Introduction

In 2017, Silicon Valley Community Foundation (SVCF) launched its first On The Table (OTT), bringing together approximately 7,000 residents at nearly 800 conversations to talk about our regional housing challenges in the Bay Area.

OTT was designed to bring together community members to share housing challenges and envision a shared future through small group discussions over a meal, after work or at any other time during the day. Most conversations involved six to 10 guests. However, some conversations mirrored a town hall meeting with up to 100 participants. OTT conversations would not have been possible without the efforts of SVCF’s outreach partners, Faith in Action, Youth Leadership Institute, People Acting in Community Together and the Bay Area Media Collaborative, who drew upon their extensive community networks, expertise, and experience. SVCF is also grateful to all of the hosts who engaged the community at large and all of the participants who came to an OTT conversation and shared their stories, frustrations and visions for a shared future.

SVCF was one of 10 community foundations across the U.S. replicating the On The Table initiative in 2017 with funding from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Support for OTT was one part of the Knight Foundation’s efforts to help cities attract and keep talented people, expand economic opportunity and create a culture of civic engagement. At SVCF, we believe that conversations have the power to transform our communities and change lives.

SVCF is grateful to the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation for supporting this work, Jasculca Terman Strategic Communications for their guidance and technical assistance, and the Institute for Policy and Civic Engagement at the University of Illinois at Chicago (IPCE) for its survey of program participants.

This document summarizes the OTT activities that took place in November, 2017, the process undertaken by SVCF and its partners to coordinate the events, and the ideas and trends identified through the events. Based on the On The Table experience and feedback from community participants and conversation hosts, this document provides recommendations for philanthropy, government and community partners to consider in future OTT and related events and organizing.
On The Table Silicon Valley 2017

November 15, 2017

How did SVCF do it?

1. SVCF and community partners used their networks to invite people to participate. SVCF hosted 10 in-person community orientations for nonprofit organizations and individuals interested in hosting On The Table conversations, as well as a virtual orientation.

2. SVCF staff were available to provide support to organizers and hosts.

3. To drum up interest and awareness among community members about the initiative, SVCF distributed more than 5,000 postcards in English, Vietnamese, Spanish and Chinese throughout the region, and launched a digital marketing push.

Who participated?

When compared with Silicon Valley residents, defined here as those living in Santa Clara, San Mateo and San Francisco counties, On The Table survey respondents tended to be slightly older, more likely to identify as white and have completed higher levels of formal education. They owned homes or rented homes at the same rate as Silicon Valley residents. All survey data were gathered and prepared by The Institute for Policy and Civic Engagement (IPCE) at University of Illinois at Chicago for the Silicon Valley Community Foundation and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

### OTT Survey Respondents Compared With Silicon Valley Residents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest Level of Formal Education Completed</th>
<th>OTT Survey Respondents</th>
<th>Silicon Valley Residents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduate degree</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate/Vocational degree</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS diploma or GED</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Identified Race and/or Ethnic Identity</th>
<th>OTT Survey Respondents</th>
<th>Silicon Valley Residents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino/a</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Homeownership</th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Own</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What has SVCF learned through On The Table?

During On The Table conversations, hosts kept notes to track the topics covered and the perspectives and ideas of participants. After the events, hosts were asked to complete feedback forms to share with SVCF. Following the conversations, IPCE also administered surveys with On The Table participants.¹

Community members have the desire, optimism and experience necessary to contribute directly to finding and implementing solutions to the housing crisis.

- More than two-thirds of IPCE survey respondents say they’re at least somewhat involved in their community and neighborhood activities.
- In the past year, more than two-thirds say they donated to a charitable organization, volunteered or attended a public meeting about community affairs. Older community members are more likely to donate resources than younger community members.

IPCE survey respondents strengthened existing relationships and formed new relationships with fellow community members and expressed their intentions to stay connected and engage in shared work.

More than a quarter of participants reported exchanging contact information at the events, and one in five (18%) said they made specific plans to continue working with at least one attendee.

¹ This executive summary includes analysis of 119 host feedback forms, 40 PACT “notes” forms, and 1,391 total surveys (305 via email link; 173 web link; 249 SMS link; 664 print survey).

“Thank you for having the On The Table conversations. Local control is important. However, we all need to do our fair share. We need to turn up the dial on civic engagement. We need more conversations. Some folks need more education on the issue. We need help getting people to show up to council chambers for the right reasons.”

– OTT Participant
Challenges

There is agreement about many of the challenges facing the region, especially related to housing.

- Participants identified a lack of information:
  - Few opportunities exist for community members to talk amongst themselves
  - Information is often disaggregated
  - Laws, regulations and rights are difficult to access and understand

- Participants said that the cost of housing is a major problem:
  - High home costs/ high rents proportional to incomes

- Participants shared many different effects of high cost of housing:
  - Decreasing diversity
  - Teachers, service sector, and public employees are not able to afford to live locally
  - Increasing homelessness
  - NIMBYism
  - Increase in hate crimes against and stigmatization of people living with homelessness
  - Guilt about implicit role in the problem
  - Discrimination in home loans, rental applications
  - Mental health suffering due to stress and anxiety associated with precarious housing situations

- Participants said they are making many sacrifices to meet housing costs:
  - Saving less for retirement
  - Working longer hours and/or multiple jobs
  - Accumulating debt
  - Cutting back on healthy, nutritious food
  - Taking fewer or no vacations
  - Limiting family size and/or not having children
  - Forfeiting time with family
  - Feeling trapped in a job due to salary considerations
  - Moving away due to housing costs and fearing that children will eventually have to do the same

- Participants recognized that housing is part of a systemic problem that crosses city and county lines:
  - Transportation
  - Education systems and school districts
  - Lack of affordable childcare
  - Lack of affordable eldercare

The diversity in our On The Table conversation is amazing. The future of our region is our youth. If they cannot live here, we will not be able to have anyone living here. We need to work on preservation and protection. Unfortunately, some of the innovation in our region brings inequity. Our youth’s voices need to be lifted and their voices need to be heard. If they are not heard we will have nothing to protect. Thanks to On The Table for including youth voices in the conversation.

– OTT Participant
Participants had many ideas about potential solutions. Ideas about solutions tend to focus on institutions.

- **Government solutions**
  - Development: Zoning; permitting; high density building; mixed income housing; vertical growth
  - Wage and employment law: Minimum wage increases
  - Regulation: Rent control; alternative housing (e.g., in-law units, accessory dwelling units, tiny homes, RVs); disallow idle buildings
  - Community engagement: Engage directly with community to develop plans to increase access to homes and community development

- **Corporate and Institutional responsibility**
  - Housing development to match job growth
  - University housing for students and faculty
  - Wage and employment perks for all employees
  - Impact investing in housing market

- **Opportunities for Education and Learning**
  - Rights: Renters rights; Loan applicant rights
  - Effective policies and/or solutions: Resources and/or repositories comparing the effectiveness of various policies and/or solutions both within and outside of the region

- **Community strengthening**
  - Create opportunities for diverse sectors of the community to listen to each other and build relationships and empathy
  - Introduce alternative housing models and structure conversations around them, such as co-housing or mixed-income housing developments
  - Support community leadership
  - Organize to create community strength

“Organizing is not the same as mobilizing. On The Table is a great example of the power of community philanthropy. The information generated today will help organizers get our work done. This is a historical day. We rarely have the opportunity to bring over 6,000 people together in face to face conversations around one issue. We have shared great ideas but what we need is the organized power of the people who participated in our conversations.”

– OTT Participant
What can SVCF and other organizations do going forward?

Provide guidance about specific actions that individuals can take.

While On The Table participants said in surveys they understood better how they can help address issues facing their community and were likely to take action (16% understood how they can help address issues “much better,” and 34% said they understand “somewhat better”), many hosts said that participants expressed frustration that they feel there is little they can do to directly impact the issue.

On The Table conversations and other SVCF activities can provide concrete actions that individuals can take in order to increase individuals’ sense of self-efficacy and involvement. Participants expressed interest in education about how to get involved in public policy. Participants also wanted more information on volunteering and donation opportunities with local and regional nonprofits.

Increase outreach to increase participation and dialog.

Outreach should include Asian American community groups and youth groups, as they were the two demographic groups that lacked representation, based on Silicon Valley demographics. Also, while the IPCE surveys did not ask about what industries participants work in, On The Table 2018 will include direct outreach to tech company employees to build community and conversations across labor sectors. Given On The Table 2017 participants’ desire for corporations to take responsibility for their role in solving the region’s housing challenges and participants’ frustration over a lack of empathy among newcomers to the region, On The Table 2018 can provide an opportunity to bridge these divides.

Create and/or point to resources about laws, rules and regulations.

Participants said they need more information about renters’ rights, mortgage loan laws, housing discrimination law, and other housing-related legal protections and structures. These resources are available with many SVCF partners. Philanthropic, government and community partners can explore opportunities to coordinate efforts and provide the residents of Silicon Valley with appropriate resources to advocate for themselves, their families and their communities.

Create and/or point to solutions and best practices.

Government policy, corporate responsibility, and cultural change are all necessary for addressing the housing challenges, but they are daunting for On The Table participants. Philanthropic, government, and community partners can provide concrete examples of best practices and solutions that work - locally and from other communities - to demonstrate how progress can be made and to highlight the processes that will be necessary to transition from challenges to solutions.

“...Our next step is to continue the conversation. We are going to gather a collaborative of nonprofits and local agencies to share information and work together to raise awareness and support.”

– OTT Participant
Link to related issues, like transportation, jobs, and taxes.

In 2017, SVCF’s inaugural On The Table conversations brought together over 7,000 community residents to have conversations about our regional housing challenges. In response to participants’ interest, SVCF will organize On The Table 2018 conversations to be held on October 23, 2018.

SVCF’s On The Table 2018 will move beyond conversations designed to share stories and ideas, to developing strategies for action that are reflective of residents’ interests and aspirations. On The Table 2018 will be a day of community conversations structured to review and build upon the insights and recommendations presented in this document and refined through a series of meetings with an advisory committee. Ultimately, community perspectives and local expertise will inform the creation of a Silicon Valley regional housing action plan. SVCF will use the action plan generated from these thoughtful and civil dialogues to influence new policy directions on housing in 2019.

SVCF will share more information about how you can get involved during the summer and fall 2018.
About Silicon Valley Community Foundation

Silicon Valley Community Foundation advances innovative philanthropic solutions to challenging problems. We engage donors and corporations from Silicon Valley, across the country and around the globe to make our region and world better for all. Our passion for helping people and organizations achieve their philanthropic dreams has created a global philanthropic enterprise committed to the belief that possibilities start here. Find out more at siliconvalleycf.org.

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