


**SOUL
PLAYERS**
of the Valley

Semillas of Change

**The Transformative Journey of
Four San Luis Valley Communities and
the Latino Community Foundation of Colorado**



Semillas of Change

Para La Comunidad y Nuestra Gente
For Community and Our People

Letter from Feliciana Lobato, Youth Member, Soul Players of the Valley, Steering Committee

The Soul Players of the Valley started nearly five years ago as four separate communities of local leadership, gathering to express our aspirations of building better opportunities for our youth. What this led to and what we have accomplished thus far has become so much more. This journey has been one of discovery, honest conversations, facing challenges, working through differences, and ending with a plan for building vibrant, thriving, successful communities.

Through our five-year journey together, we have taken our collective stories and created a pathway that outlines and supports who we are, what we value, what our greatest needs are, and how we plan to make changes that will empower our communities and lead to vibrancy for all generations. The Soul Players of the Valley represent the voices of our people. We represent our stories, our triumphs and struggles. We have built a greater connection and deeper understanding of each other's communities, all of which was made possible by giving us a platform to express our past histories, concerns, ideas, and our hopes and dreams. We have found family in each other and have a greater respect and appreciation for one another's communities in addition to our own.

Throughout our process, we've been able to take what we've learned from each other, bring those lessons back to our own communities, and start to grow and empower our own leaders. We've created a spark and energy to fuel our movement, creating partnerships and collaborations within our local communities as well as with outside organizations. This is what is needed to sustain our path and projects moving forward.

Our hope is for you to learn from our journey and experiences and pay it forward. The lessons learned are necessary and valuable to build community anywhere. While we realize this is just the start of a lifelong journey, we know it is a major role for our future.

Much Love,

Feliciana Lobato

Youth Member, SPV Steering Committee, San Luis

From top to bottom, the cover images represent the communities of San Luis (Costilla County), Capulin (Conejos County), South Alamosa (Alamosa County), and Antonito (Conejos County). Image on this page and page 3 provided by Aaron Abeyta, SPV Steering Committee, Antonito. Soul Players' logo designed by Brayan Montes, YAMZ World of Color, Design. Printed by Publication Printers in Denver, Colorado. Cover and document design by Reina Florez, RF Design - rflorezdesign@gmail.com.

A Letter from CEO Carlos Martinez, Latino Community Foundation of Colorado

The Latino Community Foundation of Colorado (LCFC) embarked on a transformative journey over seven years ago, deeply reflecting on how we could build stronger relationships with communities. It became evident through our research that much of the available support for Latinos was focused solely on Denver, disregarding the vibrant Latino communities throughout the state. In order to address this disparity, we conducted active listening tours and held forums in the Northern, Mountain, and Southwestern regions of Colorado. Through this process we recognized that to best serve Latinos we needed to challenge traditional methods of community engagement and shift power from institutions to grassroots members.

We were blessed to find willing and knowledgeable partners in Cec Ortiz and Garland Yates, national consultants, who provided us with the formal framework of Community Democracy, which focuses on change efforts driven by those who are most impacted. This resulted in a revolutionized approach as we embraced the idea that true equity can only be achieved when we shift our focus from changing others and their communities to changing ourselves and our structures. This shift allowed us to work with communities knowing that they have the solutions to their problems—they just need a trusted, supportive team to create a strategic direction. It is through this transformation that we've learned we can establish authentic, sustainable, and communal partnerships with communities.

As a result of our efforts in the San Luis Valley, we now take immense pride in the distinctive and transformative relationship that we were able to cultivate with the coalition of local visionaries who are now known as the Soul Players of the Valley. This document encapsulates our intertwined journey, laying the groundwork for the future. Both parties have undergone a profound evolution throughout this process. Our connection is cemented, and we will continue to use our learnings to advance together—focusing our energy towards advancing a healthy and vibrant future where all Latino Coloradans will prosper.

We have learned that this kind of work is only possible when everyone is on board and we build an intentional team with clear values, an insight that is vital to this process. The LCFC Board, CEO, staff, and partners were instrumental in making this shift happen. Our sincerest hopes are that our work will spark excitement in others who will join us to create new movements that radically challenge old ways of thinking and transfer power to communities!

Humbly yours,

Carlos Martinez

CEO and President, Latino Community Foundation of Colorado

Bienvenidos to Our Journey



SPV Community Planning Retreat,
December 10, 2019,
The Barn at Manzanilla

We are the Soul Players of the Valley, a coalition of local leaders from four towns in the San Luis Valley of Colorado—Antonito, Capulin, San Luis, and South Alamosa. We would like to introduce you to our partner, the Latino Community Foundation of Colorado (LCFC). Told from both of our perspectives, this is our story of mutual transformation about how we came together to build Latino power and create lasting social change.

Because our collective story is one of transformation, innovation, and self-determination, traditional formats do not serve our purposes. Instead, we intend to highlight the trusting partnership between the Soul Players of the Valley and the Latino Community Foundation of Colorado (LCFC) that is the heart of this narrative.

Our revolutionary partnership formed the path on which the Soul Players of the Valley journeyed to return to our roots, tap into our strength, and build community power. Through our mutual story with LCFC we can share the opportunities we discovered and the lessons we learned in building the foundation for lasting community transformation.

We invite you to get to know us and learn about our vision for the future well-being of Latinos in the San Luis Valley. Our hope is that you will recognize the powerful experiences we encountered and see a role for yourself, or your organization, to play in our efforts or that of other communities seeking lasting change.

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CHAPTER ONE

Community Transformation: How We Came Together to Build Our Vision for the Future



Estevan Vega, SPV, Capulin

"My favorite thing about my culture is how connected everyone is. I love that everyone knows everyone...It is what has built our community. It has allowed us to trust each other and build our relationships." – Estevan Vega, SPV Steering Committee Member, Capulin

The Soul Players of the Valley (SPV) would like to introduce seventeen-year-old Estevan Vega, who grew up in Capulin, one of Colorado's oldest communities. Named after the reddish-black chokecherries that grow wild in the San Luis Valley used to make jam, jelly, syrup, and wine, Capulin was settled by Hispano settlers in the 1860s. Today, our culture continues to reflect our Indigenous, Spanish, and Mexican roots.

Throughout this document, we use two specific terms, "Latino" and "Hispano," when referring to the community served. There is no one universal term to use because, for this community, identity is a complex and often a personal decision based on various socio-cultural elements, such as political beliefs, generation (or age), and educational background. For our purposes, "Latino" is being used as an umbrella term and most often when speaking in the present. In the 19th-century United States, the term "Hispano" or "Hispanic" was used to describe people who are descendants of early Spanish settlers in the Southwest. It was coined by the U.S. Census Bureau in an attempt to capture this specific demographic. In the San Luis Valley today, the term "Hispano" is used more than in other regions, signaling the area's unique geographic and cultural nuances. However, some residents in the Valley also refer to themselves as "Chicano/a", a more political term associated with cultural pride in Indigenous origins.

As Estevan walks through Capulin, he breathes in the beauty of the open space, awash with pride for his people and the ties that bind them together. He can catch a glimpse of the steeple of St. Joseph’s Catholic Church, the central pillar of our community, built by skilled Hispano craftsmen from sandstone carved out of the Valley floor. In the distance, he can hear the high-pitched bleating of the sheep. Although Estevan recognizes that rural Capulin “has been neglected in a way,” he also knows that “it truly is the people that live here that show its true beauty.” He feels lucky that so much of his extended family live nearby and are constantly in touch at frequent family gatherings.

¿QUIÉNES SOMOS? (WHO ARE WE?) THE SOUL PLAYERS OF THE VALLEY ARE BUILDERS OF COMMUNITY POWER

The Soul Players of the Valley (SPV) are a coalition of local Latino community leaders from four towns—Antonito, Capulin, San Luis, and South Alamosa—in the San Luis Valley of Colorado. Grounded in our traditional communal ways of life inherited from our Hispano ancestors, we lead our communities in identifying ways to address our needs, building on our strengths to ensure a vibrant and sustainable future.

To move our community to a place of power and self-determination, we will:

- 1. Build or revitalize community centers in each town**
- 2. Prioritize youth enrichment and development**
- 3. Expand health services, especially for mental health and substance use**
- 4. Improve economic conditions**
- 5. Preserve and celebrate our culture**

As some of Colorado’s longest-standing communities, we are well-equipped to develop and implement our plans to improve the lives of our people. We lead with dedication to our families as we find inspiration from our ancestors to grow our collective power and make our shared vision for the future a reality.

Working hard in nearby Alamosa, Estevan is saving money for college. Whether or not he will live in his hometown after school will depend upon the job opportunities he can find in the San Luis Valley. Both Estevan and his ten-year-old sister Valentina, who recently finished fourth grade, are mindful of drug use and crime in the local park. “This issue has deeply affected part of my family,” he explains, “and it has become a major concern in our community.” Nevertheless, Estevan is quick to say, “If I had a magic wand, I would not actually change anything about Capulin; instead, I would change the negative stigma that surrounds it. It is not a bad town. It simply needs people who are willing to come together to build our community.”



Map of San Luis Valley

© San Luis Valley Development Resources Group & Council of Governments

With passionate love for his family and his community, Estevan became a leader with us, the Soul Players of the Valley. His hope is that we “can lead by example and help build a strong community.” Youth like Estevan, his sister Valentina, and Feliciana (the opening letter author) are our future. They are the reason why it’s so important for us to provide our communities in the San Luis Valley—or *El Valle* as we locals call it—with opportunities to thrive. We want our youth to continue to be proud of their hometowns.

The Latino Community Foundation of Colorado Enters the San Luis Valley

"We have an amazing core group of advisors in the Soul Players of the Valley. They are so committed, and have such unique, lived experiences. They have inspired us all at the Foundation to follow the lead of the communities we serve and be open to change."

-Rachel Griego, Senior VP, LCFC

The Latino Community Foundation of Colorado (LCFC) recognizes that there are growing Latino communities across the more rural regions of our state where social change is taking shape, driven by the Latino people who live there. As a community foundation, we have set out to find more effective ways of engaging with and following the lead of Latino community members like Estevan and Feliciana who have an inspiring vision for their people's future. Guided by the principle that lasting change begins from within, LCFC centers community leaders' sovereignty and agency in determining the best pathways for improving the lives of Latinos in their communities.

When LCFC first spoke with local leaders from the San Luis Valley—in particular the communities of Antonito, Capulin, San Luis, and South Alamosa—we approached them with a spirit of respectful inquiry. We wanted to learn about their hopes for their collective future, grounded in their values and culture. We felt honored to be invited into this beautifully vibrant Hispano region of the San Luis Valley.

We, as a Foundation, saw that the power of the Latino people in the Valley is drawn up from the soil where their Indigenous, Spanish, and Mexican ancestors planted roots long before the nations that later lay claim to their lands. Recognizing the lasting impacts of colonialism and the various waves of oppression that Latinos in the San Luis Valley have weathered, we understood their wariness of outsiders. Right then and there, we committed ourselves to earning their trust so that—with *permiso* (permission)—we might walk with them on their journey of collective healing and transformation.

"We need to look at understanding this in a deep way because in order to move on we need to heal, and one way of healing is to tell the stories which are powerful for us."

- Cec Ortiz, National Consultant

**¿QUIÉNES SOMOS? (WHO ARE WE?)
THE LATINO COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF
COLORADO (LCFC) IS A PHILANTHROPIC
FOUNDATION LED BY LATINOS FOR LATINOS**

We pursue civic, economic, and cultural opportunities that drive a more authentic narrative about Latinos in the state, and we cement a healthy and vibrant future where all Latino Coloradans will prosper. LCFC's mission is to work hand in hand with our diverse communities to create culturally responsive strategies that build influence, equity, and opportunity for all Latino Coloradans.



Carlos Martinez, President and CEO, LCFC 15th
Anniversary Celebration, October 13, 2022

La Gente del Valle (The People of the Valley) Enter into Partnership with the Latino Community Foundation of Colorado

"LCFC listens to us...They come not on a white horse, but on a burro (donkey). They know we are perfectly capable, and they help us on our journey...others feel we can't save ourselves. I am tired of the knight in shining armor...LCFC treats us as equals."
– Aaron Abeyta, SPV, Antonito

As *La Gente del Valle*—the Latino people of the San Luis Valley—we see our neighbors as *familia*. We protect and care for one another so that we can all live and thrive together. Because of our past history, we are often hesitant around outsiders. From the start, LCFC was different. All of them, even the President and CEO, humbly asked for *permiso* (permission) to talk with us local leaders and engage with our communities.

To understand why the Soul Players of the Valley have such esteem for LCFC's approach, it will be helpful to paint a picture of our communities' previous encounters with outside funding entities. Regardless of the good intentions these organizations have had, our people in *El Valle* have often felt disrespected, misunderstood, and as a result underserved by them. Many organizations have collected data without our knowledge, rarely if ever sharing the results with us, and then asked us to complete funding applications based on guidelines that did not meet our specific needs.



Rachel Griego, LCFC, Cec Ortiz, National Consultant, and Carlos Martinez, LCFC, holding a rendition of the LCFC logo created by SPV.

SPV appreciates that LCFC understands how such power dynamics have put us, and many other communities, at a disadvantage when we try to make sustainable change happen. As a foundation run by Latinos, LCFC has a passion for both the challenges and richness of Latino communities like ours. They understand on an intimate level how our communities in *El Valle* have been gripped with the long-term impacts of colonialism, racism, and injustices tied to land and water rights. LCFC also knows that our people have survived and thrived for generations, shaping our home into a place of beauty and vibrancy.

When we work with LCFC, we feel seen and valued. We don't have to explain who we are and why we want to approach the work the way we do. It is so encouraging to partner with a foundation whose staff look and talk like us, respect our cultural richness, and believe in our collective power—it's revolutionary!

"This process is community-driven. Sometimes we'll have people from Denver come and think they need to save the people from rural Colorado, and then they leave when the money's gone. LCFC does it differently. They've proven themselves and are trusted by people in the process. They helped guide it even before there was any money. It's community-driven. They leave their opinions out of it."

– Lisa Lucero, SPV, South Alamosa

SPV's relationship with LCFC has been healing and transformative because they committed to walk alongside us *mano y mano* (hand-in-hand). Our partnership is a true match. A lasting friendship. Embracing mutual trust, open hearts, and organic agendas, we challenged each other to grow, learn, and evolve. Our revolutionary partnership formed the path on which we, the Soul Players of the Valley, journeyed to return to our roots, tap into our strengths, and build our community power. Now we can create the lasting change we need to make our future vision become reality for *La Gente del Valle*.

"If you listen and engage, it becomes an organic, natural conversation."

– Jamie Dominguez, SPV, South Alamosa



Jamie Dominguez, SPV, South Alamosa, Rachel Griego, LCFC, and Carlos Martinez, LCFC

Community Democracy: LCFC's Innovative Framework to Engage and Embolden La Gente del Valle

"The LCFC Community Democracy approach to achieving equitable change for Latino families is predicated on the belief that strong Latino communities require strong Latino organizations...LCFC's goal is to engage, embolden, and support community members at every level by making long-term investments that lead to sustainable results."

– Cec Ortiz and Garland Yates, National Consultants

Meeting communities on their own terms, LCFC uses a framework called Community Democracy to identify and build on a community's existing strengths and assets. With that as our starting point, we encourage stronger relationships among neighbors and grow the capacity for self-determination. By grounding our work in Community Democracy principles, we ensure the voices and decisions of community members are prioritized and honored and, in turn, drive our priorities. LCFC's goal is that the resulting outcome will be transformative, long-term community change.

LCFC'S CORE COMMUNITY DEMOCRACY VALUES

- **The needs, desires, and wishes of local people should be the driving force for any community change agenda.**
- **Community ownership and participation is crucial to sustaining changes.**
- **The community change process must be based on a fundamental recognition and respect for their culture, history, language, and aspirations.**
- **The change process must endeavor to include participation of the so-called "hard-to-reach" residents and work to build their power and capacity.**
- **The change process must acknowledge the degree to which social inequities (race, class, gender, economics, etc.) impede progress and address them.**

A fundamental aspect of Community Democracy is encouraging broad participation and cultivating leadership among the most underserved residents, whose voices are not often heard. In the San Luis Valley, LCFC supported local leaders in finding strategies to gather a broad section of their community members to participate in the process, ensuring a sharing of power amongst the people rather than reserving it for a chosen few.

During one of LCFC's early visits to the Valley, we met with Jamie and Cristalray Dominguez, two Latino leaders from South Alamosa who shared with us their vision for community change. Jamie and Cristalray recognized that in order to succeed in making their vision a reality, they would need to collaborate with nearby Latino communities, even though there had been rival tensions between these towns in the past.



Jamie and Cristalray Dominguez, SPV, South Alamosa

Jamie and Cristalray brought together community members from across the Valley to meet with LCFC. The invitation was met with enthusiasm knowing that this collaborative approach could be historic in addressing local needs by bringing communities together. The meeting was well-attended with Latinos across all generations representing Antonito, Capulin, San Luis, and South Alamosa.

This historic effort set off a series of meetings that took place between 2018 and 2020. Taking our cue from the local leaders, LCFC supported participants in having honest conversations, finding collective healing, and building trust. These meetings allowed ample opportunities for local leaders and residents to offer ideas and confirm or challenge the set of assumptions LCFC brought to the table. Our mutual vulnerability allowed us to form personal connections that lay the foundation for the work ahead.

The Spark that Ignited the Movement: The Soul Players of the Valley are Born

"Our name is a great insight into who we are...Look at the heart of each community. Players are the ones who make things happen and move...We are a group of individuals from four communities who together with LCFC want to move our communities forward culturally, economically, socially, and in terms of health equity in ways that are inclusive of youth, elders, everyone." – Dana Maestas, Program Manager, SPV

The Soul Players of the Valley name and logo both provide insight into who we are and how we came to be. We found power in naming ourselves. Our logo, created by Bryan Montes, features a hand with a heart on the palm. To us, it indicates that we are rooted in our communities, tied to the land, creating change with hands open to one another. It also represents the legacy of our ancestors who always fought for their way of life.

Aaron Abeyta says the logo reminds him of *La Mano Negra* (The Black Hand), "cultural and historical heroes in *El Valle* who were the first to rise up against colonialism." He tells the story of a group of heroes, or *vigilantes*, who resisted the land theft committed by encroaching white American settlers who did not recognize our communal ownership and practices. The encroachers would steal, using English while knowing full well that the rightful residents and owners only spoke Spanish, bending U.S. law to justify their theft. "As the fences went up and the cattle and trains appeared on *Raza* lands, *Mano Negra* would cut fences, run off cattle, burn haystacks, etc., and upon their departure leave a black handprint on a post or wall."

The Soul Players of the Valley came into existence because our communities made the choice to unite as one force for change. Having witnessed revitalization efforts fail in the past, we were determined to take a different approach. We armed ourselves with new skills and tools, while also honoring our cultural heritage. LCFC provided us with additional capacity building and leadership development, grounded in our values and beliefs. Most importantly, their Community Democracy framework allowed us to dedicate our time, set our own agenda, and work through the challenges we faced.

In our meetings, we spoke openly, often in Spanish, about the impacts of colonialism and oppression and also the resulting trauma. Healing old wounds was integral to the process of finding our collective strength. So often communities of color censor themselves or code switch as they interact with entities who do not represent their particular race/ethnicity. This diluting of who we are can lead to the loss of valuable meaning, authentic approaches, and ultimately failure. LCFC helped us develop a new role for our local leaders as authors of our own narrative who can educate any entity who might choose to enter *El Valle* to engage in change efforts.

As we residents discussed our concerns and how to best address them, an idea crystallized to establish or revitalize four community centers in each of our towns where not only could enrichment and learning take place, but where we could come together to help revitalize our community. We began to envision real change within our communities and started to feel our re-emerging power. We welcomed LCFC's support in setting up a process to make this change a reality. The Soul Players of the Valley had been born.

Laying the Foundation: Structural Development, Capacity Building, and Planning for the Future

"The Soul Players of the Valley have a different style of leadership, not the Eurocentric style of leadership. It's a shared leadership. There is a reclamation of going back to the ways of the ancestors that first came here. A return to the roots of the land grant mentality of brother and sisterhood that helped the first settlers survive. Our older generations worked together for the common good, but with colonialism, and envidia (envy), we've forgotten. Now we are remembering."

– Juanita Martinez, SPV, San Luis Alternate (representing surrounding villages)

LCFC met the Soul Players of the Valley on our own terms and honored our distinctive cultural identity, using a Community Democracy approach to help us build power and grow capacity. In *El Valle*, we have a continued history of sharing land and water in common and, in relation, a communal form of governance that is unique to former Spanish colonies in the region. Building on our Hispano traditions, the Soul Players of the Valley have designed our own community-led vision for change and created the collective decision-making structure to sustain it. Ours is a new model of self-governance, rooted in our past, that is propelling our future vision.

Undertaking this structural development and capacity building prepared us to engage our fellow community members in a grassroots assessment process to gain broader insights and focus our change efforts. The assessment directed us to develop plans that will move our communities to a place of increased vibrancy, power, and self-determination. (Chapter Four details our data assessment and strategic plans.)

Five years of hard work and dedication have brought us to this point. Together with our communities, LCFC, and many other partners, the Soul Players of the Valley have accomplished the following:

1. Built trust amongst each other individually and across our communities
2. Built our individual and collective capacity
3. Engaged our broader communities through assessment
4. Created a foundation for ongoing collaborative community change
5. Created dynamic partnerships with new funders who follow and support our lead
6. Prepared for the next phase in further developing and implementing our strategic plans for change



Monthly Soul Players of the Valley
Meeting, San Luis, Costilla County
Conservancy District Office

"Sometimes we get to all of the meeting agenda and sometimes we don't. We make space for discussion that needs to happen...All it takes is a little friction for the personalities to come forward. This process is organic and authentic...We all may end up with different things, but we have to trust the process and let it play out."

– Rachel Griego, Senior VP, LCFC

Forever Changed: Our Mutual Transformation

"If LCFC hadn't made the decision to get intimately involved and work alongside SPV, we would not have advanced as much as we have as an institution. There is no going back. In my heart of hearts, I know we must stay on this path."

– Rachel Griego, Senior VP, LCFC

"Man, this is the biggest piece. We are spearheading this ourselves, starting from inside our community. The Soul Players of the Valley are different. We ran deep right away... Five or six years ago I couldn't represent myself fully because I wasn't sure who I was. Now we know who we are, and we're knocking down barriers."

– Jamie Dominguez, SPV, South Alamosa

As a philanthropic organization, LCFC had not always been in the business of doing community-led work, but we had a vision that this is where we wanted to go. With the San Luis Valley, we at LCFC saw an opportunity to roll up our sleeves and engage with a Latino community in a new and intimate way—sharing power and listening rather than leading. We knew we would learn a great deal, but we didn't fully realize how absolutely transformative the experience would prove to be for us at the institutional level.

What the people of the San Luis Valley emphasized for us is that we needed to reorient our entire Foundation towards building Latino community power. As a result, we have undertaken a complete and total re-alignment, from hiring and training to implementation and evaluation. For example, we now provide months-long training in Community Democracy to every person on our staff, and we rewrote our employee handbook accordingly. We fully committed to building our culture and systems anew. The impact for Latino communities is huge! Now we are leading the way by example, advocating for philanthropic institutions and government entities in Colorado to reevaluate and prioritize methods that build Latino community power at the local level.

As local grassroots leaders, we Soul Players of the Valley have journeyed a long way over the past five years as we built a coalition, established our collective voice, and sparked a movement. When LCFC approached us, we were excited to gain the support of an organization that is run by and for Latinos. They supported us in the monumental task of uniting our four communities—Antonito, Capulin, San Luis, and South Alamosa. What impacted us most, however, was LCFC's intimate and profound way of knowing, their *conocimiento*, of our Latino community, which created a more authentic and open dialogue grounded in trust and understanding. It is as if LCFC held up a mirror for us Soul Players of the Valley to show us the strength and power we have always had and, then, supported us in determining for ourselves how best to use it.



From left to right: Gayle Warner, Carlos Martinez, Cristalray Dominguez, Lisa Lucero, Cec Ortiz, Rachel Griego, Jamie Dominguez, Johanna Leyba, Kim Sanchez

The result for us, the Soul Players of the Valley, has been a major shift in power dynamics and the creation of a community-driven plan for change that is gaining interest and excitement for what is possible. As an example, Jamie Dominguez, Soul Players of the Valley Steering Committee Member, shifted a relationship with the Colorado Housing and Finance Authority (CHFA). Jamie was scheduled to report what had been accomplished through funding from CHFA. Instead, Jamie decided to communicate his frustrations with the systems and the challenges such partnerships create for local organizations. The outcome was transformative! The CEO of CHFA came to *El Valle* to meet with Jamie in person and learn more. Priorities were shifted and new sources of funding were brought to the table.

For us, this was a powerful moment in which we saw that the Soul Players of the Valley had become an engine for change. Nowadays, other funders and new potential partners approach *us* and want to learn more. We have so much to share about how innovative partnerships can build community power, thereby laying the foundation for long-lasting community transformation—because it comes from within.

CHAPTER TWO

Nuestra Historia: A Tour of the San Luis Valley Past and Present

"I am proud of our people's legacy, our roots connected here over time, and when I put my hand in the ground, I can feel the legacy."

– Armando Valdez, SPV, Capulin

To fully understand who we are and what grounds our work, it is important to know our history. At a meeting in Alamosa, we gathered at the Shooting Stars Cultural and Leadership Center. As we often did when together, we discussed insights from our shared journey, relished in the depth of our connections to one another, and felt the importance of our history and culture. The meeting was catered by Bernadette Lucero of Pepita's, LLC, a San Luis business owner whose family has been in *El Valle* for many generations. She prepared *chile verde y frijoles* (pork green chile and beans), *enchiladas*, *biscochitos* (traditional anise cookies), and sweet rice. The food helped us ground ourselves and show respect to our ancestors—it was almost as if they were in the room encouraging our work that is rooted in our unique cultural heritage.



Shooting Stars Cultural and Leadership Center, South Alamosa

From left to right: Carlos Martinez, Jaime Dominguez, Cec Ortiz, Gayle Warner, Aaron Abeyta, Lisa Lucero, Cristalray Dominguez, Rachel Griego, Kim Sanchez, Ronda Lobato, Anna Lee Vargas, Johanna Leyba, Esteban Salazar

The San Luis Valley has always been a place of contact between multiple cultures and a true borderland. Nestled between expansive mountain ranges and the Rio Grande River, it is the largest alpine valley in the world. Many of our families in *El Valle* have Indigenous roots tied to the Ute, Comanche, Hopi, Jicarilla Apache, Navajo, Pueblo, and Kiowa. Some of these tribes regard the Valley as their sacred, ancestral homeland and tell stories of the mastodons hunted by their Paleo-Indian ancestors. Simultaneously, we are descendants of the Spanish colonizers who lay claim to the area in the 16th century. After Mexico declared its independence, *El Valle* became the northernmost expansion point of the Mexican frontier. Our people have a rich and intricate cultural identity that reflects our complex history.



Car Show at Adams State University in collaboration with Soul Players of the Valley, celebrating the many facets of our local history.

Mexico gained its independence from Spain in 1821. Shortly afterwards, the Mexican government began offering exceptionally large land grants to Hispano families, so as to permanently settle and fortify its northernmost border. For example, a large tract of common land, known as *La Sierra*, was granted to the *pobladores* (settlers) in 1844 to be used for grazing, hunting, and fishing. In the spring of 1852 these settlers began construction on an *acequia*—a communally operated irrigation system unique to former Spanish colonies. Today the *acequia* is governed by a community water board and managed by a *mayordomo* (caretaker) who allocates the water based on priority water rights. The *acequia* and common lands have bonded the community and shaped our form of governance. Both are more than agricultural tools; they are also a means of survival that guide a culture of resource-sharing, hard work, and mutual support.

In 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo transferred an enormous segment of the Southwest, including southern Colorado, to the U.S. government. This paved the way for an influx of European settlers to the area, including more of our Hispano ancestors. However, the U.S. did not always honor our Hispano land grant rights promised in the Treaty. Adding insult to injury, many incoming Anglo-Americans did not respect the fact

that we Hispanos were now U.S. citizens and swindled us out of our land and water rights. In response, our people banded together to fight against discriminatory attitudes, resist aggressive land barons, and stand up to mine owners and railroad operators. Stories of our fights against tyranny, such as the legend of *La Mano Negra*, are part of our folklore. As we shared in the previous chapter, *La Mano Negra* were a group of heroes, or *vigilantes*, who resisted the encroachments and violations of the incoming American settlers so as to defend our land and people.

Our Hispano ancestors in *El Valle* faced discrimination and segregation. To combat these injustices, Hispano communities across the Southwest established mutual-aid societies. Antonito is home to the founding chapter, Concilio Numero Uno, and the headquarters for La Sociedad Protección Mutua de Trabajadores Unidos (SPMDTU), the oldest Hispano mutual-aid society in the U.S., founded in 1900. Other chapters were subsequently established throughout *El Valle*, providing a lasting network of protection, self-defense, insurance, support, and cultural celebration.

Another important story about our early struggles and victories is the 1941 Maestas Case (*Francisco Maestas et al. v. George H. Shone et al.*). A decade before the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), Hispano families in Alamosa came together to fight back against the racial segregation of their children in the public schools. The court ruled in their favor, forcing the district to integrate. It is the earliest known successful legal case brought by Mexican-Americans over school segregation and a prime example of our commitment to Latino civil rights.

Our history attests to the fact that *El Valle* has always been a place of diversity and strength. Our people's Indigenous, Spanish, and Mexican roots have played a major role in influencing our food, farming practices, religion, art, and overall culture. In fact, our unique 17th-century Spanish dialect is still spoken by 35% of our population. We are proud that *El Valle* is home to Colorado's oldest communities, oldest churches, only communal pasture, and first water right. Beginning with the land grants, our families have continued to thrive thanks to our communal way of life and strong cultural ties.



Mount Blanca, San Luis Valley, photo by Johanna Leyba

Nuestras Comunidades (Our Communities)

San Luis, considered the oldest incorporated municipality in Colorado (although the town of Guadalupe may be older), was permanently settled in 1851 by ten families from Taos, New Mexico according to the rights and privileges awarded them from the Mexican government's *Sangre de Cristo* Land Grant.



Members and Volunteers, SPV, San Luis
From left to right: Lucas Casias, Lisa Casias, Amber Maestas, Feliciano Lobato,
Ronda Lobato, Estefanita De laTorre, Tania Portillo, Dana Maestas



Sierras y Colores by Carlos Sandoval, San Luis

The **Capulin** area was settled in the 1860s by early *pobladores* (Hispano settlers) that came to the San Luis Valley from Ojo Caliente, New Mexico. The unincorporated town was officially established in 1867. In the early 1900s, St. Joseph's Church (1878) was rebuilt by skilled Hispano craftsmen using local sandstones.



St. Joseph's Church, Capulin



Steering Committee Members, SPV, Capulin

From left to right: Armando Valdez, Karen Hinojos, Anna Lee Vargas, Estevan Vega

Alamosa and **Antonito** were founded later in 1878 and 1880, respectively, in large part due to the nearby discovery of silver and gold. The Denver and Rio Grande Railway played a major role in the development of these towns. The Cumbres and Toltec Narrow Gauge Railroad, which connects them, remains a popular tourist attraction today. Centrally located in El Valle, Alamosa is now its largest city.



Denver and Rio Grande Railroad Depot, Alamosa



Shooting Stars Cultural & Leadership Center Building, S. Alamosa



La Sociedad Protección Mutua de Trabajadores Unidos (SPMDTU), Antonito

Before they were officially established, the communities of Alamosa and Antonito were already home to Hispano settlers who worked the land as farmers and shepherders. In the late-nineteenth-century Range Wars, newly arrived Anglo cattlemen antagonized the Hispano shepherders as they vied for access to grazing lands—lands that the Hispanos had always held in common. Today, the San Luis Valley remains rooted in agriculture and the stock-raising of sheep and cattle.



Abeyta sheep being rescued from a blizzard, photo by Aaron Abeyta

Where We Are Now: The San Luis Valley Today

As you drive through the San Luis Valley and our towns, it is clear that the settlement patterns established by the Mexican Land Grants continue to shape the San Luis Valley as does the vibrant Hispano culture of our people. Our intricate history, in combination with our geographic isolation, has resulted in a distinctive culture that is unique even among Latinos in the United States.

Brought by the early Spanish settlers, Catholicism has been the dominant religion in *El Valle* for centuries, and its influence can be seen in the region's art, architecture, and traditions. Our towns have many murals that incorporate both Catholic and Indigenous iconography. The food we grow reflects our Indo-Mexican heritage, as shown in the dinner we shared at Shooting Stars in Alamosa. We are also known for our use of many *remedios* (home remedies), shared with us by local Indigenous tribes, that are based on native plants, such as the osha root. Perhaps the most cherished aspect of our culture is the unique dialect of Spanish that many of us speak. Similar to the language spoken by our 17th-century Spanish ancestors, it is combined with many words from the Aztec/Nahuatl language.



Wild Antonito by David Ocelotl Garcia, Cafe del Valle, Antonito

Our Intention Moving Forward

The past triumphs and spirit of *La Gente del Valle* make us who we are today. This can be seen in the community organizing efforts of the Soul Players of the Valley and the four communities we represent. It is our intention to revitalize and preserve the beauty of our ancestral way of life, create new opportunities, and build on the strength of our people.

Note: To read an extended version of *Nuestra Historia*, please see Appendix A on page 52 or contact Rachel Griego at RGriego@lacioncfc.org.

CHAPTER THREE

Environmental Scan: What the Existing Data Reveals

Walking through any one of our four towns, there are common threads that connect us through history and culture, and yet we each have our own unique stories to tell. Our expansive landscapes are steeped in agricultural traditions, and our main streets are surrounded by historical buildings, while many of our homes are made out of adobe brick that has stood for well over a hundred years. Many of the businesses that remain have been passed down through many generations. Beyond what you can see on the outside, there is a deeper story.

Using existing demographic data, the Soul Players of the Valley developed an environmental scan that provides a snapshot depicting the conditions of Latinos living in the San Luis Valley today.



R&R Market, San Luis, photo by Mike Rosso

Our Story as Told Through the Existing Data

Many who are not familiar with the area are not aware that *El Valle* has a larger percentage of Latino residents (46.1%) than the state of Colorado (21%). With a larger population of Latinos, it is not surprising that 22% of our people speak Spanish, much more than in Colorado as a whole where 11% speak Spanish overall. The number of Latinos (and Spanish speakers) are even higher (proportionately) in each of our four towns, ranging from over 50% Latino in Alamosa to 87% in Antonito.

Challenging widely held assumptions regarding Latinos, the majority of us living in *El Valle* are not immigrants but, instead, primarily come from families dating back many generations with ties to the land. Over half (56%) of our residents in *El Valle* were born in Colorado.

Currently, the San Luis Valley is made up of an older population. A median age of 38.9 paired with a 9.6% decrease in residents under the age of 18 between the years 2016–2020 indicates that our population is trending older than is typical. There has also been a net negative migration of families with children moving into *El Valle*.

Major economic drivers in our region include government, agriculture, and healthcare, which account for 50% of employment in the San Luis Valley. The percentages of employment by economic sector are as follows:

- 20.9% of Valley residents work for the government
- 16.2% work in agriculture
- 12.7% work in health services
- 9.3% work in retail
- 7.8% work in accommodation and food services

Despite these various local industries, our residents face economic challenges and are more likely to live in poverty than others in Colorado. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, over 40% of San Luis Valley residents live below 200% of the poverty line, and much of the region is classified as “persistently poor.” The impacts of poverty hit the Latino population in *El Valle* hardest, where 52.6% of Latinos live below 185% of the poverty line compared to 27.8% of whites.

Poverty Indicators in the San Luis Valley vs. Colorado

Indicators	San Luis Valley	Colorado
Unemployment	8.5%	4.6%
Median Household Income	\$41,973	\$75,231
Lack a High School Diploma	12%	7.9%
Bachelor or Advanced Degree	29.4%	41.7%
Lack Health Insurance	11.5%	7.8%

Our economic conditions have been exacerbated by the recent effects of climate change, extended drought cycles, and competing demands for water. Since agriculture is a major economic driver in the region, our livelihoods depend on preserving our water resources and using sustainable farming practices.

Also compounding the challenges of persistent poverty, there is a lack of affordable housing, leaving many of us to either commute long distances or live close to our jobs in subpar conditions. According to a San Luis Valleywide Needs Assessment:

“Half of renters and a quarter of homeowners are considered ‘rent or mortgage burdened,’ spending more than 30% of their income on housing.”

Demographic and Economic Trends in Each of the Four Towns

In comparison to Latinos at the state level, and within the San Luis Valley as a whole, our communities face even deeper challenges. When zeroing in on data at the town level, it becomes clear that there is a significantly greater Latino population by percentage who face even higher rates of poverty.

Demographics & Economics: Statistical Overview for Antonito, Capulin, San Luis, South Alamosa, and Colorado*

Towns	Antonito	Capulin	San Luis	Alamosa	Colorado
Total Population	857	134	622	9494	5.8 million
% Hispanic or Latino	77%	86%	87%	54%	22%
Spanish Spoken at home	44%	24%	59%	26%	11%
Median Age	52.5 (25% 65)	35.5	48.9 (37% 65+)	28.6 (10% 65)	37.6
Disability Rate	27%	17%	33%	18%	11%
% children under 18 years of age	14%	6%	16%	24%	21%
Median Household Income	\$27,686	--	\$26,090	\$38,000	\$75,231
Employment Rate	44%	--	36%	59%	64%
Below 100% of Poverty Line	30%	--	31%	25%	8%
% Uninsured	11.5%	--	9.6%	11.5%	8%
% Homeownership	72%	--	54%	39%	67%

*The more specific the data set (and the smaller the sample size), the larger the margin of statistical error may be. Therefore, some indicators may be less accurate, and a few are not included at all due to insufficient sample size.

Stories the Data Doesn't Tell

Knowing our various communities face their own unique challenges that traditional data collection will miss, first hand knowledge from community members can fill in the gaps. For example, homes and land sold in our communities are often transferred between family members (or inherited) and are not recorded as a sale or are sold at below market prices between family members. Such occurrences make for inaccurate housing/land comparables that do not reflect a true market value. This can impact people's ability to borrow and sell assets at a "real value."

Overall, our research has confirmed what we have always known—that our communities are largely made up of Latinos with deep ties to the land, who often speak Spanish and often face higher rates of persistent poverty. Given this backdrop, it is not surprising that our towns are lacking economic opportunities and have declining populations. To dive deeper into the story of our communities, we engaged in a community-driven data collection process. The purpose was to ask community members what they see as the most pressing issues rather than relying on the incomplete picture provided by the existing data.

LESSONS LEARNED

The Soul Players of the Valley were mindful that when working in small rural communities, we faced challenges in gathering accurate data. We realized just how limiting the existing data can be, depending on who has gathered the data and for what purposes. LCFC reminded us that owning and collecting our own data is an important and powerful tool for our work, now and in the future. It allows us to ensure that the story being told holds true to our lived experiences.

LCFC learned that when collecting existing data it is important to:

- **Bring on board a researcher early in the process so that they can familiarize themselves with the community and pull the appropriate data sets**
- **Recognize that traditional data sets (such as the U.S. Census) can be limiting, especially for rural communities that do not reflect the broader demographics of the counties in which they are located**
- **Look to foundations, local organizations, and media outlets for more specific and accurate information**

On a broader scale, LCFC sees that there is a need for centralized Latino data collection at the state level.

CHAPTER FOUR

La Voz de la Comunidad (The Voice of the Community): Assessments and Strategic Plans for Change

"People do surveys and questionnaires and maybe we see them again or not and maybe we see the results or we don't. It's something that gets done TO us. With participatory research, we are the ones doing the research and empowering ourselves and working with our community to collect, analyze, and make recommendations...What it does is put the power of the data in the hands of the community. You control how the data is used and distributed and who has access to it. Data holds power...YOU are building the narrative in this way."

– Carlos Martinez, CEO, LCFC (addressing the Soul Players of the Valley)

The day we began surveying our community members in San Luis was like any other Saturday. The sun rose, the animals were fed, and breakfast was prepared. But what was different was that local residents, recruited by us Soul Players of the Valley, were going door-to-door asking their *vecinos* (neighbors) to complete our survey. We made sure to include all of San Luis's surrounding villages. One elderly resident in the village of San Acacio rarely leaves her home or interacts with people other than her family, which is not uncommon among us. On this Saturday, however, she got reacquainted with her *vecina's* nephew who was asking her to share her insights about life in San Acacio and what she thought were the most important things for the community to address. After initially feeling a bit uneasy, she opened up, shared her opinions, and felt a huge sense of pride to see young people so engaged.

The data collection that the Soul Players of the Valley obtained through community assessments represents the voices and wishes of our people. It is *el corazón* (the heart) of this project—a representation of our hopes and dreams. The picture it paints tells us what we know about ourselves and what our communities feel are our most pressing needs. Together with our communities, we are the owners and keepers of this data. We will use it to build a future that honors who we are.

It is of the utmost importance to the leadership structure and a collective decision-making process, we set out to connect with our neighbors, *La Gente del Valle*. Through community assessments and shareback events, we gathered the quantitative and qualitative data we needed to create our community strategic plans for change, which we present at the end of this chapter.

Our People, Our Charge: A Communal Approach to Data Collection

"It's so important to involve your community so they have a voice. You need to wait for your community to be involved. It can create problems if the community is not informed. It is a vital piece of the project."

– Ronda Lobato, SPV Steering Committee Member, San Luis

Being San Luis Valley residents ourselves, we knew it was crucial to establish our community members' trust before collecting data from them. As previously mentioned, our people have felt disrespected by outside entities collecting data about us in the past. Being intentional about the way we presented ourselves and engaged with our vecinos helped us simultaneously build community through face-to-face connection, reclaim our power, and take ownership of our own story.

We, as the Soul Players of the Valley, therefore engaged in a careful and intentional six-month-long, community-driven data collection process. LCFC provided us with a model for this approach. Rachel Griego, Senior Vice President at LCFC, presented three key elements needed to conduct a respectful and ethical community assessment:

1. **Permiso** (asking permission)
2. **Conocimiento** (gaining and sharing knowledge and awareness)
3. **El Baile** (engaging in the dance with the community)

We operated with the understanding that, collectively, *La Gente del Valle* know best what we need and how to reach our goals. What began as a data collection process concluded with a heightened understanding and appreciation for the power of owning the process and the outcomes.

Community Assessment Process: Surveys & Analysis

Early in our process, all four towns partnered with the Aurora Research Institute (ARI) because of their commitment to respect, cultural competence, and collaboration. In addition to collaborating with us on data collection, ARI provided the Soul Players of the Valley with knowledge and skills that contributed to our capacity-building efforts. Few of us had ever helped develop a survey, let alone administer one! ARI supported us in developing surveys for each town focusing on our specific needs and priorities.

We, then, recruited local residents as surveyors to go door-to-door, attend community events, and visit local churches—ensuring we weren't serving as unintentional gatekeepers. We garnered widespread participation by bringing as many individuals as possible to the table, inviting everyone to make decisions and take action. In these ways, our data collection was done by *La Gente del Valle*, for *La Gente del Valle*.

When it came time to synthesize and analyze the data, ARI compiled reports and presentations for the towns of San Luis and South Alamosa. Meanwhile, the towns of Capulin and Antonito worked with the Institute for Research in the Social Sciences (IRISS) at Colorado State University to complete their syntheses and analyses and compile reports.

We were able to confirm the following areas of need within our communities: central gathering places to house programs and services, youth activities, health services (especially for mental health and substance use), economic opportunities, and cultural preservation. Small towns in rural locations often lack many services and have many needs. It is therefore not surprising that we found such a broad spectrum of priorities in each community. The truly impactful part of this process came when we sat down to look at the data together and reflect on its meaning in the form of community sharebacks.

Our Communities Respond: Shareback Events Bring Healing and Collective Action

"My abuelito and abuelita (grandpa and grandma) used to tell us that this is the way a community is supposed to work together. Uno pa'l otro, como la gente. (Be like our ancestors, for each other with respect.)" – Aaron Abeyta, SPV, Antonito

The Soul Players of the Valley facilitated community sharebacks with our local residents in all four towns. As our communities gathered, we followed the communal form of self-governance used by our ancestors. We shared meals, discussed our personal lives, and opened our hearts to one another. All generations took a seat at the table, and our children played as we viewed presentations of the data we had collected together.



Community Data Shareback, Capulin,
St. Joseph's Church

"To be able to share makes us that much stronger, individually that's how you move the needle. Makes us that much more resilient. I love the community feel."
– Anna Lee Vargas, SPV Steering Committee Member, Capulin

Our facilitators highlighted the key findings from the surveys, which meant that if you took a survey you would now see the actual results projected on the screen and in a printed report. The data collectors did not disappear, nor did the data! It was powerful to see data designed to serve us, collected by us, and owned by us.

We began to discuss and grapple with what we collectively saw as the key priorities in each town and across *El Valle*. Sometimes we were compelled to fill in gaps or inconsistencies we noticed in the statistical findings, making the picture that the data painted more complete and nuanced. Other times, the data brought up difficult feelings, which we processed together and then found a path forward.

For example, in Antonito, residents discussed the factors that underlie the challenges facing our community as represented in the data results. Poverty and land loss were at the top of this list, and residents also expressed the extent to which these systemic disadvantages have impacted our collective emotional well-being. The Soul Players of the Valley–Antonito have, therefore, been careful to address these underlying factors by prioritizing economic development, affordable housing, and mental health.



Aaron Abeyta, SPV, with Marsha Barela
at the Community Data Shareback in Antonito

It became clear to us that creating our own data that we could review, synthesize, and share was healing and transformative for our communities. It has been a crucial step in building our community power. The Soul Players of the Valley commit to continuing to grow an ethos of trust, belonging, and collaborative authority as we continue to make change happen. Through our community assessment process, our four towns and surrounding villages defined our ultimate goals for change.



Community Data Shareback in South Alamosa



Community Data Shareback in San Luis



OUR VISION

The Soul Players of the Valley will have thriving communities—Antonito, Capulin, San Luis, and South Alamosa—by providing promising futures to our youth, improving behavioral and physical health, promoting fiscal autonomy, creating sustainable job opportunities, stemming the exodus of home-grown talent, and reinvigorating cultural and civic pride for our Latino residents of all ages.

OUR MISSION

To collaborate and leverage resources to improve the overall well-being of Latinos in our communities.

A Roadmap for the Future: Moving from Assessing to Strategic Planning

"Through this process we find ways to lean on each other, find common needs, and allow for freedom for individual needs. It's a sort of hybrid between collaboration and independence. I see it as a nice compliment...We can branch out and work on other things parallel to one another. There is an opportunity through the Soul Players of the Valley to work collectively and separately." – Armando Valdez, SPV, Capulin

We, the Soul Players of the Valley, represent the collective voices and stories of our communities. After five years of hard work and dedication, we have condensed these stories, collected through community assessment, into four local and one shared Community Strategic Plan for Change. These plans identify the paths we will take to create the change our communities want to see—encompassing our most cherished values and our greatest needs.

As mentioned previously, we envision that the resources and services that each town aspires to provide will be offered through newly established or revitalized community centers. These community centers will be a hub for youth enrichment, health resources, economic development, and cultural celebration serving all generations. To accomplish this, we anticipate hiring up to twenty-seven employees over approximately three years in a phased approach. The jobs created will be equally available to each community, with some employees working across all four towns and others housed in one location, so that we can most effectively leverage our collaborations and resources.

The Soul Players of the Valley began our work bringing individuals and communities together, driven by shared concerns and a vision for progress. The group evolved from independent individuals and communities into a coalition committed to making change around shared goals and strategies. Our coalition will continue to evolve and work to build broader collective power as we commit to working together across our four towns to uncover new ways to collaborate and pool resources. We will be finding new partners and searching for new opportunities to grow our movement.

On the following page, we illustrate the combined results of our four local and one Collective Community Strategic Plan for Change. It was easy to recognize that so many of our communities identified similar priorities with only a few unique ones in each town. This set us up perfectly to move forward *juntos* (together) in seeking funding to support shared resources across all four communities, while also allowing us to pursue more specific endeavors locally. To read the extended versions of each local community plan, please refer to Appendices B, C, D, and E on pages 58-102 or contact Rachel Griego at RGriego@lacioncfc.org. To read the full Collective Community Strategic Plan for Change, please refer to Appendix F on page 103.

LESSONS LEARNED



The Soul Players of the Valley gained skills and knowledge in developing and administering our surveys. Specifically, we now know we can:

- **Strategize the best ways to reach as many of our neighbors as possible.**
- **Provide energy for our movement by providing communal space to connect, share food, and discuss our deepest fears and greatest hopes**
- **Push the usual suspects—the community doers—to connect with others who are just as passionate and willing to put in hard work to help our communities**

Having been the first time LCFC engaged with a community at this level, we learned that it is important to:

- **Identify culturally-competent evaluators who are enthusiastically committed to using Community Democracy principles**
- **Engage these evaluators from the very beginning of the work so they can familiarize themselves with the communities and help shape the process**
- **Maintain flexibility to make sure that things run smoothly without holding up the next step of creating plans for change**

La Gente del Valle

Collective Community Strategic Plan

Estamos Juntos

Shared Priorities and Goals

ANTONITO'S UNIQUE PRIORITIES

- Public Safety
- Affordable Housing
- Financial and Job Security

CAPULIN'S UNIQUE PRIORITIES

- Financial Literacy
- Community Infrastructure

1 Local Community Centers

Goal 1: Provide a new or revitalized community center in each town

2 Youth Engagement & Development

Goal 2: Provide enrichment and development for our youth

3 Health Services

Goal 3: Improve the mental, behavioral, physical health of our residents, with emphasis on substance use disorders

4 Economic Development

Goal 4: Improve the economic conditions that impact our quality of life

5 Cultural Preservation & Celebration

Goal 5: Support ongoing cultural preservation, education, and celebrations

SAN LUIS'S UNIQUE PRIORITIES

- Adult Education
- Affordable Housing
- Small Business Development

S. ALAMOSA'S UNIQUE PRIORITIES

- Youth Leadership & Workforce Readiness
- Public Safety
- Civic Engagement

CHAPTER FIVE

Caminar con Nosotros (Walk with Us): An Invitation to Join Our Transformational Journey

"What's really exciting about having witnessed this process is that it has created a movement in the Valley. As a descendant whose family had to leave the area to find work, it is really heartwarming to see a new energy and momentum building around the Soul Players of the Valley that's attracting attention and new potential partners." – Johanna Leyba, Advisor and Consultant

The Soul Players of the Valley have come to the end of our 5-year-long planning process, but our journey is just beginning. We set out to ensure change would take place on our terms. Along the way, we learned a great deal about ourselves. We gained new friends, forged new partnerships, and adopted a new approach to change that puts us in the driver's seat. Reigniting a flame within ourselves, we now know the full value of the intimate knowledge we bring to the table as local leaders.

We are steadfast in our commitment to always be true to who we are and to our community values, always honoring our ancestors and our people. This is what drives us to build our collective power, provide new opportunities, and make lasting, impactful change for *La Gente del Valle*. In this regard, our original goals remain unchanged.

Having laid the foundation for a broad regional movement, we see our accomplishments as our jumping off point! This document serves as a record of our process, our growth, our vision, and our plans to begin transforming our hometowns and the San Luis Valley. In essence, it is a solid start to the planning that will culminate in the implementation of our local and shared community strategic plans. Moving forward, we will approach and welcome institutional partners from a place of power and self-determination.

*"I have **gained knowledge**. What LCFC has taught us. What the goals are and the planning process. Reaching out to other people and other funders. I've met a lot more people through them."* - Karen Hinojos, SPV, Capulin

The Soul Players of the Valley are grateful to the Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) for being willing to do something new: flip their approach upside down and give us funding to support a process that is outside of their traditional funding guidelines. With pride, we share the news that DOLA has funded our next phase of infrastructure building, continued planning, and implementation. In addition, we are thankful for the innovative partnerships we have formed with the Colorado Health Foundation, the Colorado Housing and Finance Authority, and especially with our *familia* at the Latino Community Foundation of Colorado who walked *mano y mano* with us through it all!

We are encouraged by the growing interest in our work, and we hope others will join us on our transformative journey to build community power. Together we can reimagine what partnerships between communities and institutions can accomplish! We, therefore, welcome new partners who have open hearts, who want to evolve, and who will support our community-driven approach to create lasting change in some of Colorado's oldest and most vibrant communities.

***To learn more, or to walk alongside us,
please contact:***

**Jamie Dominguez, Soul Players of the Valley at
shootingstarsslv@gmail.com**



**Rachel Griego, Senior Vice President, Community
Innovation & Strategic Partnerships at
RGriego@Latinocfc.org**



latinocfc.org

KEY PLAYERS

Soul Players of the Valley Steering Committee

Antonito

Aaron Abeyta
Jennifer Sandoval

Capulin

Armando Valdez
Karen Hinojos
Anna Lee Vargas
Estevan Vega, Youth Representative

San Luis

Dana Maestas*
Feliciano Lobato, Youth Representative
Ronda Lobato
Juanita and Jose Martinez

South Alamosa

Cristalray Dominguez
Jamie Dominguez
Lisa Lucero
Esteban Salazar

* Dana Maestas was hired as the Community Planning Manager for SPV.

Key Partners and Advisors

Latino Community Foundation of Colorado

Cec Ortiz and Garland Yates, National Advisors

Department of Local Affairs

Colorado Health Foundation

Colorado Housing and Finance Authority

Johanna Leyba, Kim Sanchez, Gayle Warner, and Sarah Olivier, Diarists/Evaluators

Aurora Research Institute

Institute for Research in the Social Sciences, Colorado State University

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OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS

The Soul Players of the Valley identified partners with whom we will continue to collaborate and/or strengthen our partnerships across all four towns. Some of these partners include:

Adams State University

Alamosa Housing Authority

Alamosa County

Alamosa School District

Alcoholics Anonymous/Al-Anon/Drug Anonymous Support Groups

Centennial School District

City of Alamosa

Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service

Colorado State University, San Luis Valley Area Extension

Conejos County

Conejos County Commissioners

Costilla County 4-H

Costilla County Commissioners

Costilla County Conservancy District

Costilla County Economic Development Council

Family Leadership Training I
Institute at Colorado State University
Family Leadership Training Institute–San Luis Valley
HadaNōu Collective
Justice Heritage Academy
Main Street San Luis
North Conejos School District
Queen of Peace Community Center, Saint Joseph’s Parish
Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area
San Luis Valley Behavioral Health
San Luis Valley Great Outdoors (SLV GO!)
Shooting Stars Cultural and Leadership Community Center
South Central Colorado Seniors
Town of Antonito
Town of San Luis
Valley Courier
Valley-Wide Health Systems, San Luis Valley Health
WFA (Wilderness First Aid) training and certificates



APPENDIX A

Nuestra Historia (Our History): A Tour of the San Luis Valley Past and Present (Extended Version)

As the largest alpine valley in the world, the San Luis Valley has always been a point of contact between cultures and races. Its fertile lands are nestled between expansive mountain ranges and the Rio Grande River. While several Native American peoples consider the Valley their ancestral home, the region also represents the northernmost expansion of the Spanish Colonial and Mexican frontier. *El Valle*, as it is known to us locals, is home to Colorado's oldest communities, oldest churches, only communal pasture, and first water right.¹

An international border crossed over our Hispano people when the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) moved a portion of the U.S.–Mexico border from central Colorado down south to the Rio Grande. A true borderland, *El Valle* is a place of diversity and resilience. While some families have Native American roots, the area's Spanish and Mexican history has played a major role in influencing our food, folklore, farming practices, religion, art, and overall culture. In fact, a unique dialect of 17th-century Spanish is still spoken by about 35% of our population—a marker of our distinctive Hispano/Latino heritage.

Indigenous Histories Predating European Contact

The San Luis Valley has a long and rich history, dating back to the Paleo-Indians who lived here 11,000 years ago. It has been home to many Native Americans, including the Ute, Comanche, Hopi, Jicarilla Apache, Navajo, Pueblo, and Kiowa, several of whom regard the Valley as their sacred, ancestral homeland.

The Ute are considered to be the oldest residents of the Valley, and they played a large role in shaping its history. The Ute Trail, a network of trails that connected the Front Range to the San Luis Valley, was an important part of Ute culture and helped to connect the sacred landscapes that remain integral to the Ute's heritage, spiritual beliefs, and worldview today. Other Native American tribes and early European colonizers relied on the Ute's knowledge of the land to survive.

¹ Early in Colorado's history water became a vital commodity and beginning in 1887, water rights were granted for use. The water rights granted under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo were later recognized as the first water right retroactively to 1852.

Spanish Period, 1598–1821

The Spanish were the first Europeans to explore and claim the San Luis Valley. They established settlements in the region in the 17th century, but faced resistance from the Ute and Comanche. In 1779, a Spanish war party led by Juan Bautista de Anza defeated Comanche warriors led by Chief Cuerno Verde, precipitating a peace treaty. Following this, European trading posts began to dot the San Luis Valley as Spanish, French, and American fur traders increasingly traversed the area.

Over the course of 400 years, the flags of three nations flew over the San Luis Valley: Spain, Mexico, and the United States. With deep roots in the area, many of our Hispano families from *El Valle* were born, raised, and died under multiple governments without having moved an inch. These colonial governing changes each posed different challenges to our well-being and land ownership.

Mexican Period and Land Grants, 1821–1848

After gaining its independence from Spain in 1821, Mexico offered land grants in order to permanently settle and fortify its northernmost frontier. These grants were exceptionally large and included communal lands on which multiple families lived and shared resources. Our ancestors, the original Hispano inhabitants of these land grants, incorporated the following common elements: *plazas* (villages), *varas* (long-lot agricultural fields), *hornos* (dome-shaped outdoor ovens), *acequias* (communal irrigation systems), adobe brick buildings, and Roman Catholic village churches.

Two land grants of particular importance to the Soul Players of the Valley, because we still live on the land today, are the Conejos Land Grant and the Sangre de Cristo Land Grant. The Conejos Land Grant was given in 1833 and settled by Hispano immigrants from Abiquiú and Ojo Caliente. The Sangre de Cristo Land Grant was received in 1843 by Stephen Luis Lee and Narciso Beaubien, two Hispano men from the Taos valley in New Mexico. Narciso's father, Carlos Beaubien, took over the grant and helped to settle the territory following the death of his son in the 1847 Taos Revolt, a populist insurrection by Hispano and Pueblo allies against the U.S. occupation of present-day New Mexico.

A large tract of common land—known as *La Sierra*—to be used for grazing, fishing, hunting, and gathering wood that includes the 14,000-foot Culebra Peak was granted to the *pobladores* (settlers) by the Mexican government in 1844. A communal grazing ground known as *La Vega*, which is a part of the original 1843 Sangre de Cristo Land Grant, remains one of the true commons in the U.S. today. These common lands held the community together and shaped our form of governance for generations to come.

Our Hispano ancestors also built acequias, which is a communally operated irrigation system unique to former Spanish colonies in the region. *Acequia* culture is a means of survival and a system of governance built on an ethic of resource-sharing, hard work, and mutual support. In *El Valle*, the communal land, along with the water, which together form the *acequias*, are to this day used to irrigate our fields and raise cattle.

This irrigation system is governed by our community water board and managed by a *mayordomo* (caretaker/steward) who allocates the water based on priority water rights.

The 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and Its Aftermath

The San Luis Valley was part of northern Mexico from 1821–1848, but that ended with the Mexican-American War. In the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Mexico ceded a vast territory including much of the Southwest to the U.S. government, forever changing the lives of our people living in the San Luis Valley. The U.S. government secured its rule in the area, forcing the Ute out of the San Luis Valley, thereby paving the way for an influx of settlers to the area.

Throughout the 1850s, more Hispano settlers migrated to *El Valle*. However, the U.S. government did not always honor our Hispano ancestors' land grant rights even though they had promised to do so in the Treaty. Moreover, many incoming Anglo-Americans did not respect the fact that the Hispanos were now American citizens, and they denied them equal opportunities. In response, our people banded together to fight against discriminatory attitudes, resist aggressive land barons, and stand up to acquisitive mine owners and railroad operators.

The Settlement of the Valley's First Communities: San Luis, Guadalupe, and Capulin, 1850s–1860s

The oldest incorporated municipality in Colorado, San Luis, was permanently settled in 1851 by ten families from Taos, New Mexico according to the rights and privileges awarded them from the Sangre de Cristo Land Grant. The Sangre de Cristo church was built in 1850. In the spring of 1852, the settlers began construction on an *acequia* adjacent to *La Vega*. Named the San Luis People's Ditch, this *acequia* is the first priority water right in the state of Colorado.

In addition to San Luis, Guadalupe is one of the first communities established in *El Valle* (and may be the oldest). Guadalupe is located just north of Antonito. Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, an excellent example of the Spanish Colonial Revival style, still serves our predominantly Hispano parish and has been a focal point of our community events since its founding in the 1850s.

The Capulin area was settled in the 1860s by early *pobladores* (Hispano settlers) that came to the *El Valle* from Ojo Caliente, New Mexico. The unincorporated town was officially established in 1867. In the early 1900s, St. Joseph's Church (1878) was rebuilt in the Gothic Revival style by skilled Hispano craftsmen using local stones. The name Capulin means "chokecherry," which is an abundant wild berry used to make jam, syrup, and wine that grows in Northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado. Vigil Farms, built in 1876, is a Centennial Farm¹ that is still operated by the same family today.

¹ A Centennial Farm is a historical designation presented by History Colorado and the Colorado Department of Agriculture to a farm, currently in operation, that has belonged to the same family for at least 100 years.

The Gold Rush and the Railroads: Alamosa and Antonito, 1870s–1900s

Alamosa and Antonito were founded in 1878 and 1880 respectively due to the discovery of silver and gold in the surrounding mountains. The Denver and Rio Grande Railway played a major role in the development of these towns, and the Cumbres and Toltec Narrow Gauge Railroad, which connects them, is a popular tourist attraction today. Centrally located in *El Valle*, Alamosa is now our largest city. South Alamosa refers specifically to a group of Latino neighborhoods located south of Main St. in the larger city of Alamosa.

Before our communities of Alamosa and Antonito were officially established, they were already home to Hispano settlers who worked the land as farmers and sheepherders. In the late-nineteenth-century Range Wars that followed, newly arrived Anglo cattlemen antagonized the Hispano sheepherders as they vied for access to grazing lands—lands that our Hispano ancestors had always held in common. Today, our economy remains rooted in agriculture and the stock-raising of sheep and cattle.

Early Latino Grassroots Organizing in El Valle

Our Hispano ancestors in the San Luis Valley faced discrimination and segregation. To combat these injustices, Hispano communities across the Southwest established mutual-aid societies. Antonito is home to the founding chapter, Concilio Numero Uno, and the headquarters for La Sociedad Protección Mutua de Trabajadores Unidos (SPMDTU), the oldest Hispano mutual-aid society in the U.S., founded in 1900. Other chapters were subsequently established throughout *El Valle*, providing a lasting network of protection, self-defense, insurance, support, and cultural celebration.

Alamosa Hispanos also have a history of addressing inequities. Few have heard of the 1914 Maestas Case (Francisco Maestas et al. v. George H. Shone et al.), the earliest known successful legal battle waged by Mexican-Americans to end school segregation. After years of organized protest, our Latino community in Alamosa won this precedent-setting case, forcing the public school district to integrate. Today, the Maestas Commemoration Committee honors this Latino legacy that is foundational to civil rights history in the U.S.

From Past to Present: Hispano Culture in *El Valle* Today

We have a rich religious, cultural, and linguistic history that has been shaped by our relative geographic isolation within a rural alpine valley as well as our Spanish and Indigenous heritage.

- Religion: Catholicism has been the dominant religion in *El Valle* for centuries, and its influence can be seen in our art, architecture, and traditions. For example, Los *Penitentes* is a Catholic brotherhood that performs religious rites and maintains tight local community bonds.

- Art: Our art is also influenced by our Catholic heritage. For example, *retablos* are devotional paintings depicting religious scenes that we place above altars. We have many murals that incorporate Catholic iconography or the history and culture of the area. *Colcha* is our traditional Spanish Colonial style of needlework.
- Food: The food grown in *El Valle* today reflects our Indo-Mexican heritage. This is reflected in the use of indigenous chile (green and red) and the wheat brought by the Spanish used for *tortillas*, *sopapillas* (fried pastry or bread), and *biscochitos* (cookies). The prevalence of lamb reflects our history of Mexican settlers bringing sheep to the area for summer pasture grazing.
- Remedies: We are also known for our use of many *remedios* (home remedies), shared with us by local Native American tribes, that are based on plants native to the area, such as osha root, and traditional ways of healing.
- Dialect: A cherished aspect of our culture is the unique dialect of Spanish many of us speak, which is quite similar to that spoken by our 17th-century Spanish ancestors. Our dialect also incorporates many words from the Aztec/Nahuatl language, while our local slang reflects the fact that we have always relied upon one another for everything. Instead of *Don* and *Doña*, we say *Mano* and *Mana*. Instead of *hermano/a*, we say *manito/a*, indicating we view one another as brothers and sisters, or *familia*, as we like to say.

Where We Are Now: The San Luis Valley Today

The settlement patterns established by the Mexican Land Grants continue to shape the San Luis Valley as does the vibrant Hispano, or Latino, culture of our residents. Many places of importance have been placed on the National Historic Register, including Our Lady of Guadalupe Church near Antonito, St. Joseph's in Capulin, and the entire town of San Luis.

The Sangre de Cristo Heritage Center is being renovated with support from the Colorado State Historical Fund. The Center plans to hold traditional festivals and art markets that reflect our Indo-Hispano culture. A historic theater inside the building will hold performances, events, and business development training for our local youth. In addition, the building now boasts a commercial kitchen that can be used by our residents to harvest and cook local traditional foods.

The R&R Market, Colorado's oldest grocery store, continues to be a community hub for our local residents in San Luis. Seven generations of Felix Romero's family have managed the R&R since it was built in 1857. With funding from The Colorado Health Foundation, the R&R is being turned into the San Luis People's Market, a cooperative that will continue the grocery store's legacy as a social and economic hub.

Today, Antonito is known for its many murals, most of them painted by Fred “Lightning Heart” Haberlein, who grew up and attended school in Antonito. This community also has a medical clinic, a newly built library, and the South Conejos Junior and Senior schools. In addition, Antonito is home to The Justice and Heritage Academy, a multi-aged community of learners (elementary through high school grades) co-taught by a cooperative of committed educators and parents.

Alamosa, *El Valle*’s largest town, is a gateway connecting natural and historical locations, such as the Great Sand Dunes, the Rio Grande River and Scenic Railroad, San Luis Valley Museum, the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, Wolf Creek Pass and Ski area, and the Rio Grande National Forest. Many new initiatives have influenced Alamosa’s growth. For example, the City of Alamosa is working on an ongoing revitalization project called “Downtown on the Rio.” Our city is home to Adams State University and Trinidad State College as well as one of two major hospitals in *El Valle*. In addition, Alamosa has many non-profits that bring resources to our community, such as the Boys and Girls Clubs, Shooting Stars Cultural and Leadership Center, La Gente, San Luis Valley Local Food Coalition, Mt. Blanca Music Conservatory, Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project, La Puente Home, Inc., Community Resources and Housing Development Corp., and the Community Foundation of the San Luis Valley.

Despite the United State’s forced removal of Native Americans from *El Valle* in the 1800s, the Ute, Pueblo, Jicarilla Apache, and Comanche still maintain strong cultural and spiritual ties to their ancestral lands here. Many of our families have Indigenous roots. Tribal representatives are partnering with local and national entities to restore their people’s relationship to the San Luis Valley.

Our Intention Moving Forward

The past triumphs and enduring spirit of *La Gente del Valle* make us who we are today. This can be seen in the community organizing efforts of the Soul Players of the Valley and the four communities we represent. It is our intention to revitalize and preserve the beauty of our ancestral way of life, create new opportunities, and build on the strength of our people.

APPENDIX B

ANTONITO:

Community Assessment, Shareback, and Community Strategic Plan for Change

Demographic Overview: Antonito

Antonito and our surrounding villages are predominantly Hispanic or Latino (77%) and include a large number of Spanish speakers (44%). Out of the four communities that the Soul Players of the Valley represent, Antonito has the oldest population with a median age of 52.5. We have the second highest rate of disability at 27% (after San Luis), which is much higher than Colorado's rate of disability, which is 11.2%. Despite these facts, we have the highest percentage of individuals lacking health insurance.

In comparison to our other communities, Antonito has the second lowest median income (after San Luis) and the second highest poverty rate (also after San Luis), yet a relatively higher rate of employment at 44%. (Only South Alamosa has a higher rate of employment.) Nevertheless, our rate of employment is still much lower than the state's (64%). A distinguishing fact about our town is that our homeownership rate, 72%, is even higher than the rate of homeownership in Colorado, 67%.

Antonito's Population at a Glance

Total population: 857

Percentage of population identifying as Hispanic or Latino: 77%

Spanish spoken at home: 44%

Median age: 52.5 (25% of population is 65+)

Disability rate: 27%

Percentage of population under the age of 18: 14%

Median household income: \$27,686

Employment rate: 44%

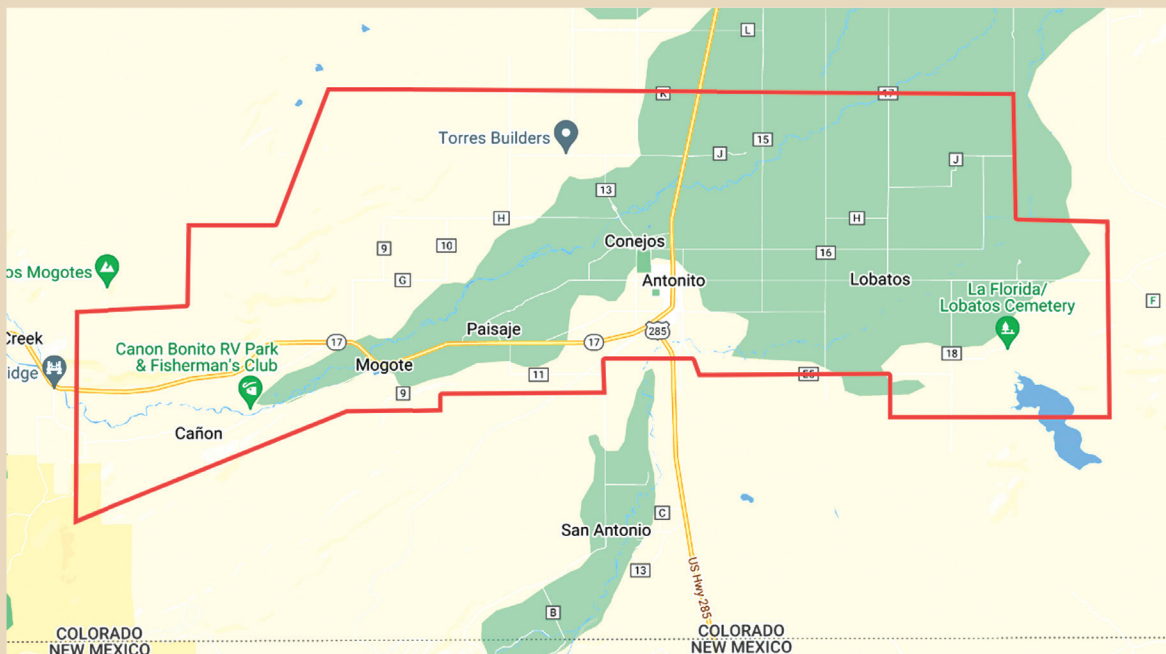
Below 100% of poverty line: 30%

Uninsured rate: 11.5%

Homeownership rate: 72%

Where We Live

Antonito lies just north of the New Mexico border on the Conejos River near the Rio Grande National Forest. The map below depicts the community of Antonito and our surrounding villages, where the majority of our survey respondents reside, with our survey boundaries shown in red. While Antonito residents comprised 65% of our survey respondents, Conejos comprised 15%, and Cañon and San Antonio comprised 5% each. We also had village residents from Las Mesitas, Lobatos, Guadalupe, La Jara, Mogote, La Isla, and Manassa participate. We want all of our villages to have a voice and stake in our community development plans.



Community Assessment: Data Findings for Antonito

The surveys that the Soul Players of the Valley–Antonito distributed to our community members asked them to rank the top areas where our community faces the most challenges and which resources would best address those challenges. The Institute for Research in the Social Sciences (IRISS) at Colorado State University provided us with statistical summaries and graphics that we use here to share our findings.

Antonito Community Priorities

The infographic below illustrates how Antonito community members rank the top priorities in our community. **A need for community and youth activities is our most important priority followed closely by improved safety and law enforcement. Infrastructure improvements and financial/job security received the third highest ranking and are also important priorities Antonito residents want to address.**



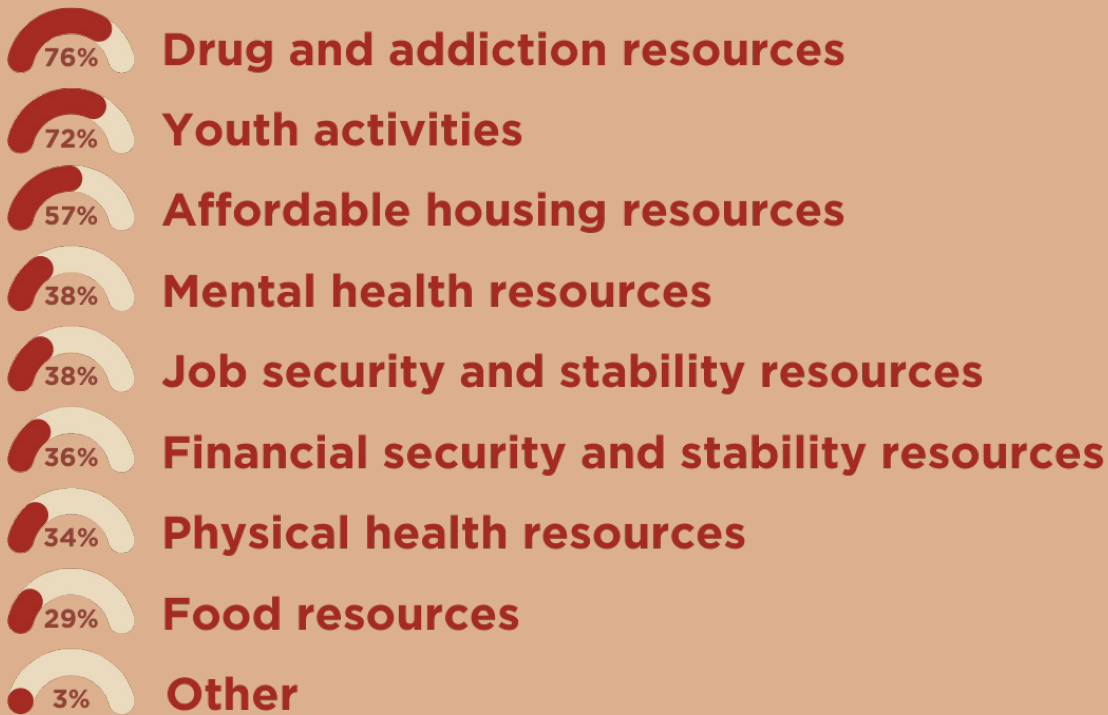
The Soul Players of the Valley-Antonito would also like to note that **a significant number of our communities ranked each and every category in our survey as a top priority**, even when they were not in the majority. **This shows that all of the other priorities depicted are of importance to certain segments of our population.** These other challenges include: educational opportunities, community unity, mental health, physical health, and access to healthy food.

Resources Needed to Address Priorities

After our community members ranked the top priorities, we asked them which resources are needed to address them. The infographic below shows which resources are in highest demand. **Resources for drugs and addiction, youth activities, and affordable housing rank as the most requested resources. Resources for mental health and financial/job security rank next highest.**

Comparing the top resources requested to the top priorities identified provides insight into the primary factors impacting quality of life for our residents in Antonito. **A strong desire for youth activities is consistently a top concern.** Although our community members ranked health needs as a lesser priority overall, we see **a specific need for drug and addiction services rising towards the top of the list** for requested resources. We understand that the need for youth activities is related to the request for drug and addiction services.

TOP RESOURCES NEEDED FOR ANTONITO & SURROUNDING VILLAGES



Affordable housing is also a major concern that Antonito residents want addressed. Although the homeownership rate in Antonito is quite high—which we regard as an asset to our community as a whole—the lack of housing inventory may contribute to increased housing costs for those of us who do not already own property.

Our data also indicates that all of the other areas in which resources are needed received considerable rankings, even if they are not amongst the highest ranked. This shows that **the other resource areas are important to certain segments of our community.** Other areas for which resources are needed include mental health, job stability, financial security, physical health, and food assistance. **Out of these other areas, mental health and financial/job security ranked highest.**

Our survey participants were able to write in answers as well as ranking the options listed. Many of us asked for a safe place for our children to go and for specific activities, such as sports and art classes. Our participants voiced the importance of keeping people and drugs off the street, educating our community about drug use, and keeping our community clean from drug paraphernalia. Other issues that we mentioned include the need to create more jobs, increase affordable housing, improve access to healthy food, and overcome community factions.

Community Center

The unifying vision of developing community centers for each town is, in large part, what motivated The Soul Players of the Valley from the beginning. Accordingly, the Soul Players of the Valley–Antonito set out to determine if this is really what our community wants.

Our results show that a resounding 88% of our community members who participated in our survey do, in fact, want a community center (8% said maybe, while only 2% said no).

This community center will be the central hub housing the services and activities that will address the challenges identified as top priorities by our residents. We envision it as a space for our community to come together, access services that help us to live healthy and fulfilling lives, and attain our collective goals for the future.

The Community Responds: Shareback for Antonito

The Soul Players of the Valley–Antonito facilitated a community shareback event that included a presentation summarizing the data findings from our community assessment surveys. All of us in attendance discussed the survey results and provided additional feedback regarding our prioritization of community needs and our concerns about future planning.

Attendees were in agreement that the data results accurately reflect the top challenges facing our community. There were attendees present who did not take the original surveys, and they also agreed that the challenges identified and the resources requested accurately represented the opinions of our local residents. It was noted that all of the items listed on the survey received a 20% or higher ranking **indicating that every concern is pressing**, although some will receive higher priority.

In addition to the priorities identified through the survey process, our shareback attendees expressed other concerns—mainly focusing on the community center. Some attendees expressed worry about long-term funding for such a facility. We can address this by developing a formal **strategy for long-term funding** in our subsequent planning phases. While Antonito envisions our community center will be a gathering place for all residents, **special concern was expressed for elderly residents** to be able to access services and support there. Our attendees also **requested a community kitchen** where our people could sell foodstuffs, share recipes, and cook and eat together. This could potentially be housed within the community center, and it could also contribute to the local economy.

Last but not least, residents discussed the **factors that underlie the challenges facing our community. Poverty and land loss were at the top of this list**, and residents also expressed the extent to which these systemic disadvantages have impacted the emotional well-being of our town/villages collectively. Although these issues are not represented directly within the survey results, we all feel them to be of extreme importance to the community development approach we want to take moving forward.

We are therefore careful to address these underlying factors in our community's strategic plan for change by prioritizing economic development, affordable housing, and mental health. In addition, we will continue to work with our community through events similar to this shareback so that **we can foster an ethos of trust, belonging, and collaborative self-empowerment.**



Looking Ahead: Antonito's Community Strategic Plan

Antonito's Vision

Antonito and its surrounding villages will be a vibrant community that supports its Latino residents in achieving their personal goals.

Antonito's Mission

To provide services and activities to individuals and families that will address our community's most pressing challenges.

Antonito's Priorities

1. Community Center
2. Youth Activities and Services
3. Drug and Alcohol Abuse Mitigation, Counseling, and Prevention
4. Behavioral and Mental Health
5. Public Safety
6. Affordable Housing
7. Financial and Job Security

Antonito's Goals & Strategies

GOAL 1: Create a central, multigenerational gathering place in the form of a community center

Strategies:

1. Create a local commission to create plans for building and sustaining a local community center
2. Raise funds to support the development of said local community center
3. Consider incorporating a community kitchen that contributes to the local economy where residents can sell foodstuffs, share recipes, and cook meals together

GOAL 2: Provide meaningful, accessible activities for our youth

Strategies:

1. Identify activities youth would be most interested in attending outside of the school day
2. Create activities for youth that honor and celebrate cultural pride and heritage so as to preserve traditional ways of life
3. Partner with local schools to offer additional recreational, arts, and educational activities beyond the school day
4. Recruit local volunteers to provide and lead cost-free or low-cost activities

GOAL 3: Reduce drug and alcohol abuse among our residents

Strategies:

1. Facilitate drug and alcohol support groups at the community center
2. Provide drug and alcohol wrap-around services through collaborations
3. Provide mental health resources and treatment services specific to addressing addiction through collaboration with existing providers:
 - a. San Luis Valley Behavioral Health
 - b. San Luis Valley Area Health Education Center
 - c. Alcoholics Anonymous/Al-Anon/Drug Anonymous Support Groups
4. Focus on early prevention, intervention, and support for those in recovery

GOAL 5: Address the affordable housing needs of our residents

Strategies:

1. Establish a community task force to identify and address safety needs
2. Partner with local law enforcement to develop policies and practices that meet the safety needs of all residents
3. Use town halls, community listening sessions, and community advisory groups to communicate and collaborate with local law enforcement
4. Initiate a study to identify prevalent crimes in the area (e.g., substance use, drug dealing, domestic violence, traffic violations, or theft or property damage, etc.) and develop interventions accordingly
5. Consider enacting the following community safety measures:
6. Substance abuse treatment referral program with local police (i.e., anyone using substances can come to local police and ask for a referral for services and receive free transport without fear of legal repercussion)
7. Environmental protections, such as improved lighting, surveillance cameras, repairing walls/fences, or providing financial/manual assistance in installing better locks and alarms on residential doors, windows, barns, and storage sheds
8. Citizen organizations or groups (e.g., Neighborhood Watch)

GOAL 6: Improve public safety

Strategies:

1. Initiate a local affordable housing commission that will define the scope of the problem and oversee strategies to solve it that ensure local control
2. Host a community round table to brainstorm possible locally-sponsored and locally-led solutions
3. Identify existing opportunities to provide immediate, short-term relief for those in danger of losing their homes
4. Explore funding opportunities to support the renovation of local homes, increase affordable housing options, and create job opportunities through construction

GOAL 7: To improve the overall financial and job security of our residents

Strategies

1. Offer financial literacy classes to residents
2. Bolster existing initiatives that support financial literacy for families
3. Create a local marketing campaign targeting Latino families about the importance of financial literacy
4. Leverage partnerships with local financial institutions to support financial literacy and planning
5. Provide job training and job search services as well as employee incentive programs

APPENDIX C

CAPULIN:

Community Assessment, Shareback, and Community Strategic Plan for Change

Demographic Overview: Capulin

It is admittedly difficult to gather demographic information for Capulin and our surrounding villages because our population size is small. The challenge is to obtain a large enough sample size from which to extrapolate reliable statistics. In many cases, percentages may not be accurate and the first-hand knowledge of our community members is more reliable.

Out of the four communities represented by the Soul Players of the Valley, Capulin has the second largest percentage of Hispanic/Latino individuals (similar to San Luis). While we have fewer Spanish speakers, proportionately, than some of the other communities, we still have much more than Colorado as a whole. Our families tend to be larger than others in the San Luis Valley and the state. Our average family size is 5.06. (Others range from 2.83 to 3.5.) The median age of our residents is fairly young for the San Luis Valley, but the percentage of our population under the age of 18 is comparably low. Even though the median age of our population is similar to Colorado's overall, our disability rate is significantly higher.

Capulin's Population at a Glance

Total population: 134

Percentage of population identifying as Hispanic: 86%

Spanish spoken at home: 24%

Median age: 35.3 (4% are 65+)

Disability rate: 17%

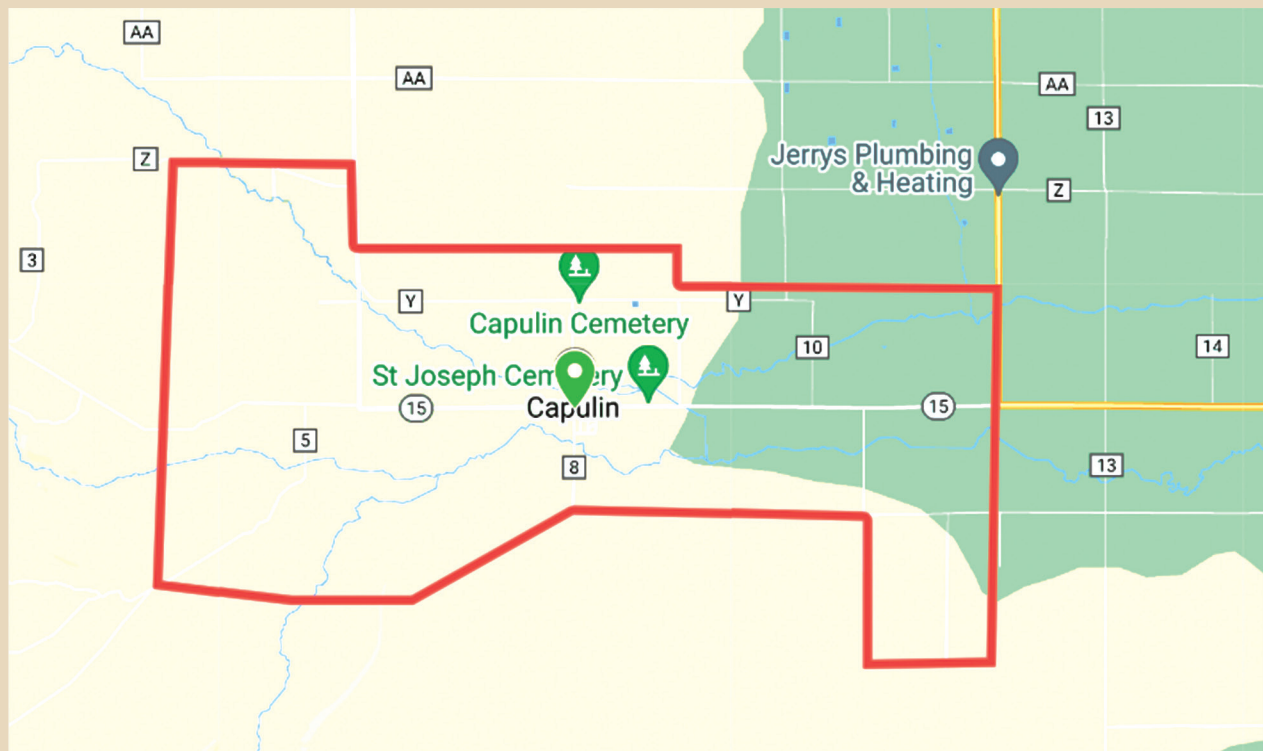
Percentage of population under the age of 18: 6%

Average family size: 5.06

Note: Economic information is too difficult to obtain for Capulin due to the small population skewing the data results. The margins for error were too high for us to give any accurate report. Qualitative data (i.e., knowledge of community members) provides a better picture.

Where We Live

Capulin is located in the northern part of Conejos county and quite close to the nearby community of La Jara. It is near the foothills of the San Juan Mountains and nestled between the La Jara Creek and Alamosa River. St. Joseph Parish is the heart of our community. The map below depicts our community of Capulin and our surrounding villages where the majority of our survey respondents reside, with our survey boundaries shown in red. While Capulin residents comprised 46% of our survey respondents, La Jara comprised 25%, Manassa comprised 10%, Sanford comprised 8%, and Romeo comprised 5%. We also had a few community members from North Conejos, Los Sauces, and Monte Vista participate.



Community Assessment: Data Findings for Capulin

The surveys that the Soul Players of the Valley-Capulin distributed to our community members asked them to rank the top priorities in our community. The Institute for Research in the Social Sciences (IRISS) at Colorado State University provided us with statistical summaries and graphics that we use here to share our findings.

Capulin Community Priorities

The infographic below illustrates how Capulin community members rank the top priorities in our community. Drug and alcohol use is our most important priority, followed closely by recreational activities for youth, and then mental health.



Resources Needed to Address Priorities

After our community members ranked the top priorities, we asked them which resources are needed to address them. The infographic below shows which resources are in highest demand. As you can see, the resources requested align with the top priorities, but we can also see that there are resources being requested in additional areas. **Although some requested resources ranked higher than others, all issues are considered to be of notable importance to a large percentage of our respondents.**

TOP RESOURCES NEEDED FOR CAPULIN & SURROUNDING VILLAGES



Overall, our data collection results show that our community members care a great deal about all of the issues affecting our community. We do, however, overwhelmingly tend to agree that providing resources and support for substance use, creating more activities for our youth, and expanding mental health services are our top priorities moving forward.

The Community Responds: Sharebacks for Capulin

The Soul Players of the Valley-Capulin facilitated two community sharebacks in Capulin and La Jara. Together with our attendees we shared a meal and socialized, joining as a community to reflect on the transformative work undertaken thus far. Armando Valdez, SPV-Capulin, gave presentations that reiterated the Soul Players of the Valley's overall goals and highlighted the major findings from our community assessment process. Completing written surveys and engaging in group discussion, our attendees evaluated the accuracy of our data results and discussed next steps.

Discussing Community Priorities

All of us in attendance agreed that **our community's top priorities in Capulin/La Jara are 1) drug and alcohol resources 2) recreational activities for youth and 3) mental health resources.** Although improvement of roads and speeding concerns were also high in some areas, Armando showed the variation on these issues between communities.

Overall, the Soul Players of the Valley-Capulin were successful in determining the priorities of our community in our data collection process. A combined 95% of our shareback participants found our results to be "very accurate" or "somewhat accurate," while **90% said that the priorities identified should be addressed in our Community Strategic Plan for Change.**

A substantial majority of our residents think that the issues of "lesser concern," according to the data results, should still be included in our Community Strategic Plan for Change. This makes sense because all of the issues identified in the survey process were ranked a top priority by a significant number of our community members.

Feedback on the Process

Our shareback participants unanimously agreed that the Soul Players of the Valley's project added value to the community and that a strategic community plan is needed. While a majority (75%) agreed that the data collection process engaged our community effectively, a minority (25%) felt that it did not. This came up in the discussion when **some attendees said that more residents should be surveyed,** including children and families via the school. While we did have a high survey response rate, we do commit to making the effort, moving forward, to include as many members of the community as possible in assessments and planning. We continue to learn a great deal from this process, and we are making changes to our future plans based on this feedback.

Filling in the Gaps

It was important to many of us present to clarify the community's top priority regarding youth activities. Our residents want many kinds of youth activities, including development, skills-building, and educational activities, not only recreational.

There were several community needs not emphasized in the data results that many of us still felt to be impactful for our community. Many advocated for resources in these areas during the discussion portion of our shareback including safety, resources for the elderly, and yard cleanup. We can explore these issues at future meetings and prioritize them in future community planning and development efforts.



Looking Ahead: Capulin's Community Strategic Plan

Capulin's Vision

The community of Capulin will be a thriving area addressing the needs of all its residents with opportunities for growth and development for individuals and families.

Capulin's Mission

To host programs and activities in our existing Queen of Peace Community Center to support the mental and physical health and overall well-being of our community.

Capulin's Priorities

1. Youth and Multigenerational Activities
2. Drug and Alcohol Use
3. Behavioral and Mental Health
4. Job Opportunities & Financial Literacy
5. Community Infrastructure

Capulin's Goals & Strategies

GOAL 1: Strengthen community ties through youth and multigenerational activities at the Queen of Peace Community Center

Strategies:

1. Increase indoor gym accessibility for age-specific physical activities for youth, families, and seniors
2. Create youth and intergenerational development programs in the following areas:
 - a. Leadership development
 - b. After-school tutoring
 - c. Arts and crafts
 - d. Music
3. Support specific outdoor recreation activities through the following actions:
 - a. Build outdoor, family-friendly pavilions
 - b. Create a Hunter Safety program for families
 - c. Create a Fishing/Guide program for families
 - d. Cultivate partnerships with nonprofit/state/federal outdoor and wildlife agencies, such as:
 - i. San Luis Valley Great Outdoors (SLV GO!)
 - ii. Colorado Parks and Wildlife
 - iii. Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service
 - iv. Alamosa Riverkeepers
4. Address play space equity by installing two playgrounds for children ages 2-5 and 5-12

GOAL 2: Reduce drug and alcohol use among residents

Strategies:

1. Facilitate drug and alcohol support groups at the Queen of Peace Community Center
2. Provide drug/alcohol wrap-around services through collaborations
3. Develop related mental health resources and treatment services specific to addressing addiction through collaboration with existing providers:
 - a. San Luis Valley Behavioral Health
 - b. San Luis Valley Area Health Education Center
 - c. Alcoholics Anonymous/AI-Anon/Drug Anonymous Support Groups
4. Focus on early prevention, intervention, and support for those in recovery

GOAL 3: Expand access to behavioral health services for residents and improve overall mental health

Strategies:

1. Provide broad, onsite behavioral health services and resources for individuals and families at Queen of Peace Community Center
2. Collaborate with existing providers to offer additional services
 - a. San Luis Valley Behavioral Health
 - b. San Luis Valley Area Health Education Center
3. Distribute educational resources about behavioral and mental health
4. Collaborate with local parishioners who can provide additional mental health services and resources (i.e., local counselors/therapists)

GOAL 4: Increase financial and employment pathways for residents of Capulin and northern Conejos County

Strategies:

1. Increase job skills in the trade fields through the following actions:
 - a. Offer information sessions with local trade professionals
 - b. Provide a certification class for trades in high demand regionally
 - c. Develop apprenticeship programs with local employers/contractors
 - d. Create a local job board at the Queen of Peace community center
2. Support career development through the following actions:
 - a. Help individuals explore career opportunities with a Career Pathways program
 - b. Develop job shadowing opportunities linked to the interests identified the Career Pathway program
 - c. Offer training/classes in skill areas such as communication,
3. Fund an employer wage assistance program to encourage employers to provide employee apprenticeship/job probationary period opportunities
4. Offer financial literacy classes for residents

GOAL 5: Improve community infrastructure

Strategies:

1. Seek funding to improve the water delivery system for the town
2. Formalize a governance structure to oversee the Capulin water infrastructure development
 - a. Facilitate/support the development of by-laws
 - b. Facilitate/support the establishment of a governing board
3. Initiate a study to determine the benefits/drawbacks and potential unintended/unwanted consequences of paving County Road 6
4. Integrate pedestrian safety zones throughout the town of Capulin:
 - a. Reduce the speed limit to 25 in the town of Capulin
 - b. Install flashing yield signs and crossing signs
5. Initiate a study to examine the feasibility of a central wastewater system

APPENDIX D

SAN LUIS:

Community Assessment, Shareback, and Community Strategic Plan for Change

Demographic Overview: San Luis

San Luis and our surrounding villages have the largest percentage of Hispanic or Latino individuals (87%) as well as the largest percentage of Spanish speakers (59%) out of the four communities represented by the Soul Players of the Valley. Our population in San Luis is significantly older than is typical, something we share in common with Antonito. 37% of our population is aged 65 or older. We have the highest rate of disability at 33%. After South Alamosa, we have the second highest percentage of residents under the age of 18.

In terms of economics, we have the lowest median income, the lowest employment rate, and the highest poverty rate of all four towns. These statistics are likely related to the fact that many of our residents are of an older age and may no longer work.

San Luis's Population at a Glance

Total population: 622

Percentage of population identifying as Hispanic or Latino: 87%

Spanish spoken at home: 59%

Median age: 48.9, 37% 65+

Disability rate: 33%

Percentage of population under the age of 18: 16%

Median household income: \$26,090

Employment rate: 36%

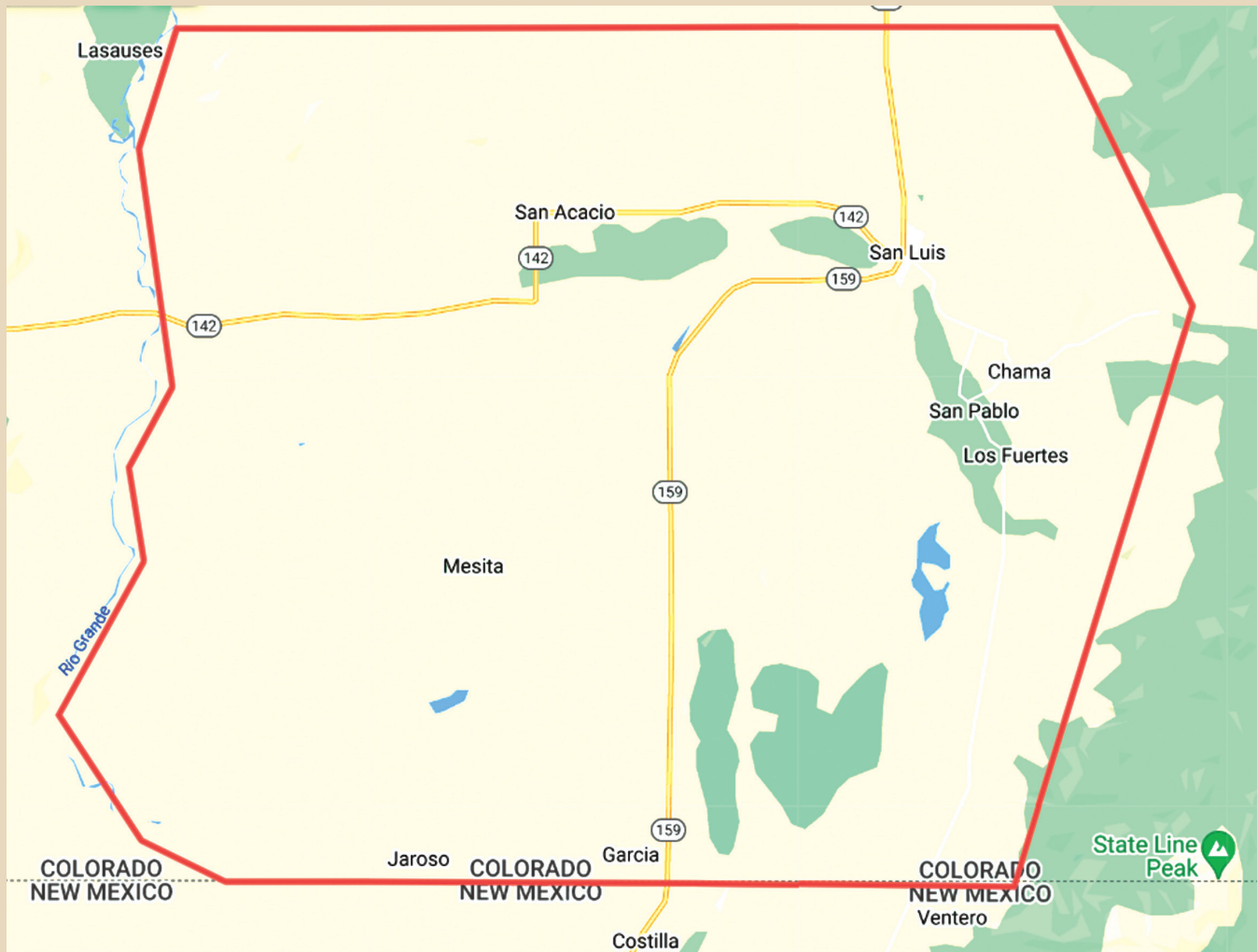
Below 100% of poverty line: 31%

Uninsured rate: 9.6%

Homeownership rate: 54%

Where We Live

Nestled against the magnificent Sangre de Cristo Mountains, San Luis sits at the Highway Junction of 142 and 159. Our community includes the town of San Luis and several surrounding villages. Among our survey respondents, 30% reside in San Luis, 21% reside in San Pablo/San Pedro/La Cordillera, 12% reside in Las Colonias/El Rito/Los Fuertes, 12.5% reside in Chama/Chama Cañon, 11.5% reside in San Acacio, and the remainder reside in Garcia/Jaroso/Mesita or Wild Horse Mesa/San Luis Valley Ranches (subdivision). The map below shows San Luis and our surrounding villages, with our survey boundaries shown in red.



Community Assessment: Data Findings for San Luis

The surveys distributed by Soul Players of the Valley-San Luis asked participants to prioritize which needs we consider to be the most pressing in our community and which community spaces we most want to see built. Our surveys also asked residents to rank the factors that most impact our quality of life so that we could see how these relate to our community needs. Leonardo Flores and Erika Barse from the Aurora Research Institute (ARI) provided us with a detailed report and infographics that we use here to share our findings.

San Luis Community Priorities

The infographic below illustrates how our San Luis community members rank the top priorities in our community. Youth and mental health activities are our most important priority, followed by physical health, affordable housing, and substance use. Our next highest ranked priorities are cultural activities, adult education programs, and small business development.



Resources Needed to Address Priorities

After our community members ranked the top priorities, we asked them which resources we need to address them. The infographic below shows which resources are in highest demand.

TOP RESOURCES NEEDED FOR SAN LUIS & SURROUNDING VILLAGES



When viewing our survey results and seeing that **youth activities are the need category for which resources are requested the most**, one Soul Players of the Valley-San Luis leader stated, *“That was a given, that is why we are all here, but that is a pretty overwhelming result.”* Observing that cultural activities ranked as the second highest need category, one of us said, *“[that is] such an important piece of having a central place in our community for the sustaining of our cultural traditions.”*

Honoring Community Voices: Additional Needs Requested

In addition to ranking the close-ended response categories explained above, our participants also had the opportunity to write down any additional need categories.

Seven additional need categories were identified, and they are listed, here, according to how many of our residents requested them (most to least):

- 1. Basic Necessities**
- 2. Trash**
- 3. Transportation**
- 4. Employment**
- 5. School**
- 6. Safety**
- 7. Leadership**

Access to affordable food that is fresh and nutritious ranked highest out of all basic necessities that our community requested. Soul Players of the Valley–San Luis identified the specific barriers to access:

- High food costs
- Not enough grocery stores selling healthy foods
- High commercial mortgages/building maintenance costs for restaurants/stores
- Elderly people exiting the restaurant business without younger people taking over

Economic factors greatly impact our quality of life in San Luis. It is therefore worth noting that **88% of our respondents who identified employment as an additional need category requested an increase in job availability.**

Community Spaces & Events

The top two most requested community spaces included community gathering spaces and covered picnic areas. The top two most requested community events were farmers markets and youth camps.

Our survey included an open-response section where our residents could write in any additional community spaces they would like to see. **A community/recreation center was, by far, the most requested additional space**, which supports the Soul Players of the Valley’s original vision of developing or revitalizing centers for each community. Basketball courts and walking spaces were also requested.

The other additional community spaces requested are listed here in order from most requested to least requested: **outdoor recreational spaces, local businesses, library, community garden, swimming pool, outdoor gathering spaces, indoor recreational facilities.**

The Soul Players of the Valley-San Luis have some insights to share about our community’s specific requests for additional spaces. **We recognize that only San Luis has a park, which makes it difficult for our residents from our surrounding villages to access it. San Luis already has a library, but it is only open during school hours, which makes it inaccessible to children.**

Noting the high number of requests for local businesses, one Soul Players of the Valley-San Luis leader had this to say:

“One thing that I wanted to say about local businesses, when I think about some of the stories I heard from my husband and his experience growing up and hearing stories from other people, a lot of community gathering spaces used to provide things to do. There used to be (I know we have an alcohol problem) several bars, roller skating at the gym, there was a swimming pool. There were all these different things for people to get together and do things. There were wedding dances or dances in the villages on the weekends. And there is just not that anymore.”

Through sharing our stories, we highlighted how the lack of social businesses and recreational spaces impacts our ability to socialize, connect, and unite with each other.

In San Luis and our surrounding Culebra villages, our residents’ resounding request for farmers markets highlights our need for local, fresh, and nutritious food. Our communities’ request for youth camps further highlights the need to offer activities for young people.

Our residents also had the option to write in their own suggestions for community events on the surveys. Here are some of those suggestions:

- Arts and culture events: Ceramic classes, Concerts, History and food-focused activities, Quilting, Arts and crafts fairs, Book clubs
- Active-Lifestyle events: Sports (basketball and softball), Sports camps, Walking programs, Roller skating
- Educational events: GED classes, Health classes, Beginner computer classes
- Charitable events: Clothing drives, Toy drives

Overall, Soul Players of the Valley-San Luis discovered that our community has many ideas for creating the spaces and programs that we need to build connections, improve public health, and generate economic momentum.

Factors that Shape Our Experiences

Soul Players of the Valley-San Luis provided rich contextual information about the **economic factors and interpersonal dynamics** that influence our lived experiences. These factors include:

1. Rural Location
2. High Cost of Living
3. Individuals Holding a Monopoly of Local Businesses
4. Individuals Holding a Monopoly of Local Leadership Positions

Without addressing these factors, in tandem with providing resources and services, we provide a bandage only. This will not create the systemic change we need to sustain the transformative work we aim to do.

The Community Responds: Sharebacks for San Luis

In collaboration with Leonardo Flores at ARI, Soul Players of the Valley-San Luis facilitated a community shareback event that included a presentation summarizing the data findings from our community assessment surveys. Together with our attendees we discussed the survey results and provided additional feedback regarding the prioritization of community needs and the environmental factors that impact our quality of life in San Luis and our surrounding Culebra villages.

Discussing Community Priorities

A majority of our attendees felt that our prioritization of community needs as determined by our survey results is accurate, saying it reflects what is going on in our community. As a reminder, San Luis ranked community needs in the following order:

1. Youth activities and mental health
2. Physical health, affordable housing, and drug/alcohol use
3. Cultural activities, adult education, and small business development

One community member stated, *“This makes sense to me because if you provide youth activities and work on mental health, then the other items will also be worked on.”* However, some of our community members provided a dissenting opinion. One community member reported, *“I would have thought that drug and alcohol use, affordable housing, and physical health would have been prioritized higher.”*

As the conversation progressed, our community members discussed the interrelated nature of these community needs. One person said, *“I had the same reaction where I thought group two should have been prioritized differently, but when I think about it more, if we provide youth activities, then that will impact mental health, physical health, and drug and alcohol use.”*

Ultimately, even though initial reactions to the prioritization of needs may have varied, we decided together that the prioritization order stemming from the survey results should be honored. We collectively concluded that the lower-ranking priorities should inform how we address the top-ranking need categories (youth activities and mental health).

Important Additions to our Agenda

The second major point of conversation at our shareback concerned the environmental factors that contribute to the needs, services, tools, and resources requested by our residents.

Two important updates resulted from our community shareback:

1. “Opportunities for and quality of employment” was added as an economic environmental factor impacting our quality of life in San Luis.
2. Community members felt that “the fear of change” should be addressed by establishing an inclusive decision-making process that builds a bridge between our youth and our elders.

Our community members offered many **insights into our economic needs, emphasizing the rural location of San Luis:**

- *“Everything everywhere is expensive, and that is just the reality; and being in a community like ours [rurally located], things are even more expensive. How are we expected to pay for things if we don't make enough?”*
- *“Where we live is also connected to employment [i.e. rural]. We don't have a lot of businesses coming in.”*

Given the need to build community relationships and include community members in the decision-making process, **the need for a community center to function as a community gathering space was further emphasized.**



Looking Ahead: San Luis's Community Strategic Plan for Change

San Luis's Vision

San Luis and its surrounding villages will be a vibrant community led by our citizens and grounded in our cultural values.

San Luis's Mission

To improve the overall wellbeing of the residents in our community while preserving our historical and cultural ways of life.

San Luis's Priorities

- 1. Community Center**
- 2. Youth & Family-Centered Activities with Cultural Emphasis**
- 3. Behavioral & Mental Health**
- 4. Physical Health**
- 5. Affordable Housing**
- 6. Job Opportunities & Adult Education**
- 7. Small Business Development**

San Luis's Goals & Strategies

GOAL 1: Create a central, multigenerational gathering place in the form of a community center

Strategies:

1. Establish a local commission to create plans for finding an existing facility (or building a new one) to house a new, local community center
2. Raise funds to support the development and sustainability of this local community center

GOAL 2: Provide meaningful, accessible, youth and family-centered activities that celebrate our cultural heritage

Strategies:

1. Administer a youth survey to identify activities that will engage them
2. Create activities for youth that honor and celebrate cultural pride and heritage to preserve traditional ways of life
3. Host intergenerational activities that will foster stronger relationships between the generations while promoting cultural pride
4. Create opportunities for our elders to share their cultural knowledge and pass down traditions
5. Invite local religious leaders and groups to host or participate in events
6. Coordinate with other organizations, such as local schools and 4H, to provide additional youth programming outside of the school day
7. Identify local and regional funders to support activities

GOAL 3: Improve the overall behavioral and mental health of residents with an emphasis on drug and alcohol addiction

Strategies:

1. Provide broad, onsite behavioral and mental health services and resources for individuals and families locally
2. Collaborate with existing providers to offer additional services:
 - a. San Luis Valley Behavioral Health
 - b. San Luis Valley Area Health Education Center
3. Create programs that specifically address prevention, early intervention, treatment, and recovery for those experiencing addiction and their families
4. Facilitate local support groups for individuals and families
 - a. Alcoholics Anonymous/AI-Anon/Drug Anonymous Support Groups

GOAL 4: Improve the overall physical health of residents

Strategies:

1. Provide activities for all residents that promote physical health (e.g., exercise classes, sports programs, healthy diet/cooking classes, mindfulness/meditation, etc.)
2. Ensure senior residents have full access to health and fitness programs
3. Collaborate with other towns and health providers in the San Luis Valley to offer health services locally:
 - a. San Luis Valley Area Health Education Center
 - b. San Luis Valley Health
4. Improve access to Spanish-speaking healthcare providers and culturally-competent care
5. Prioritize disability when developing or expanding services and programs

GOAL 5: Provide meaningful, accessible, youth and family-centered activities that celebrate our cultural heritage

Strategies:

1. Establish a local affordable housing commission that will define the issue and oversee strategies to address the problem ensuring local control
2. Host a community roundtable to brainstorm possible locally-sponsored and community-led solutions
3. Identify existing resources to offer immediate, short-term relief
4. Renovate and build new homes to create more housing inventory and stimulate new job opportunities in construction
5. Develop a funding strategy to implement all solutions and plans

GOAL 6: Provide meaningful, accessible, youth and family-centered activities that celebrate our cultural heritage

Strategies:

1. Create an adult education program in which participants can acquire new, job-readiness skills
2. Provide career exploration events and job shadowing opportunities
3. Partner with local trade organizations and professionals to create information sessions, training opportunities, and apprenticeships
4. Collaborate with existing employers in the town and region to expand opportunities and incentivize wages/benefits that enable workers to meet the needs of their families

GOAL 7: Provide meaningful, accessible, youth and family-centered activities that celebrate our cultural heritage

Strategies:

1. Create a local Small Business Commission, or body made up of a diverse group of residents, to attract small businesses that support the preservation of San Luis's cultural heritage and identity
2. Develop a marketing strategy to attract small businesses to San Luis who will provide meaningful employment for residents in the town and surrounding villages
3. Host a community forum on the impacts (challenges and opportunities) that small businesses can have on small towns to address local concerns about growth and change
4. Identify funding sources to provide low-interest loans and capital for new small business development in San Luis
5. Create a San Luis Business Association to provide mentorship, support, and promotion for new and established businesses

APPENDIX E

SOUTH ALAMOSA:

Community Assessment, Shareback, and Community Strategic Plan for Change

Demographic Overview: South Alamosa

South Alamosa is more developed in comparison to the other communities represented by the Soul Players of the Valley. Adams State University is nearby, as is the regional medical center for San Luis Valley Health, our major hospital. We have more businesses in the area, but they do not necessarily provide adequate opportunities for our employment.

Given our larger population, it makes sense that our residents tend to be much younger and that we have many more children. In fact, we have a higher percentage of children (24%) than the State of Colorado (21%). Although our rate of disability is lower than in Antonito and San Luis, it is still 6% higher than in Colorado overall.

When it comes to economics, we have a significantly higher median income, higher rate of employment, and lower poverty level than other places in the San Luis Valley. Nevertheless, our incomes and employment rates are still much lower than Colorado's overall, and our poverty rate is much higher. This economic situation corresponds to our relatively younger ages (i.e., more people of working age). In this same vein, our homeownership rate is significantly lower compared to the other communities in the Valley and to Colorado as a whole.

South Alamosa's Population at a Glance

Total population: 9,494

Percentage of population identifying as Hispanic or Latino: 54%

Spanish spoken at home: 26%

Median age: 28.6, 10% 618

Disability rate: 33%

Percentage of population under the age of 18: 24%

Median household income: \$38,000

Employment rate: 59%

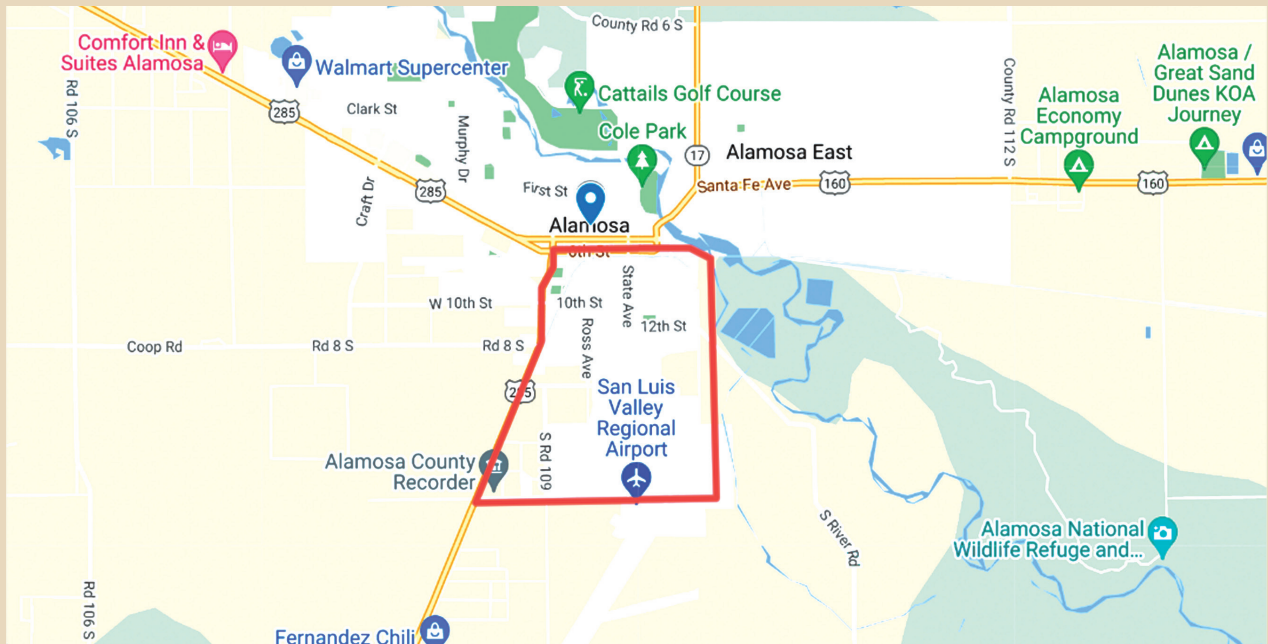
Below 100% of poverty line: 25%

Uninsured rate: 11.5%

Homeownership rate: 39%

Where We Live

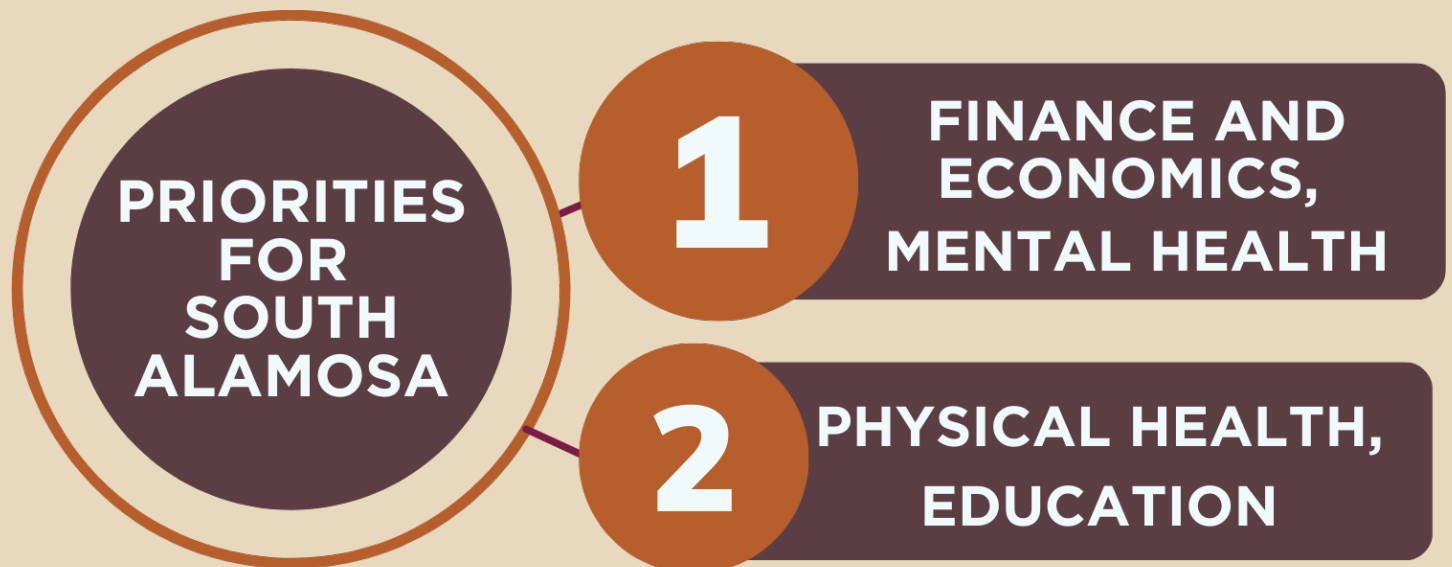
Positioned alongside the Rio Grande River, the city of Alamosa occupies a north-central position in the San Luis Valley and acts as a commercial hub for the area. South Alamosa is comprised of several predominantly Latino neighborhoods located south of Main Street. The map below shows the boundaries of South Alamosa in red, which are also the boundaries of our survey area.



Community Assessment: Data Findings for San Luis

The surveys distributed by Soul Players of the Valley-San Luis asked participants to prioritize which needs we consider to be the most pressing in our community and which community spaces we most want to see built. Our surveys also asked residents to rank the factors that most impact our quality of life so that we could see how these relate to our community needs. Leonardo Flores and Erika Barse from the Aurora Research Institute (ARI) provided us with a detailed report and infographics that we use here to share our findings.

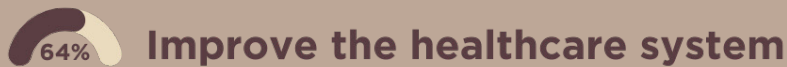
According to our survey results, our community's top priorities are finance and economics, mental health, physical health, and education.



In addition to identifying our priorities, the Soul Players of the Valley-South Alamosa also wanted to see what actions our community wants us to take to address them, which is what the diagram shows below:

TOP PRIORITIES PER NEED CATEGORY FOR SOUTH ALAMOSA

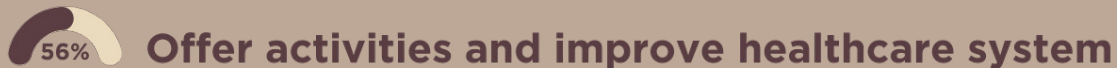
Mental Health



Finance and Economics



Physical Health



Education



Additional Needs



The Soul Players of the Valley-South Alamosa also determined what specific services, tools, and resources our community members requested to address our priorities. While the Soul Players of the Valley-South Alamosa collected extensive details about the resources requested for all priorities, we only provide an overview of those deemed most important below.

Finance & Economics

In the need category of finance and economics, our community says we should **improve jobs and wages and enhance community resources** through the following actions:

- Incentivize employers to provide a living wage, or higher wages, and better quality benefits packages
- Provide new job opportunities for underserved citizens and teens while also increasing the availability of side jobs, volunteer opportunities, or working hours with current employers
- Ease the job acquisition process by providing a method or strategy that makes job finding easier while reducing hiring times
- Provide financial assistance for basic necessities (i.e., housing, utilities, transportation, food, childcare, and healthcare)
- Provide educational programming related to financial literacy, wealth building, small business development, and tech skills

Mental Health

In the need category of mental health, our community says that we should increase access to services and improve public health resources by taking the following actions:

- Reduce the cost of services and expand health insurance coverage
- Hire and retain providers who practice cultural competence and speak the languages spoken by our community
- Employ more counselors, especially ones qualified to work with youth
- Establish general and urgent care (e.g., 24/7 holds) mental health clinics
- Expand mental health services in schools
- Increase awareness through public education
- Offer pro-social activities (specifically for families and kids), support groups, classes, and workshops (especially for addiction)

Education

In the need category of education, our community says that we should make changes to the school system and enhance academic supports by taking the following actions:

- Involve South Alamosa parents in school/district leadership
- Offer more behavioral health support in our schools
- Plan and execute equity-building measures
- Hire more teachers/tutors to provide one-on-one learning opportunities
- Increase college readiness
- Expand online, after-school, and in-person learning modalities

The Soul Players of the Valley-South Alamosa discovered that our community members have many specific actions that they want to take to address the top needs and priorities in our community. This provided us with a solid foundation for our Community Strategic Plan for Change.

Environmental Factors Impacting Our Quality of Life

The Soul Players of the Valley-South Alamosa identified the **high cost of living, reduced presence of businesses, safety concerns, and community division** as the most significant environmental factors impacting our quality of life. These factors must be addressed in conjunction with providing the services, tools, and resources our community needs. A failure to do so will impede the transformative work we are doing to create lasting, systemic change.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

High cost of living
(n = 96)

Reduced presence of businesses
(n = 46)

Safety concerns
(n = 43)

Community division
(n = 11)

We provide more explanation below regarding the economic factors, in particular, as these received the most attention from our survey participants.

High Cost of Living

Factors contributing to the high cost of living in South Alamosa are **low wages, high cost of housing, high cost of transportation, and high cost of childcare.**

Many of our community members reported not earning “a living wage” or working multiple jobs to make ends meet. This, in turn, limits our time to connect with our family members, care for our children, and engage with our communities.

The high cost of living is an environmental factor that shapes multiple aspects of our lives with long-lasting consequences that ripple across various facets of our lived experience. Therefore, addressing this environmental factor is paramount in creating relief for our community members.

Reduced Presence of Businesses

The reduced presence of businesses arose as an environmental factor because our **community members consistently requested the establishment of facilities for each need category.** Regarding physical health, for example, a lack of certain types of business (i.e. gyms, sports facilities, groceries, and restaurants) impacted community members’ access to physical activity spaces and fresh and nutritious food.

The reduced presence of businesses also impacts financial and economic needs by reducing the number of job opportunities. This, in turn, contributes to the low wages earned by our residents. One community member’s comment highlights this relationship via their request for *“bigger companies in the Valley to give people an opportunity at a better life with better jobs.”*



The Community Responds: Shareback for South Alamosa

In collaboration with Leonardo Flores at ARI, the Soul Players of the Valley-South Alamosa facilitated a community shareback event that included a presentation summarizing the data findings from our surveys. After the presentation, we had two break-out sessions in which we 1) discussed our feelings about the data collection process and the accuracy of our findings and 2) ranked our community priorities in order of importance. The results of this ranking process are summarized below. This summary provides clear direction for the action steps our community wants to take moving forward.

Discussing Community Priorities

We confirmed that the top need categories in South Alamosa are finance/economics and mental health followed by physical health and education. We also confirmed that the environmental factors that impact our quality of life include 1) high cost of living 2) reduced presence of businesses 3) safety concerns and 4) community division.

Overall, our community found the survey results to be very accurate. We therefore spent a good amount of the time during our shareback sessions developing precise actions we want to take to create lasting, systemic change. These action steps are outlined in our Community Strategic Plan for Change.



Looking Ahead: South Alamosa's Community Strategic Plan for Change

South Alamosa's Vision

South Alamosa will be a thriving community with improved quality of life for Latino families.

South Alamosa's Mission

To provide services and activities that will increase the skills and abilities of Latino families that will help them achieve their personal goals.

South Alamosa's Priorities

1. Community Center Expansion
2. Economic Opportunity
3. Mental Health
4. Physical Health
5. Youth Leadership & Workforce Readiness
6. Public Safety
7. Civic Engagement

South Alamosa's Goals & Strategies

GOAL 1: Expand the services and programs offered through our existing community center, which is run through a collaboration with the local nonprofit Shooting Stars

Strategies:

1. Continue to utilize the space provided by Shooting Stars to expand services and programs in the following areas: mental and physical health, economic and financial opportunity, and youth leadership.

GOAL 2: Expand economic opportunities and improve the financial standing of our community members

Strategies:

1. Incentivize employers to provide a living wage, or higher wages, and better quality benefits packages
2. Provide new job opportunities for underserved citizens and teens while also increasing the availability of side jobs, volunteer opportunities, or working hours with current employers
3. Offer job search support through trainings and coaching
4. Collaborate with top employers in the area and local tradespeople to build a pipeline for recruitment, apprenticeships, and hiring
5. Provide educational programming related to financial literacy, wealth building, small business development, and tech skills

GOAL 3: Expand economic opportunities and improve the financial standing of our community members

Strategies:

1. Collaborate with behavioral healthcare entities and schools to expand the number of mental health providers and counselors who speak Spanish and are culturally-competent
2. Collaborate with local mental health providers to expand outpatient, inpatient, and urgent care (e.g., 24/7 holds)
3. Increase mental health awareness through public education and support groups, particularly for substance use disorders

GOAL 4: Expand economic opportunities and improve the financial standing of our community members

Strategies:

1. Provide activities for all residents that promote physical health (e.g., exercise classes, sports programs, healthy diet/cooking classes, etc.)
2. Collaborate with local health providers to expand services and hours:
 - a. San Luis Valley Health
 - b. San Luis Valley Area Health Education Center
3. Improve access to Spanish-speaking healthcare providers, including specialist providers, and culturally-competent care
4. Create a care coordination system to help patients better access care
5. Develop effective interventions to maintain health and reduce the burden of age-related diseases, disorders, and disabilities for the 50+ population
6. Create an annual health fair for Latinos aged 50+
7. Collaborate with the following entities to support our strategies:
 - a. The City of Alamosa
 - b. Family Leadership Training Institute at Colorado State University
 - c. San Luis Valley Great Outdoors (SLV GO!)
 - d. South Central Colorado Seniors
 - e. Valley-Wide Health Systems
 - f. Alamosa Senior Center
 - g. Alamosa Housing Authority
 - h. San Luis Valley Area Health Education Center

GOAL 5: Improve Latino youth leadership capacity and workforce readiness in South Alamosa

Strategies:

1. Partner with local non-profit organizations and the Alamosa school district to provide opportunities for youth leadership development
2. Collaborate with the local nonprofit Shooting Stars on youth leadership initiatives
3. Collaborate with the San Luis Valley Great Outdoors (SLV GO!) Embajadores/ Ambassadors program to offer:
 - a. Paid internships
 - b. Positive outdoor recreation experiences to build confidence and develop leadership skills
 - c. WFA (Wilderness First Aid) training and certificates
4. Partner with local non-profit organizations and the Alamosa school district to provide opportunities for workforce-readiness skills acquisition

GOAL 6: Improve public safety in the Latino neighborhoods of South Alamosa

Strategies:

1. Organize community safety protocols, such as a Neighborhood Watch
2. Seek sustained funding for neighborhood safety improvements from the municipal budget (e.g., lighting, increased patrols, etc.)
3. Collaborate with the City of Alamosa on all new and existing safety-focused initiatives to ensure they are addressing the needs of Latinos in South Alamosa
4. Conduct process and outcome evaluations of all implemented safety initiatives sponsored by SPV-South Alamosa

GOAL 7: Increase civic engagement amongst Latinos and impact the outcomes of local and state government processes and policy decisions

Strategies:

1. Recruit promising community leaders to engage in training and build capacity
2. Utilize the Family Leadership Training Institute curriculum to train local Latino leaders to become vocal and engaged in policy decisions
3. Develop interest in representative democracy to champion legislative policy change for historically excluded communities

APPENDIX F

Collective Strategic Plan for La Gente del Valle



OUR VISION

The Soul Players of the Valley will have thriving communities—Antonito, Capulin, San Luis, and South Alamosa—by providing promising futures to our youth, improving behavioral and physical health, promoting fiscal autonomy, creating sustainable job opportunities, stemming the exodus of home-grown talent, and reinvigorating cultural and civic pride for our Latino residents of all ages.

OUR MISSION

To collaborate and leverage resources to improve the overall well-being of Latinos in our communities.

Estamos Juntos (Together): Shared Priorities

After each town conducted our own community assessments, we identified five shared priorities we plan to address:

1. Local Community Centers

- A. Network for Organizing, Providing Resources, and Gathering**
- B. Multigenerational Activities**
- C. Healthy Lifestyles**

2. Youth Enrichment & Development

- A. Recreational Activities**
- B. Leadership Development & Workforce Readiness**

3. Health Services

- A. Healthcare Access**
- B. Behavioral and Mental Health**
- C. Substance Use**
- D. Physical Health, especially for Older Adults**

4. Economic Conditions

- A. Financial Literacy**
- B. Job Opportunities & Training**
- C. Small Business Development**

5. Cultural Preservation and Celebration

Shared Goals & Strategies

GOAL 1: To provide a new or revitalized community center in each town

Strategies:

A. Create a Network of Community Centers for Organizing, Providing Resources, and Opportunities for Gathering

1. Create plans to update an existing building or construct a new building in each town to serve as a local community center
2. Grow a network amongst the four towns with each community center serving as that town's hub for coordinating shared resources
3. Enter into formal MOU's with partner towns to encourage local community centers to house shared relevant programs
4. Apply jointly for funding to support recreational and educational programs
5. Dedicate indoor and outdoor spaces at each community center for gatherings and relationship-building amongst residents of all ages

B. Offer Multigenerational Activities to Foster Stronger Relationships Between Generations and Promote Cultural Pride

1. Develop arts and culture programs for all ages that incorporate local traditions—murals, painting, sewing/stitching, music, culinary, dance, etc.
2. Provide youth enrichment and development programs that instill a strong sense of pride and purpose in young minds
3. Create adult education programs that support skills-building, prioritize self-empowerment, and expand opportunities
4. Facilitate community leadership and community service projects

C. Promote Healthy Lifestyles for Community Members of All Ages

1. Provide access to programs and activities that promote strategies for improving behavioral and physical health—support groups, health-driven cooking classes, public health awareness campaigns, mindfulness, etc.
2. Establish indoor and outdoor recreational programs for all ages—sports, exercise, hunting safety, fishing, guided wilderness tours, etc.
3. Cultivate partnerships with nonprofit/state/federal outdoor and wildlife agencies such as:
 - a. San Luis Valley Great Outdoors (SLV GO!)
 - b. Colorado Parks and Wildlife
 - c. Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service
 - d. Alamosa Riverkeepers

GOAL 2: Provide enrichment and development for our youth

Strategies:

A. Engage Local Youth with Enrichment and Recreational Activities

1. Administer a youth survey to identify the activities they find engaging
2. Partner with local schools to offer activities in recreation, the arts, and learning (i.e., tutoring) beyond the school day
3. Collaborate with other youth organizations, such as 4H, to expand program offerings
4. Offer intergenerational, or family, activities that are appealing to youth

B. Enhance Youth Achievement Through Leadership Development & Work Readiness

1. Partner with local nonprofits, such as Shooting Stars, and local school districts to provide programs in leadership development
2. Inspire youth to contribute to their communities with service-based and project-based learning
3. Offer educational programs in skills-building and career exploration
4. Partner with local tradespeople to initiate youth apprenticeship programs
5. Coordinate with the San Luis Valley Great Outdoors (SLV GO!) Embajadores/ Ambassadors program to offer:
 - a. Positive outdoor recreation experiences to build confidence and develop leadership skills
 - b. WFA (Wilderness First Aid) training and certificates
 - c. Paid internships

GOAL 3: Improve the behavioral and physical health of our residents, with emphasis on substance use disorders

Strategies:

A. Increase Access to Healthcare in the San Luis Valley and in Each Town

1. Enter into formal MOU's to enable each local community center to house traveling behavioral and physical health providers
2. Apply jointly for funding to better meet the behavioral, mental, and physical health needs of our communities
3. Identify opportunities to share behavioral and physical health providers and health resources
4. Improve access to Spanish-speaking healthcare providers and culturally-competent care
5. Advocate for the reduction of costs and expansion of health insurance

B. Address the Behavioral and Mental Health Needs of Our Community

1. Partner with San Luis Valley Behavioral Health Group and San Luis Valley Health to connect our residents with the services and resources they need—including urgent (24/7) and inpatient mental healthcare
2. Provide behavioral health services and resources at each and every local community center
3. Invite local residents with relevant skills to provide mental health services and other support services (i.e., local counselors/therapists/spiritual advisors, etc.)
4. Increase the number of mental health providers at clinics and schools throughout the San Luis Valley

C. Reduce Substance Use Disorders Amongst Our Residents

1. Leverage prevention and early intervention with education campaigns that support informed decision-making—particularly for youth
2. Provide drug and alcohol support groups to residents and their families at each of our local community centers
3. Address addiction through collaboration with existing providers to connect residents with care for treatment and recovery:
 - a. San Luis Valley Behavioral Health Group
 - b. San Luis Valley Area Health Education Center
 - c. Alcoholics Anonymous/AI-Anon/Drug Anonymous Support Groups
4. Coordinate with local organizations, such as La Puente, to provide those in recovery, and their families, with resources for housing, food, stability, and job acquisition

GOAL 3 cont. : Improve the behavioral and physical health of our residents, with emphasis on substance use disorders

Strategies:

D. Assist Older Adults in Maintaining Active and Independent Lifestyles

1. Develop effective interventions to maintain the health, well-being, and physical function of older adults
2. Prevent, or reduce the burden, of age-related diseases, disorders, and disabilities for the 50+ population by taking the following measures:
 - a. Create an annual health fair for Latinos age 50 and older
 - b. Offer recreational activities for adults age 50 and older at each local community center
 - c. Provide a series of health-related workshops, classes, and information sessions focused on the health of the 50+ population
3. Collaborate with the following entities to support our strategies:
 - a. Family Leadership Training Institute–San Luis Valley
 - b. San Luis Valley Great Outdoors (SLV GO!)
 - c. South Central Colorado Seniors
 - d. Valley-Wide Health Systems
 - e. San Luis Valley Health
 - f. Alamosa Senior Center
 - g. San Luis Valley Area Health Education Center

GOAL 4: Improve the economic conditions that impact our quality of life

Strategies:

A. Increase the Financial Literacy of Our Community Members

1. Create a shared marketing campaign about the importance of financial literacy that targets Latino families
2. Provide financial literacy classes at each local community center
3. Identify opportunities to share financial literacy educators
4. Leverage partnerships with local financial institutions to support financial literacy

B. Assist Residents in Securing Meaningful Employment by Increasing Job Opportunities and Providing Training

1. Create shared job boards at the local community centers to advertise job opportunities and apprenticeships in all towns
2. Provide career pathways sessions and job shadowing opportunities to help individuals explore career opportunities
3. Offer classes and training in job-readiness—job searching, tech skills, communications, customer services, administrative services, etc.
4. Seek joint funding for a wage assistance program to encourage employers to provide job-probationary-period opportunities and apprenticeships
5. Increase job skills in the trade fields by:
 - a. Hosting information sessions with local trade professionals
 - b. Offering certifications for trades that are in high demand regionally
 - c. Partner with local employers and contractors to establish a shared network of placement programs for apprentices

C. Promote Community-Driven Small Business Development

1. Create a network of Small Business Commissions, or bodies made up of a diverse group of residents, to attract small businesses that support the preservation of the San Luis Valley's cultural heritage and identity
2. Develop a marketing strategy to attract small businesses to the San Luis Valley who will provide desirable employment for our residents
3. Identify joint funding sources to provide low-interest loans and capital for new small business development in the San Luis Valley
4. Provide incentives for small businesses that address unmet needs in the community (i.e., health clinics, pharmacies, grocery stores, restaurants, fitness/health speciality stores, and businesses offering family/youth activities and/or community gathering spaces, etc.)

GOAL 5: Support ongoing cultural preservation, education, and celebrations

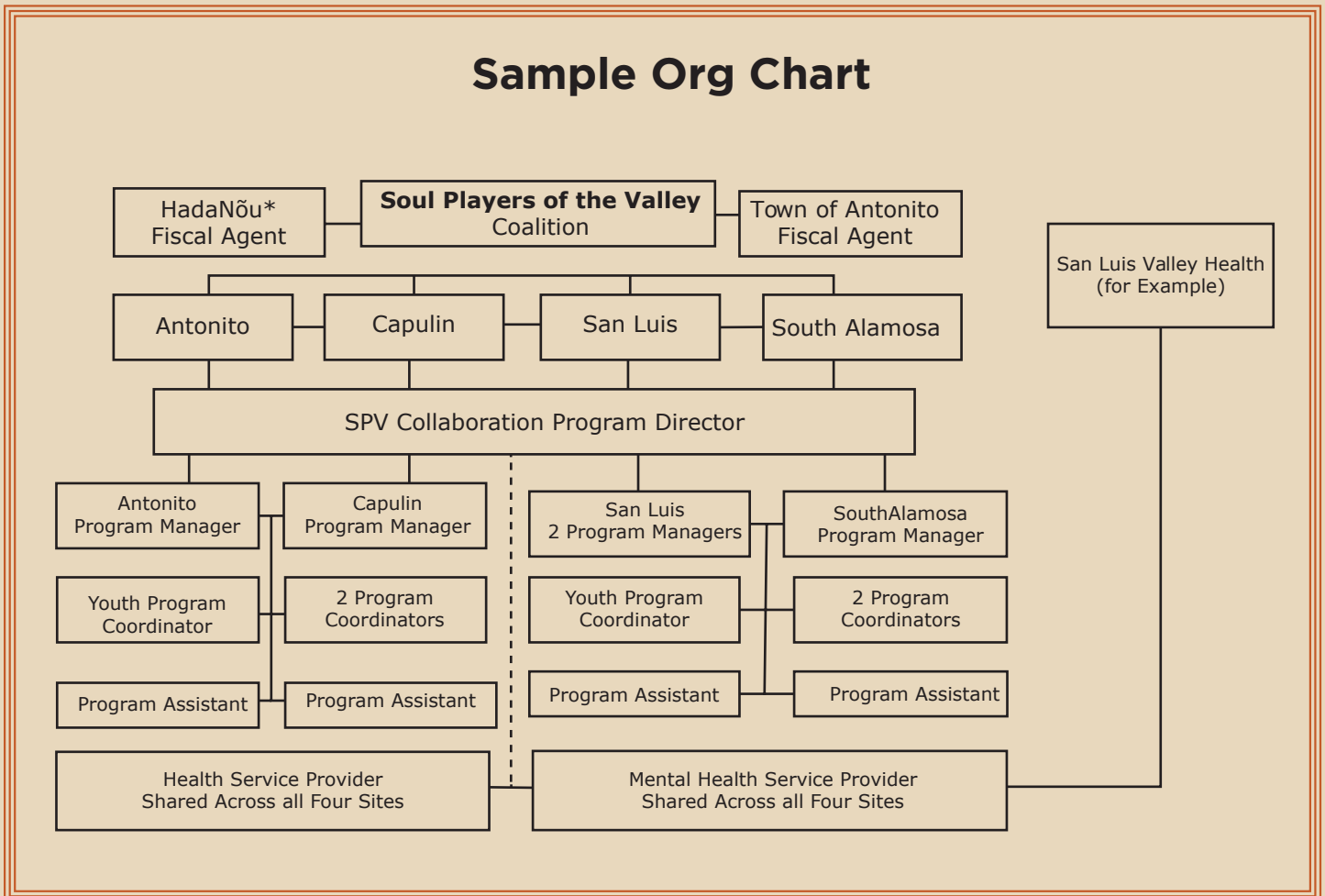
Strategies:

1. Enter into formal MOU's to encourage local community centers to house rotating culturally-focused events, educational programming, and activities
2. Apply jointly for funding to support existing and new cultural activities
3. Create activities for youth that honor and celebrate cultural pride/heritage
4. Coordinate shared events across all four towns and invite an inclusive roster of cultural institutions and heritage sites to participate
5. Create opportunities for our elders to share their cultural knowledge and pass down traditions
6. Invite local religious leaders and groups to host or participate in events
7. Explore potential partnerships and resources for cultural preservation, heritage tours, and heritage awards
8. Fund and initiate a reprinting of the dictionary that documents the unique dialect of 17th-century Spanish spoken in the San Luis Valley

Anticipated Jobs Created

As part of our commitment to our Coalition, we will hire up to 27 employees over approximately 3 years in a phased approach. The jobs created will be equally available to each community. We recognize that hiring, training, and supervising staff will be through a collective effort, allowing greater opportunities to create full-time jobs that can serve multiple communities and be housed across our four locations. Some jobs will be created and filled after programs and services have been established. Early hires will be those who will be responsible for creating our collective structure and implementing programs. Hiring, payroll, and supervision will be in partnership with the Soul Players of the Valley Steering Committee and partner fiscal agents. Below is a sample organizational chart demonstrating our collaborative efforts through the initial 18 employees we would hire.

SEE ANTICIPATED JOBS CHART BELOW



*The HadaNōu Collective is a nonprofit that provides support to aspiring leaders and new nonprofits. The Soul Players of the Valley are supported by their Infrastructure and Leadership Structure program, which provides a **values-aligned approach to fiscal sponsorship**.

APPENDIX G

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