7	5	4	2
Stanislaus	10	9	5	3
Tulare	20	19	10	1
Total (San Joaquin Valley)	83	59	30	10

IV. Documenting Conditions in the Communities

It is easy to define the Communities of Interest as low-income, but more difficult to systematically document the local conditions in which residents live. The responsibility for providing basic infrastructure to these communities is divided among a great number of providers who have little incentive to document the shortcomings of their services, or to contribute any data to a more comprehensive assessment. Most reports commissioned to document the challenges faced and responses to the variety of ills (e.g., high levels of poverty, poorer health, environmental problems, etc.) facing the San Joaquin Valley do not include a specific focus on conditions in unincorporated communities, especially our Communities of Interest. Though the broad social and economic disparities that our Communities of Interest contend with, as well as the gaps in infrastructure provided to these communities, are common knowledge among residents and public officials, the lack of comprehensive data systematically documenting the state of Communities of Interest in the San Joaquin Valley, means that from a policy standpoint the urgent needs of Communities of Interest are virtually invisible.

One exception to the dearth of systematic documentation of infrastructure deficits was the evidence presented in the lawsuit CRLA and the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights brought against the City of Modesto, Stanislaus County, and the Stanislaus County Sherriff. Working with organized resident leaders in unincorporated *islands*, the lawyers documented serious infrastructure deficits, including: the lack of sidewalks and street lights, inadequate sewage disposal and storm drainage, lack of curbs and gutters, poorly kept roads and inadequate traffic control mechanisms that have lead to increases in incidents of pedestrian harm; and evidence of lower levels of municipal services including solid waste and bulky garbage pick-up and spotty emergency service response. Another significant area of systemic documentation and advocacy has been in the area of water in Tulare County – as sited in Section 4 below, on Water.

Almost all research on our Communities of Interest cites infrastructure and service deficits as consistent challenges for *colonias* or unincorporated communities. [As Mukhija and Monkkonen wrote about the border *colonias*, “another key, and easily apparent, deficiency in almost all the colonias is the lack of or shortage of paved roads, sidewalks, gutters, storm drains, and streetlights.”⁹] Anecdotally, one can find articles about specific roads, “blighted” neighborhoods, sewage overflows, garbage collection, etc., but systematically, no data is available. We can infer trends from anecdotes, but real work needs to be done to methodically collect and synthesize conditions information.

In the absence of a lot of place-specific government data or independent research that pertained to all kinds of Communities of Interest, we began with a search of the press and other public sources of news and information. A preliminary literature review of local news papers and research focused on key social and economic challenges for the San Joaquin Valley has led to a sizeable collection of *anecdotal evidence that the Communities of Interest suffer major gaps in basic infrastructure supports* (e.g., water, sewage, solid waste disposal, housing, roads, and emergency response services, etc.). These are summarized in the sections that follow, beginning with a few extended quotations about three places.

In Tulare:

“As the sun rose over the majestic Sierra Nevada mountain range, the radiant light illuminated a long forgotten subdivision in southeast Porterville surrounded by decaying buildings, rotting infrastructure, and a deep-seated poverty. The subdivision, located within the Porterville Redevelopment Project Area is at the physical core and economic fringe of the city, which had become a place known for drugs, crime, and vagrants. Property values continued to plummet as the area surrounding the subdivision, which is bounded on the south by the Tule River, had become a dumping ground for refuse, drug paraphernalia, and a habitat for the homeless.”¹⁰

In Fresno:

“Today, halfway between Hollywood and the Golden Gate Bridge, in the shadow of America's richest farms, their tarpaper shacks rise out of fields of salt and tumbleweed. The old migrants and their children, a lost tribe of Black Okies, pass their last days in some of the worst poverty in the nation. Their broken piece of the promised land sits in exile from the rest of the state, a scattering of country churches and crooked huts that seem lifted straight out of the plantation South.”¹¹

In Stanislaus:

“The gangs and the garbage heaped in yards persist, despite a decade-long campaign by Martinez (resident) to better the neighborhood. The troublemakers are still around, as are vicious-looking dogs.”¹²

“The tiny, run-down downtown Salida house Carla Morgan inherited from her mother put a roof over her head, but not much more. “We haven't had any heat for three years”... “We turn on burners on top of the stove to heat up the house.” The 1945-vintage two-bedroom, one-bath home is too dilapidated to repair, and it's considered a fire hazard.

Electrical wiring in the 800-square-foot house is antiquated. Cabinets are coming off the walls, and the garage burned down a few years ago.¹³

“They come to school with very poor shoes – hand-me-downs that are a size too small or two sizes too big,” (Principal) Dittman said of the 500 students in his school. “Whatever is handy.¹⁴”

a. Economic Status

Poverty in the San Joaquin Valley can be so extreme that it is often compared to that in the Appalachian region.¹⁵ Although the media coverage/research of conditions in the San Joaquin Valley is far less extensive than that in Appalachia, the poverty is greater; a Congressional Research Service Report in 2005 found that per capita income in San Joaquin Valley was lower than in the 68-county Central Appalachia region.¹⁶ The root of this kind of poverty in the Valley is said to be “high unemployment, low wages and an undereducated work force.”¹⁷ Statistics on unemployment in parts of the Valley are staggering; the juxtaposition of incorporated to unincorporated communities shows an unmistakable disparity to which only numbers do justice. While the unemployment rates for Tulare County’s three largest cities in June 2007 remained between 5.2 percent and 7.8 percent, in remote or unincorporated parts of the county, in Alpaugh, Cutler, Earlimart and Strathmore, unemployment averaged between 22 to 25 percent.¹⁸

Youth in the San Joaquin Valley fair no better, as the Valley sends “far more of their juvenile delinquents per capita to the California Youth Authority than other California counties,” due to counties’ lack of financial ability and capacity to create effective juvenile justice systems.¹⁹ Twelve percent of youth age 16-19 the San Joaquin Valley are unemployed and not in school, compared to 10% statewide.²⁰ Children in the San Joaquin Valley are least likely in the Central Valley to attend preschool and have the largest average class sizes.²¹ According to a 1999 Fresno County study on child-care needs:

“The unincorporated community of Biola looks like a model for much of rural Fresno County when it comes to child care: The demand is high. The supply is limited. “We have so many parents that work in the fields, so many that need day care.” The problem is pervasive, according to a 1999 Fresno County study on child-care needs: “Lack of facilities and providers as well as lack of transportation contribute to the limited accessibility to child care in rural and unincorporated areas.”²²

b. Infrastructure Deficits and Service Disparities

1. Gutters, Drainage, Sidewalks, Curbs

In 2005, the *Fresno Bee* documented that certain streets in Calwa (fringe), in Fresno County flooded 6-8 inches when it rained, due to lack of sidewalks, curbs and gutters. Although residents were able to fundraise and receive grants for some sidewalks, they are anomalies in this unincorporated area.

“Vanessa Cortez, 11, said she is excited that Kaviland Street is finally going to have sidewalks and

curbs. She said she doesn't like walking to school on rainy days because ... the street has a lot of puddles and they're really big," said Vanessa, a sixth-grader at Calwa Elementary School."²³

Standing Pools of Water

Stagnant pools of water caused by the absence of gutters and curbs, or because generally vacant property has gone wild, are all too common in Porterville, Tulare County. (The example comes from an island only recently annexed into the city.) The fear of contracting West Nile virus – generally contracted through mosquito bites – is heightened because mosquitoes are attracted to the pools of stagnant water and there is little mosquito abatement in Porterville.²⁴

2. Street Lighting

In many unincorporated communities, adding street lighting is viewed as a way to reduce residents' fear of crime in their neighborhoods. In southwest Modesto's Paradise South (island or fringe), an area of higher crime, residents believe that if streetlights were installed it would prevent criminals from "lurking," aid traffic safety and increase pedestrian traffic.²⁵ The lack of street lighting has been identified as a built environment barrier to health, as it decreases the likelihood that residents will be able to walk and engage in other forms of exercise in the evening after work. .

Residents can sometimes opt to pay for street lights on their streets, when feasible, but still do not always receive adequate maintenance services. Residents have paid taxes to install and maintain streetlights in the high-crime Franklin-Beachwood area (unsure of location, but a CDP) of Merced County, but one resident claims that the county has failed to regularly change light bulbs (less than once per year) and he "feels like the county has forgotten about his neighborhood" through its negligence.²⁶

3. Roads

Unsafe, smaller roads and inadequate traffic enforcement for both speeding and driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs plague rural roads in unincorporated parts of the San Joaquin Valley.²⁷ In some areas of Fresno County high-growth "traffic levels exceed what the roads were built to handle" and two lane roads with no medians make head-on collisions more likely.²⁸ Narrow, poorly constructed roads in unincorporated areas "that don't meet safety standards and (have) limited traffic enforcement," lead to dozens of fatal car crashes per year.²⁹

In Tulare County heavily-traveled, pothole-littered roads in "many of these unincorporated communities have not seen a road grater for 40 years" as stated by Chairman Allen Ishida of County's Board of Supervisors.³⁰ It will take an estimated 30 years to improve these sorts of roads in Tulare County.³¹

Porterville's, South Indiana Street (was an island), "populated by potholes and alligator-striped concrete" has only recently been annexed into the City of Porterville. However, the City doesn't have the funding to complete this road project despite Mayor Hamilton's statement that it is a "really bad street. On a scale of 1 to 10, I'd give it a good 8."³²

4. Water

Potability / Access to Drinking Water

Water access and potability are areas that have the most data in the San Joaquin Valley – whether due to pesticide runoff, proximity to dairies and nitrate contamination, or simple fact that most of the residential water is supplied through groundwater. The water issue has been the most extensively studied, due in large part to non-profit water activists' concern about drinking water (*See Community Water Center, Environmental Justice Coalition for Water*), agribusiness/farmers' water concerns (*See Great Valley Center, California Farm Water Coalition*), and more broadly, droughts and global warming. Thus, we will not try to replicate their work, but rather give a snippet of the picture.

Laurel Firestone and Susana De Anda began the Community Water Center in 2004 as an outgrowth of work begun by the Rural Poverty Water Project at the Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment (CRPE).³³ In Tulare County, various unincorporated communities, like Cutler-Orosi, Tonyville, and Alpaugh) deal with toxic levels of nitrates, arsenic, and spill-over sewage in their residential water. This is due to the fact that over 90% of the communities in the Central Valley rely on groundwater for drinking water and 73% of the nitrate drinking water violations in the state are in the Southern San Joaquin Valley, which is also home to the same percentage of the state's dairy cows.³⁴ "Nitrates can come from fertilizers, septic systems and animals, and can occur naturally" and they all exist in the unincorporated areas in Tulare.³⁵ The groundwater in some of these communities is unsafe to drink and "residents drive 30 to 50 miles each week just to buy bottled water, effectively doubling the price for this basic need."³⁶ This is not unique to Tulare; in Fresno County, an ordinance dealing with the proximity of dairies to cities and unincorporated areas has raised public health concerns about the inadequacy of buffer zones.³⁷ And, although non-profit organizations like Self Help Enterprises³⁸ do important advocacy work and help update and replace water infrastructure components, the systemic issues remain deeply rooted.

5. Sewage

Many communities in unincorporated California have private septic tanks instead of connections to sewer lines.³⁹ When septic tanks overflow, due to poorly maintained structures, high levels of rain, etc. the overflow of waste invades homes, streets and neighborhoods with health hazardous, foul smelling matter.⁴⁰ Although the court did not agree that there was evidence of discrimination in *Committee*

Concerning Community Improvement v. Modesto, U.S. District Judge Lawrence O'Neill stated that: "Plaintiffs do live in poor conditions, including failing septic tanks. The county and the city have put unincorporated islands in a difficult situation. ... It is further undisputed that most of Rouse-Colorado and Hatch-Midway (neighborhoods) are in need of new or upgraded sewer systems."⁴¹ Residents believe that linking the sewer system should be the top priority for Stanislaus County.⁴²

6. Garbage Collection

Illegal dumping of large items in unincorporated areas has been a highly publicized problem. But the problem is rooted in the services provided/absent and the cost of those services. In Fresno County, residents and officials say that "people who illegally dump their trash typically can't or won't pay for garbage service," that the difficulty of disposing of bulky items contributes to the problem, and that in the past two years "the rates in some of the unincorporated areas have nearly doubled."⁴³ In Stanislaus County, unincorporated community residents are considering paying a fee to have a biannual bulk trash pick up – although certain types of bulk trash will still need to be dumped at a special site.⁴⁴ On a different scale, in South Modesto (island or fringe), Stanislaus County, residents and the Neighborhood Watch Group collect garbage – tires, broken furniture, etc. – to help instill a sense of pride and community in their neighborhood.⁴⁵ Although the problem is larger than the physical landscape, residents see the clean-up as a "first step toward eliminating the crime plaguing (the) neighborhood," but that residents "must do it 'on (their) own.'"⁴⁶

7. Crime (See also: Street Lighting and Roads)

Neighborhood Watch groups, like that mentioned in the previous section on Garbage are not uncommon throughout the state. But the South Modesto Neighborhood Watch patrols along with the sheriff's department, as there are too few deputies overall in the county, leaving even fewer for the unincorporated areas.⁴⁷ Fearing an increase in the number and violence of the crime in South Modesto, residents hesitantly join the Neighborhood Watch, despite their fears of retribution from gangs and other criminals.⁴⁸ In terms of domestic violence crimes, Fresno County had "5,641 (calls to the domestic violence hotline) in the city of Fresno...and 927 in the unincorporated areas of the county,"⁴⁹ – showing another form that violence takes in some unincorporated communities.

8. Fire

In unincorporated areas of Fresno County, fire stations are located "farther apart from one another, (than in the cities) increasing response times" and increasing the cost of home insurance due to reduced fire coverage.⁵⁰ Parallel circumstances are found in Stanislaus' unincorporated areas of rural land on the fringes of the county boundaries. Residents "can't expect timely responses to fires" and "most

departments have substandard stations and equipment, including engines and trucks.” In Stanislaus, the disparity is between the urban areas (largely incorporated) and rural areas (largely unincorporated).⁵¹ In Tulare, the Fire Department has an agreement with the County to deal with some of the fires in unincorporated areas. However, responses to these calls take much longer than in the incorporated parts of the county.⁵² In terms of ambulance services, Board of Supervisors Chairman Allen Ishida of Lindsay, Tulare County “said his concern is the unincorporated county territory and smaller cities that don’t have on-the-spot (on-site emergency) ambulance service” and the community wants to get services to some areas that don’t have any currently.⁵³

In a conclusion to this section, it is critical to underscore the importance of developing a strategy to assess and document current conditions has surfaced as key objective for any new advocacy strategy to improve the basic infrastructure of Communities of Interest in the San Joaquin Valley. As noted earlier, good data and research about social and economic disparities facing different racial and ethnic groups in the San Joaquin Valley; however this data is rarely organized to illustrate the spatial/geographic dimensions of poverty. Fifty-nine of the 83 Communities of Interest we identified through this research have considerable higher rates of poverty than the counties in which they sit. Meanwhile, the rate of poverty in 30 of the Communities of Interest are 150% and 10 are 200% higher than overall poverty rates in their respective counties.

We believe that our advocacy efforts would benefit greatly from meta-analysis research that would combine relevant findings in existing research with a place based assessment of the relationship between higher levels of poverty and the infrastructure deficits in Communities of Interest as a whole. The perspectives shared by the Community Advisory Committee through this project could prove to be an invaluable in first step in an effort to more systematically describe the state of infrastructure in the San Joaquin Valley’s *colonias*. The strategy used in counties like Imperial that are able to tap Federal grant dollars designated for *Colonias* could be used to develop a baseline picture of needs. In 2002 Imperial County used a State of California Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) grant to develop a Colonia Master Plan⁵⁴ that includes a description of needs, estimated costs and timetables for recommended improvements related to infrastructure, services and supportive community issues. Imperial County drew on quantitative (GIS and Census) and qualitative research methods (e.g., interviews with residents and staff of key agencies) to inform the plan. The Colonia Master Plan addressed the following specific areas for each *colonia*: water, sewer, refuse/solid waste, electrical service, natural gas, street lighting, telephone, cable, streets/roads/bridges, safety services, schools, parks, housing, retail/commercial, and social services.

V. Identifying Approaches for Combined Action, Targets for Engaging the System of Governance & Public Finance in Support of Infrastructure Improvements

The challenges facing residents in our Communities of Interests are deeply entrenched and complex. Tackling them will require effective and sustained advocacy to make the infrastructure needs of our *colonias* a priority in decision-making bodies at the local, regional, and state levels. The starting point for developing an effective advocacy strategy is getting clarity on:

- the **problems or barriers** we seek to address
- the **policy and institutional practices** that can be changed or harnessed to help us achieve our goals
- the **resources** and allies we can count on to advance our advocacy efforts, and
- the **opportunities and challenges** that are likely to affect our chances of success.

In the previous sections of this paper we sought to begin defining the barriers and problems that severely limit the quality of life in our Communities of Interests. The principal purpose of this section is to present the project participants with an “initial cut” of the challenges and opportunities we are likely to encounter as we advocate for strengthening infrastructure supports in unincorporated islands, fringe, and hinterland communities.

Apart from a host of organizational and tactical questions that will need to be taken up by resident leaders and their allies (e.g., what form the advocacy group will take and from what tools, litigation, grassroots organizing, community development, it will draw on), our initial policy analysis has surfaced two inter-related structural challenges, regardless of the infrastructure deficits we seek to address (water, sewage, energy, roads, storm drainage, housing, and etc.). They are very basic – **governance and money**.

a. The Structure of Government: Barriers & Challenges:

As grassroots leaders and civil rights lawyers can attest, the current maze of governmental agencies with responsibility for providing basic services in Communities of Interest make it difficult to determine what agency(ies) to hold accountable for addressing infrastructure deficit(s). In the language of community organizing, who is the “target,” the decision-maker(s) who can give us what we demand? All other agencies and services aside, according to our research, as of 2000 there were a total of 586 special districts providing basic infrastructure services to the eight counties in the San Joaquin Valley. Special district services include sewage, water, fire protection, pest abatement or cemetery management, etc.⁵⁵ In 2004-2005, 57 multi-functional or specialized service districts were providing infrastructure

services to Communities of Interest in just the three counties that we examined in more detail (14 in Stanislaus, 16 in Fresno, and 27 in Tulare). Among these 57 agencies were eleven different types of service districts.

Given the large number of possible “targets” (each with their unique histories, governance structures, and leadership) that would need to be engaged, it is not surprising that advocacy and litigation strategies to improve infrastructure supports have focused on multiple targets. For example, the recent lawsuit on behalf of residents in unincorporated Stanislaus County focused on three providers—the County, the City of Modesto, and the County Sheriff—that lawyers argued were principally responsible for providing services to residents. Meanwhile, the community-lead campaign to restore safe drinking water to Alpaugh at the beginning of the decade required the engagement of the two special districts that provide water services, the state, and several other local institutions.

According to leading researchers (Olmstead⁵⁶ and Ward⁵⁷) money is a key factor in the enduring infrastructure deficits in *colonias*. More specifically, city governments are reluctant to annex neighborhoods whose infrastructure and municipal service needs exceed the resources that can be collected through property taxes and other levies (e.g., special assessments). If this is true, it will be difficult to use annexation as a strategy to improve infrastructure support for Communities of Interest because the LAFCO processes give cities and counties virtual veto power over decisions about annexation and incorporation. For example, before the LAFCO’s executive officer will issue a certificate of filing (for special election on annexation) proponents must negotiate the allocation of property tax revenues with the city, county, and affected special districts involved. An agreement among these parties is a precondition to a LAFCO hearing on an application for annexation. As a result, although only residents of the proposed territory have a right to vote in the special election on the issue of annexation, the steps leading to this election are stacked against the residents. These policies have made it possible to block annexation proposals from unincorporated neighborhoods that are viewed as revenue drainers rather than revenue producers.

The situation with incorporation would require residents in our Communities of Interest to overcome similar hurdles, because any strategy to use incorporation presumes that the residents of the residents have the resources to support the new city’s various municipal service functions. This seems less likely, or at least less widely applicable, as an option. In fact, much of the haggling that takes place in an incorporation process is between proponents of the new city and the county that is reluctant to give up the tax revenues of an unincorporated territory made up of fairly wealthy homeowners. The requirement that incorporation of a new city be revenue neutral for the county involved provides considerable leverage to counties.

Special districts are also reluctant to take on costly projects for small areas. This is because securing bond financing hinges on the ability of rate payers (low-income residents in the Communities of Interest) to accommodate substantially higher rates in order to pay debt service on the bonds that would fund the infrastructure improvement projects. According to Olmstead, who has studied the factors that determine who gets access to water service in the border *colonias*, “for every \$1000 increase in per capita income, a *colonia*’s probability of water service increases by 2.3%.”⁵⁸ Olmstead also found that service providers who were not subject to rate regulations (designed to keep rates low) are more “proactive in providing water services to colonias” than municipalities and counties.⁵⁹ Finally, Olmstead found that price regulations reduce the likelihood of obtaining services by 27% in *colonias*.⁶⁰

Given these formidable structural challenges, what are the strategies for finding new public capital and operating funds for unincorporated communities, and how can we emphasize solutions that are more than a “zero-sum game” within local governments? The Alpaugh case demonstrates the value of looking beyond the immediate governance and special district structures to engage state and other public agencies. Focusing organized community leadership on the goal of leveraging new resources from the state, and collaboration among small service districts toward this end, may be important avenues to pursue.

b. Policy Strategies & Levers:

Because of the public finance challenges and the extreme fragmentation of local government authority and decision-making with regard to unincorporated communities in the San Joaquin Valley, the policy responses to infrastructure and service deficits will differ for communities with **different structural characteristics** and for communities with different **political/historical circumstances**.

Our research and discussions with policy experts suggest a number of possible levers for change in the system of governance. Some of these have been addressed by recent research, lawsuits, legislation or organizing campaigns, but to our knowledge there has not been a comprehensive or widely shared discussion of their future prospects. Some may pertain only to certain types of communities, or to a limited number of counties, while others may be relevant to a state-level strategy. At least nine broad categories of areas for action have already been raised in the early months of this project. We summarize these approaches along with key questions as inputs for the strategic discussion on November 27th:

- 1. Annexation and Incorporation**, to provide the services of city government to unincorporated areas. What are the prospects of developing a viable advocacy strategy to remove the built-in barriers to annexation or incorporation of Communities of Interest? Would our approach be to

use a litigation as a tool to challenge LAFCO actions that limit the percentage of annexation elections in unincorporated neighborhoods that are predominantly low-income vs. those that are wealthy; or is it best to use the racial make up of the neighborhoods as the key consideration? Are there other leverage points that are further upstream that we can exploit? For example, in addition to serving as the key regulatory body on the annexation process, LAFCOs are charged with the task of establishing the “spheres of influence” that serve to define the primary area in which a city will encourage urban development. Can leaders and allies of our Communities of Interest work with local smart growth advocates or those who oppose sprawl to encourage LAFCO’s to prioritize the annexation of *island* and *fringe* Communities of Interest as a strategy to preserve agriculture and open-space lands (one of the key points that is considered in “sphere of influence” determinations).

2. **Improvement of the practices, performance and accountability of community service districts and special districts.** What advocacy strategies could we use to ensure infrastructure and services CSDs and other special districts provide Communities of Interest with the basic/minimum standards in charters or service goals set by governing bodies? How might a litigation strategy be enhanced by including additional deep pockets as parties to lawsuits against service districts? For example, would including agricultural interests who are largely responsible for contamination of ground and surface water in Communities of Interest adjacent to farm land in lawsuits related to water services be a viable option (especially given the fact that some local farmers are members of the governing boards of the special districts?)
3. Taking a different tactic, **are there new approaches to address the public finance challenges faced by Community Service Districts?** Could regional CSA’s that include several or all unincorporated communities in the pool of rate payers Wall Street financiers used to determine the viability of a bond deal to finance infrastructure improvement projects make a difference? Could the adoption of variable rates based on usage in CSDs that serve residents in Communities of Interest and agribusiness help to raise enough revenue to qualify for the bond financing needed to complete water related infrastructure projects? What advocacy strategies could be used to leverage new public capital and operating funds for unincorporated communities; and how can we emphasize solutions that are more than a “zero-sum game” within local governments?
4. **Improvement of the practices, performance and accountability of the agencies of county government.** Although this paper has emphasized the complexity of determining what public entity to hold accountable for various infrastructure deficits in Communities of Interest, the

County Board of Supervisors are responsible for overseeing services to county residents in cities and in unincorporated areas alike. What advocacy approaches could be used to secure a commitment to improve services provided to Communities of Interest by county government?

5. Using **local and county general plans, as well as plans for housing, transportation and capital improvements**, as vehicles for securing adequate infrastructure for unincorporated areas. Although existing Community Development Block Grant money could be used to fund infrastructure improvements in our Communities of Interest, at the present moment resident leaders do not have enough power to successfully compete with other interests groups that are vying for these resources. What new framing and advocacy messages could help the build alliances needed to impact planning and decision-making? For example, could connecting the infrastructure needs of *island* and *fringe* Communities of Interest to the advocacy agenda of anti-sprawl and smart growth advocates through a “fix it first” strategy in general plan discussions about growth work? Would emphasizing the threat posed by the high percentage of Communities of Interest residents that rely on aging and leaking septic tanks to ground water that supplies all city and county residents (and the greater costs associated with cleaning up contamination) help to broaden support proposals to spend city and county funds to connect Communities of Interest to the municipal sewer system?
6. Using existing **federal and state civil rights laws to document patterns of disparate inputs and outputs in Communities of Interest that have higher populations of color** than the region as a whole. What additional documentation would we need to support litigation or legislative advocacy on disparate access to basic infrastructure supports?
7. Using **regional planning and governance entities** to address the needs of low-income unincorporated communities. Our research and discussion with policy experts surfaced a number of regional planning efforts aimed at improving social and economic conditions in the San Joaquin Valley. Some of these are led by government agencies; while others feature collaboration between government, business, and community leaders. For example, the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley’s Land Use, Agricultural and Housing Work Group presented a Strategic Action Proposal that was adopted in September 2006; this proposal included Principles for a Sustainable San Joaquin Valley that specifically called for “new growth to be located in or adjacent to existing communities whenever possible.” What advocacy and partnership strategies could be used to put the infrastructure needs of Communities of Interest on the radar screen of these efforts? What would it take to enlist the leadership and support of these

regional planning and leadership bodies in our efforts to improve infrastructure supports in *island, fringe, and hinterland* Communities of Interest?

Since its inception, the Inter-Agency Taskforce for the Economic Development of the San Joaquin Valley has secured \$150 million, over and above regular, formula, and state pass-through funds for these initiatives. After conducting listening sessions with economic development leaders in seven counties, the Taskforce adopted a Strategic Plan with four initiatives: 1) Jobs/Business Development, 2) Clean Air/Clean Energy, 3) Asset Development, and 4) Rural Infrastructure. The Taskforce had on its drawing board in 2005 a pilot program to improve funding for water-related infrastructure by organizing rural water districts through joint powers agreements. What are the prospects for full realization of this objective, and how much of the problem would it solve? What would be the best vehicle for the long-term implementation of the Taskforce's other plans?

Finally, San Joaquin Valley agricultural interests are using regional organizing and advocacy strategies to ensure their water needs are addressed by the State. For example, the California Rural Water Association, the San Joaquin Valley Water Coalition, and several major water districts (e.g., the Westlands Water District) have played key roles in garnering support for the 2006 water bonds and are working with the Governor to secure a new State water policy that will ensure Central Valley agribusiness's water needs are met. What lessons can infrastructure equity advocates learn from these successful efforts? What new opportunities for forming unusual bedfellows alliances with these water coalitions, given the challenges Central Valley Agricultural interests will face in securing a majority in a Democratically controlled legislature. What role could the Latino Caucus, with strongholds across the state, play in positioning the infrastructure needs of *Colonias* in the policy deliberations to develop a statewide water policy?

8. Accessing **additional state funding for infrastructure** and other aspects of capital development. In 2006, voters approved close to \$43 Billion worth of bonds to address infrastructure needs ranging from: housing, transportation, school facilities, parks, water and flood protection, and disaster preparedness. What advocacy strategies could be used and what decision-making bodies would we need to target to tap portions of these bond dollars for critically needed infrastructure improvement projects in Communities of Interest? Proposition 84, for example, contains: \$10 million for grants to fund emergency grants to provide alternative water supplies where necessary to protect public health, \$60 million to make grants and loans for projects to reduce contamination of groundwater that serves as a source for drinking water, and \$180 million for grants for small community drinking water infrastructure improvements.

Administration of these grant and loan programs has been given to the State Department of Health Services. What advocacy and partnership strategies could be used to facilitate access to these resources among the special districts and municipal infrastructure service providers in Communities of Interest? Similarly, in what ways could an expanded alliance dedicated to improvement of infrastructure supports in Communities of Interest help to channel bond dollars for housing, parks, school facilities, roads, and etc toward this goal?

9. Exploring the advantages of pursuing some form of **state or federal designation as *colonias***, for purposes of funding, other support, special development regulations, or other policies. As noted earlier in this report, the ability to leverage federal and state resources has made it possible for counties that are within 150 miles of the border to launch and sustain *Colonia* improvement projects. Would a state designation of “*Colonias*” in the San Joaquin Valley help counties and special districts leverage additional state dollars to launch and sustain similar projects? What other opportunities would emerge from this strategy? For example, how might new state resources help non-profit housing developers leverage municipal and private dollars needed to finance infrastructure improvements in Communities of Interest?

If the convening on November 27th makes progress on many of these questions and opportunities for action, or raises others of equal or greater importance and relevance to the participants, it will have been a major step in the movement to improve the lives of residents of these communities.

Endnotes

¹ Mukhija, V., Monkkonen, P., *What's in a Name? A Critique of "Colonias" in the United States*, International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, June, 2007.

² State of California, Department of Finance, *E-1 Population Estimates for Cities, Counties and the State with Annual Percent Change — January 1, 2006 and 2007*, Sacramento, California, May 2007.

³ The only method for identifying islands within our 8 San Joaquin Valley counties is through reviewing public documents and publicly available GIS maps including: Local Area Formation Commission (LAFCO) maps of current city boundaries; maps available from city and county planning or public works departments; city and county web-based GIS systems; and the U.S. Census Bureaus website, www.factfinder.census.gov. All islands identified to be located within a county are included as potential Communities of Interest in this analysis. Because islands are often very small and only partially overlapped by Census Block Groups, it is not possible to summarize in any systematic way their demographic and housing characteristics using data from the 2000 Census. **Therefore any ensuing reference to demographic or housing characteristics of unincorporated communities in this report excludes all county islands.**

⁴ Spheres of influence are created by county Local Agency Formation Commissions (LAFCO's) typically based upon a petition by a local government agency, including special districts. As described in the California Government Code Section 56076, a sphere is a "plan for the probable physical boundaries and service area of a local government agency." Once approved by a LAFCO, and depending on local rules and practice, a city may exercise influence over how development occurs in areas located within its sphere. This may entail reviewing building permits issued by the county for areas within the sphere, coordinating land use planning and collaborating on the creation of regulatory standards.

⁵ The exact population of each island has not yet been calculated, but it is clear that they are, on average, smaller than the CDPs.

⁶ Public Documents: Documents available from County LAFCOs as well as city and county planning departments were used to identify additional unincorporated communities missed in the 2000 Census. These additional unincorporated communities were only identified for Fresno, Tulare and Stanislaus counties. The primary communities identified through this method are those served by County Service Areas or Community Service Districts in Fresno and Tulare counties. Advisory Committee Informants: Advisory committee members who have helped guide and support this project identified local unincorporated communities that have recently emerged or have been missed in both Census data as well as local government documents. A total of 7 of these communities, all located in Tulare County, were identified through interviews with key informants.

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⁸ A. Gonzalez, M. Bengiamin, J., *Home Garden Community Assessment*, Central Valley Health Policy Institute, May, 2007.

⁹ Mukhija, V., Monkkonen, P., *Federal Colonias Policy in California: Too Broad and Too Narrow*, Housing Policy Debate Volume 17 Issue 4, 2006, Fannie Mae Foundation, p769.

¹⁰ Porterville Redevelopment Agency,

www.calredevelop.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home&CONTENTID=3706&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm

*Although Porterville was annexed recently and making improvements through the redevelopment agency since 2004, these extreme conditions still exist there and in other Communities of Interest.

¹¹ Los Angeles Times, August 25, 2002, *The Black Okies; A Lost Tribe's Journey to a Land of Broken Promises; 'Going to California' was the rally cry of black sharecroppers who traded one hardscrabble life for another in the San Joaquin Valley*, Mark Arax.

¹² Modesto Bee, January 22, 2006, *A Watchful Eye Focuses on Riverdale; Martinez and Company Reversed Neighborhood's Slide into Crime*, Inga Miller.

¹³ Modesto Bee, February 24, 2006, *Tapping Financial Resources; Funds Help Low-Income Families Build New Homes or Repair Old Ones*, J.N. Sbranti.

¹⁴ ***Quoted from Principal Bob Dittman of Empire Elementary, "a school where 85 percent of the students come from families living below the poverty level."

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- ¹⁵ “Appalachia, as defined in the legislation from which the Appalachian Regional Commission derives its authority, is a 200,000-square-mile region that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi. It includes all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.” <http://www.arc.gov/index.do?nodeId=2>
- ¹⁶ *California’s San Joaquin Valley: A Region in Transition*, December 12, 2005, Tadlock Cowan, Congressional Research Service.
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- ¹⁸ Tulare Advance-Register, July 21, 2007, *Jobless rate holds steady*, George Lurie
- ¹⁹ *Out of Sight Out of Mind: Central San Joaquin Valley Delinquents and the California Youth Authority*, Nancy M. Richardson, 2001.
- ²⁰ *Assessing the Region Via Indicators: Education and Youth Preparedness, The State of the Great Central Valley of California*, Great Valley Center, February, 2004.
http://www.greatvalley.org/pub_documents/2004_5_28_0_23_43_indicators_edu_report.pdf
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