Five Essays on the San Joaquin Valley

Notes about the Community Leadership Project Cohort of the Alliance for California Traditional Arts (2009 – 2017)

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Preface

> “To me, leadership has to do with responsibility and being responsible to the community, and giving back. Not only giving *back* but *giving* to the community. Because if you don’t give, it cannot survive and it won’t go on. Not just our culture, but all cultures will die. Without them being replenished from our community and from our own people, from communities like this.—Agustín Lira, Teatro de la Tierra

> What we are up against is culture change. It needs to come not only from asking people inside communities to give more—communities that have been through foreclosures and bankruptcies—but to ask that of major foundations and others.
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> Literally, we are starting from ground level. It’s not the fact that our people are not generous. They are extremely generous. But traditionally, it’s been about sending money back home to the Philippines to their families or giving to the Catholic Church.
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> Part of that is colonialism. And so how are you going to battle colonialism—in a year, right?! When you are talking about close to 400 years? And how are you going to change a whole culture? In a very, very short amount of time? In the end, this is kind of what was being asked of us.—Dillon Delvo, Little Manila Foundation

Over the last seven years, a group of grassroots organizations in low-income San Joaquin Valley communities, run by and serving people of color, have been imagining and shaping the future on their own terms. This report explores how seven of these groups made use of a major foundation investment of grant dollars through the Community Leadership Project (CLP), managed by the Alliance for California Traditional Arts (ACTA).

I turn to CLP participants to explore how and why ACTA’s approach was successful. Comments throughout are drawn from interviews and conversations that I was privileged to have with people from Arte Américas (Fresno), Danzantes Unidos Festival (San Joaquin Valley and beyond), Kings Cultural Center (Armona), Little Manila Foundation (Stockton), Merced Lao Family Community, Inc. (Merced), Modesto Cambodian Buddhist Society, Inc. (Modesto), Teatro de la Tierra (Fresno), and the Alliance for California Traditional Arts.[1] This account is grounded in the longer histories of Mexican, Filipino, Hmong, and Cambodian people in the Valley and the forward-thinking work of ACTA.

The ACTA-CLP cohort experience is significant in many ways. (1) The scale of the investment in small grassroots cultural organizations of color—in sheer dollars, the amount and variety of support, and the length of the grant period—is unusual.[2] (2) The idea of using change capital to support innovation and growth has been explored in large elite organizations[3] but rarely in small grassroots groups that are already nimble, resourceful, and creative. (3) Bringing a cultural (and a folk cultural) lens to the work focused attention on community assets and resources and opened transformative possibilities. (4) Trusting grassroots organizations of color to chart their own futures, respecting the values and practices that got them this far, and building collective practices and support are all critical to the transformative work that occurred. The stories of the ACTA-CLP cohort directly challenge conventional funding practices and provide inspiring alternatives.

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[1] In March and April 2017, I made site visits to each of the groups listed above. These seven groups were involved in the final two phases of CLP (dubbed CLP 2 and CLP 2.5). Four of these groups were in the first cohort as well. I also conducted interviews and did document reviews; see the Afterword for more on this process.

[2] The amount of money, though large by many grassroots groups' standards, and unrestricted, was not huge: $20,000–40,000 for two or more years. People achieved incredible yields with these funds. The success of this funding **is** important in the context of general philanthropic disinvestment in communities of color. See Holly Sidford and Alexis Frasz, "Not Just Money: Equity Issues in Cultural Philanthropy," *Helicon Collaborative* (July 2017): http://notjustmoney.us/docs/NotJustMoney_Full_Report_July2017.pdf.

[3] On change capital, see Rebecca Thomas and Rodney Christopher with Holly Sidford, "Case for Change Capital in the Arts," *Nonprofit Finance Fund* (2011): http://www.nonprofitfinancefund.org/sites/default/files/paragraphs/file/download/caseforcapitalfinal_050611_spread.pdf. Also see Meghan McDermott, "Change Capital Investments: One Tool for Moving to Abundance," *Global Action Project* (March 2014): https://global-action.org/system/files/reports/Change%20Capital%20Investments--Global%20Action%20Project.pdf; Alan S. Brown and Arthur F. Nacht, "Lessons Learned About Change Capital in the Arts: Reflections on a Four-Year Evaluation of Nonprofit Finance Fund's Leading for the Future Initiative," Report for Nonprofit Finance Fund (2014): http://www.ddcf.org/globalassets/Arts/Lessons-Learned-about-Change-Capital-in-the-Arts.pdf.

Five separate essays make up this report. I begin with an overview and description of key elements of ACTA's approach. This is an attempt to draw on, and share back, some of what participants themselves found most meaningful about their experience with CLP. In the second essay, I sketch how four of the groups, all very different from each other, made use of the CLP investment, suggesting both the range and variety of their work and their creativity and resourcefulness. Three essays take a closer look at particular people and their work. While ACTA and CLP literally put a roof over the community at the Cambodian Buddhist Temple, some less tangible dimensions of spirit and heart were also essential to the building project. I use the third essay to point out those dimensions and bring us all around the table to listen in—a way of valuing the ethnography, people's words, and collectivity that are features of the ACTA approach. CLP was "game-changing" for the Little Manila Foundation, but Little Manila, like other groups, brought history and strengths into the room, as I try to demonstrate in the fourth essay. Character, ethics, values, and love figure large here and in the fifth essay where I look at grassroots folklore theory and practice in the work of Teatro de la Tierra. Given that this entire endeavor was called the Community Leadership Project, I offer this final essay as a sort of meditation on what one example of leadership looks like at the grassroots. In an Afterword, I offer some reflections.[4]

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Acknowledgments: I am especially grateful to Amy Kitchener for this invitation. Spending time with the ACTA-CLP cohort was deeply moving and inspiring. Again and again I witnessed people opening themselves and others to who we might be, doing justice to the people and the stories they share, and building collective community power. Deep thanks to Agustín Lira and Patricia Wells Solórzano from Teatro de la Tierra; Dillon Delvo, Brian

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[4] For an excellent essay on the virtues of small grassroots groups and suggestions for how to better appreciate and support them, also drawing on CLP experiences and lessons, see Amy Kitchener and Ann Markusen, "Working with Small Arts Organizations: How and Why It Matters," *GIA Reader* 23:2 (2012): http://www.giarts.org/article/working-small-arts-organizations.

Batugo, Joel Juanitas, Dr. Dawn Mabalon, Elena Mangahas, Lange Luntao, and all of the extended Little Manila family, including Dr. Joan May Cordova; Leng Nou Power, Dr. Van Prom, Kunna Vath, Chantol Ma, Sokuntheary Keo, Ork Hern, Venerable Lorn Vibol, Moeurn Doung and all the other Modesto Cambodian Buddhist Society board members; Houa Vang, Lue Thao, Tony Lor, and the young people in the Lao Family Merced Community *qeej* ensemble; Juan and Consuelo Medina and the parents and young people in the extended family of Kings Cultural Center; Frank Delgado, Nancy Márquez, and Juan Arambula from Arte Américas; Maria Luisa Colmenarez, Rudy Garcia, Juana Saludo, Jerry Fierro, Sabrina Valles, and board members from Danzantes Unidos; and Lily Kharazzi, Russell Rodriguez, Sara Aguilar, Jerry Yoshitomi, Nayamin Martinez, and the whole ACTA staff, as well as all the others who helped. For their helpful readings and comments, in addition to the people already mentioned, I thank Jane Barry, Eric Joselyn, Deborah Menkart and Ellen Somekawa. For their time and insights, I thank all of the above. All the mistakes are my own.

1. "Being responsible to the community"

In December 2009, the Alliance for California Traditional Arts (ACTA) was chosen to be one of the intermediaries[5] for the next iteration of the Community Leadership Project (CLP), funded by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, The James Irvine Foundation, and The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. After the initial three-year run, ACTA twice successfully applied to extend and develop the CLP program until funding ended in the spring of 2017.

ACTA saw CLP as an opportunity to expand resources for chronically underresourced communities. They proposed to reach and serve grassroots cultural groups run by people of color, immigrants, and refugees working in low-income communities, to make multiyear general operating support grants available, and to offer (with as few strings as possible) other forms of support, including peer learning, coaching and support, and customized training. They proposed to show what people in low-income grassroots cultural organizations could do with change capital: financial capital that propels change in organizations and, through these groups, change in people's lives. And they proposed to do this work in culturally competent ways, and with profound respect for the strengths these organizations already had.

To launch the effort, ACTA conducted outreach, offered information sessions in a variety of communities and online, and developed a process for selection. They went to where people were, instead of expecting people to come to them. They anticipated potential barriers to participation and worked to remove them.[6]

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[5] For initial descriptions, see http://www.actaonline.org/content/acta-amongst-new-cohort-community-leadership-project-grantees and http://www.communityleadershipproject.org/.

[6] For example, ACTA staff went through Guidestar listings to identify possible participants who might not have learned about the program on their own, and they actively recruited through their own broad networks. They did not rely only on responses to announcements or a call for RFPs (Requests for Proposals).

Five of the groups eventually selected tell origin stories about how ACTA sought them out, saw value in what they were already doing, and encouraged their applications.These are stories about ACTA going the extra mile, about unexpected possibility, about hope. And they are also stories about how "competitive" processes historically exclude people.

In November 2010 ACTA announced awards of $210,000 to eight nonprofit organizations in the San Joaquin Valley and Monterey County.[7] ACTA then successfully applied for a second round of CLP funding and in July 2013 announced $420,000 in grant investments for seven nonprofit groups serving the San Joaquin Valley, reflecting a shift in the funders' priorities for regional intermediaries: Arte Américas, Danzantes Unidos de California, Kings Cultural Center, Little Manila Foundation, Merced Lao Family Community, Inc., Modesto Cambodian Buddhist Society, and Teatro de la Tierra. The program was extended for an "exit phase" in December 1, 2015. It ended in the spring of 2017.[8]

Overall, through the CLP in its various versions, ACTA directed an enormous investment to 11 grassroots cultural organizations of color over seven years: a remarkable $819,000 in operating support grants and more than $329,000 in additional funds for individual technical assistance (TA) needs and training with a phalanx of outside consultants. These funds were supplemented with customized training and targeted support by ACTA staff, lead consultant Jerry Yoshitomi, and program managers (initially Nayamin Martinez, then Lily Kharazzi and Russell Rodriguez). ACTA Executive Director Amy Kitchener offered a guiding eye and hands-on support throughout.

ACTA was the only arts organization chosen as an intermediary regrantor. ACTA has worked in innovative ways with California folk and traditional artists and grassroots communities of color since 1997. They have collaborated with community groups, run regranting programs, offered technical assistance, and facilitated convenings—skills on which they relied and which they developed further as part of the CLP initiative. They are widely respected as field leaders and change agents. The CLP effort was something new. It was the largest investment ACTA has ever been able to make through a single project; it primarily focused on the financially underresourced and culturally rich San Joaquin Valley; and it allowed ACTA to work over a long period of time with community groups.

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[7] They were: Arte Américas, Caminos del Arte, Centro de Unidad Popular Benito Juarez, Kawaiisu Language and Cultural Center, Kings Cultural Center, Merced Lao Family Community, Inc., Teatro de la Tierra, and The Way Ministries.

[8] The grant period formally ended in December 2016. Wrap-up, evaluation, and some extensions of the grant period continued through spring.

For most grantees, these were also the largest grants they had ever received. The dollars were for general support, rather than projects, and they were multiyear grants. Folklorist Amy Kitchener, ACTA's founding director, recognized that these funds were likely finite, representing one-time commitments from the foundations involved. She saw that the CLP effort needed to help groups manage a time-bounded investment so that it would continue to yield benefits and leave organizations stronger. This required a change capital approach: "Knowing that the San Joaquin Valley had few if any funders that could potentially replace this funding at the end of seven years, we were intentional to devise a strategy where groups could use the money to invest in business models that would result in sources of renewable annual income."

ACTA engaged Jerry Yoshitomi as principal consultant. He led the design and implementation of the CLP, building in a number of key elements to support long-term learning and change: communities of practice, step-by-step planning, convenings, site visits, training sessions, and individualized coaching and support. Jerry had been an early mentor for ACTA staff, and he and ACTA had a long working relationship. He and ACTA together were excellent intermediaries at work. The effort represents mature thinking and practice by principled and multiculturally fluent practitioners.

The grant dollars became available after California activists challenged funders about longstanding inequalities in funding communities of color and pushed funders to disclose data about their own practices. In response, a coalition of nine foundations created a pool of funding for organizations serving low-income communities of color. Three of these foundations co-funded the Community Leadership Project, focusing the grant dollars on building capacity and sustainability in defined areas.[9]

The funds that ACTA received were directed to a particular place.[10] The San Joaquin Valley[11] is both the nation's largest producer of fruits and vegetables and home to an ongoing epidemic of hunger. Forty percent of the Valley's children live in poverty. Thousands of people go without clean drinking water. There is a crisis in affordable housing. Valley residents represent the highest concentration of immigrants in the state, and 35% of them live in poverty. People face racism, discrimination, and exploitative labor practices, and live and work in environmentally hazardous conditions. Philanthropy is limited. Participants in CLP know these issues first-hand. This is lived experience for communities of color and tightly connected to the long-term cultural work each has undertaken.[12] Moreover, most of these groups are actively addressing social issues and community needs. In a region with sparse or missing infrastructure, they are crucial community anchors and resources. Movements for justice that started and continue in the Valley provide context and an important base of folk wisdom and practices that people can call on.

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[9] See Avis Atkins and Orson Aguilar, "A Promise to Diverse Communities: Summary of the Foundation Coalition's Efforts," *The Greenlining Institute* (June 2012): http://greenlining.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/PDCreport.pdf; Rick Cohen, "Putting the AB 624 Agreement into Practice and Policy," *Critical Issues Forum* (2009): https://racialequityblog.wordpress.com/2009/06/22/putting-the-ab-624-agreement-into-practice-and-policy/. For an evaluation conducted by Social Policy Research Associates after the first phase of the project, see http://communityleadershipproject.org/learnings.html.

[10] Initially ACTA was funded to work in the San Joaquin Valley and the central coast. For the later rounds, funder priorities shifted to the San Joaquin Valley.

[11] For statistics, see: "San Joaquin Valley Health Fund Policy Platform 2017," http://www.shfcenter.org/assets/SJVHF/SJVHF_Policy_Platform_February_2017.pdf; "California's San Joaquin Valley: A Region and Its Children Under Stress (January 2017): http://www.shfcenter.org/assets/SJVHF/A_Region_and_Its_Children_Under_Stress-Web.pdf; "About the San Joaquin Valley," *UC-Merced Health Sciences Research Institute* (2017): http://hsri.ucmerced.edu/research/health-disparities/about-san-joaquin-valley; Chris Reed, "Social Justice, the Central Valley and CA Dems," *CalWatchdog.com* (June 11, 2013): http://calwatchdog.com/2013/06/11/44017/.

[12] The Valley is also one of the most ethnically diverse regions in the U.S. See Isao Fujimoto and Gerardo Sandoval, "Tapping into California's Central Valley's Hidden Wealth: Its Rich Cultural Capital," *Berkeley Journal of African American Law & Policy* 9:2 (September 2007): http://scholarship.law.berkeley.edu/bjalp/vol9/iss2/3/.

Amy Kitchener, who has lived and worked in Fresno, in the San Joaquin Valley, for over 25 years, saw possibilities: “The Valley is a cultural crossroads. Generations of ethnic communities have settled here. Something is so vibrant and powerful about these groups. They are here and we got to work with them. They were already strong. We were asking about the future: what does it call for, in terms of ACTA and these groups and other partners.”

ACTA’s approach was important. Rather than adopting a deficit model—the idea that organizations of color lack the “right” skills, and need to be fixed to be more like mainstream groups—ACTA looked to the powerful assets[13] that communities already have. In doing this, ACTA moved past the inadequate and one-dimensional picture offered by a financial balance sheet to a more fully realized and multidimensional awareness of groups’ strengths and resources.

Future-thinking together

Amy saw the CLP as visioning work and as a collective process: “There is this sense that people are bringing forward their histories and the stories of their culture and community. And we are all future-thinking together. And we are trying to figure out what can we do together to make it strong and sustainable.”

The practice of future-thinking together was basic to how ACTA and groups in the CLP cohort operated. People had plenty of dreams. ACTA’s CLP project design offered money, tactics, and tools for making those dreams real.

Habits of collectively sourcing futures are invaluable: bringing visions to the surface and building them out, asking and imagining “what next?” and sharing ideas within the peer group. People hear themselves think out loud, receive valuable affirmation and feedback, exchange information, and share and revisit histories. All of this happens within a context of respect (and is impossible without it). These processes were cultivated in the workshops and activities Jerry led, and also in formal and informal conversations between CLP and ACTA people.

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[13] I use “assets” to refer to all the valuable qualities and resources that people and organizations possess. This diverges from the notion of tangible and intangible cultural assets used in cultural mapping activities. For discussion of those, see Maria Rosario Jackson and Joaquin Herranz Jr., *Culture Counts in Communities: A Framework of Measurement* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2002): http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/60316/310834-Culture-Counts-in-Communities.PDF.

Jerry observes, “Traditional cultural groups often have little trouble describing the future they imagine. ACTA-CLP’s ‘step-by-step planning’ approach encouraged groups to determine, for themselves, their long-range (10 year) goals and what best steps to take along the way to get there.”

Lue Thao, from Merced Lao Family Community, Inc, says, “It opened our eyes, united us and brought us together. It made us invest and focus on the future. Where do we see ourselves five years, 10 years from now?” It was effective for us as an organization, helping us to plan where we want to go. A lot of board members and clan leaders and elders are passing the torch to the younger generation, and it is our job to run with it. But we need to have a sense of direction. And now there is unity there.”

People often think of folklore work as backward-looking: a way for people to collectively source the past or the present. In fact, collectively sourcing the future is a mindset that community people already have [14] and cultural work that ACTA has been doing for a long time: inviting people to imagine together what could (or should) be happening in their communities. Each CLP group is unique, but all are choosing how to contribute to their community’s long-term well-being. Groups depend on several strategies when charting their futures:

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[14] Robin D. G. Kelley writes about “freedom dreams,” naming and exploring African American traditions of imagining and creating freedom, liberated time and space and being. There are strong folk traditions of collectively sourcing freedom (besides the surrealist examples he shares). This is a public interest folklore practice, too. See Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams* (NY: Beacon Press, 2003).

- People constantly and creatively draw on culture: not only art forms and traditions, but practice, theory, ethics, and values offer important alternatives (and challenges) to “mainstream” ways of being and doing.

- Every group in the ACTA-CLP cohort works with young people. Youth cultural arts programs are important future-looking vehicles that nurture young people and keep community cultural traditions alive and vital. Youth leadership development, education justice work, and mentoring are part of the mix.

- There is a strong focus on ensuring safe and welcoming spaces and times. Buildings, gatherings, and ritual traditions are crucial in settings that have been (and remain) unwelcoming and hostile to people of color.

- Heart and spirit are essential dimensions of their work: love, caring, kindness, and nurturing. Every CLP site works as an extended family.

- These organizations rely on a much wider range of resources than appear on spreadsheets, including enormous gifts of time, labor, heart, and spirit.

- People generally see their efforts as long-term, multigenerational work, even when formal planning involves shorter horizons.

Amy reflects: “What is powerful in all of these groups is a much bigger frame than the arts. It is the community frame. How culture and traditional arts and folklife have become central to these groups and their work and their mission as part of being stewards and leaders in their responsibility, and organizing for change. There is power in the much longer view. The story of these organizations is tied to a larger history in the valley.”

It is striking to me that Amy’s description of the power of these San Joaquin Valley groups resembles in many ways the culture of ACTA. Committing to community culture, traditional arts, and folklife for 20+ years, ACTA has centered many of the values of grassroots communities of color and made these values their own. And there is a feeling that future-thinking together is work in which we all have a stake. ACTA, no less than CLP community groups, takes to heart the responsibility of being stewards and leaders in cultivating cultural traditions that are essential to humane lives and organizing for change. This confluence of interests and values contributed to the success of the effort.

Scaffolding strategies[15]

> "What did ACTA learn? ACTA learned more about what are some of the 'best practices' around capacity-building and the leadership development field. And then we learned what parts of it didn't seem to fit for the groups we were working for.
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> And so while we might not have known how to address these problems at the beginning, we just dug in and tried to figure out what each group really needed and helped them address it in a productive, coaching kind of manner.
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> We were also trying to use our networks and help facilitate peer learning around this. And people could realize they weren't alone. And this other group is dealing with the same thing, and get these two groups together.
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> It wasn't about the deficits. And not that there's all these things wrong that have to be fixed.
>
> It was much more pragmatic: when you look at what the strengths there are, and you try to scaffold onto that, into another area. I think we had more of a philosophy of how to do this than a real methodology."—Amy Kitchener, ACTA

The fact that Amy saw the possibilities of the CLP and pursued this new direction in the first place illustrates the expansive perspective that ACTA brings to this work. They have a long history of advocating to create more respect and resources for grassroots cultural groups and working with those groups. They have deliberately cultivated the habit of working across sectors, framing a broad and holistic field for work. Over the years, this has given the ACTA team experience in many new domains and developed their intermediary skills at "bridging links between culture and social justice, health and wellness, education, civic participation and youth engagement efforts statewide."[16] These are among the solid skills and experiences on which they built with CLP.

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[15] Scaffolding is a pedagogical technique: "breaking up the learning into chunks and then providing a tool, or structure, with each chunk." For example, see Rebecca Alber, 'Six Scaffolding Strategies to Use with Students," *Edutopia* (May 24, 2011): https://www.edutopia.org/blog/scaffolding-lessons-six-strategies-rebecca-alber.

In her comments above, Amy outlines some basic elements of ACTA's approach, values, and culture:

- Take the culture of the community group as a starting point. Center and respect grassroots and vernacular practices as tools that people have developed.

- See the community groups themselves as doing things right, according to standards that matter for the community, rather than imposing a monocultural, top-down, one-size-fits-all measure.

- Start with the strengths that groups have and build scaffolds around them, using supportive strategies and leveraging strengths.

- Work in a kind of call-and-response, iterative process, both to particularize and customize the supports you offer and to move forward. Value people as active agents shaping their own paths.

- Commit to learning and self-critique. Learning, change, and growth are collective efforts, with ACTA as a partner in the process.

Antisubordination politics and a commitment to equity also characterize ACTA's work. ACTA referred to CLP participants as "investment partners" rather than "supplicant grantees" (in Jerry's phrases) stressing the nonhierarchical nature of the relationships they sought. The language is telling. It's an indication of how ACTA tried to bridge the worlds of grassroots communities of color and mainstream foundations. Sometimes they were advocates for (and with) the community groups; sometimes they were buffers, resisting the demands of the powerful.

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[16] "ACTA Fact Sheet," n.d.

Sometimes—and their discomfort still registers—they were constrained by funder demands. They weren't alone in facing these challenges and met with other intermediaries in learning circles and conversations to reflect on them. In a white paper co-written with the Rose Foundation, another intermediary, ACTA articulated insights about practices they saw as good, culturally responsive, and responsible to the community. For example, most of the grassroots cultural organizations in CLP rely on volunteer staff or staff members who juggle families and multiple jobs. Holding meetings on the weekend or in the evening facilitates attendance without requiring people to lose a day's pay.[17] Here ACTA was directly channeling feedback from CLP and advocating practices that they already had in place.

ACTA worked one-on-one, offering individualized, customized, hands-on, hand-made support to the community partners. They did whatever was necessary to ensure that people got suitable help, were satisfied, and moved forward. Invariably, everyone learned a great deal from this kind of careful dovetailing and attention.[18]

Dillon Delvo, director of Little Manila Foundation, comments, "ACTA was extremely sensitive to our culture. Crossing that cultural bridge is definitely not that easy. Their willingness to reach out to us—to not really come from a top-down approach but really trying to understand the nuance of culture—is something that I extremely appreciate."

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[17] "Capacity Building with Small Groups: Good Practices and Added Value," *Rose Foundation* (November 17, 2011): https://rosefdn.org/capacity-building-with-small-groups-white-paper/.

[18] Group trainings were made available to all the CLP participants in the initiative (including people in the ACTA cohort and other cohorts) by technical assistance and leadership providers. ACTA-CLP groups took advantage of offerings they found relevant.

ACTA people were conscious and conscientious about shaping locally relevant, community-appropriate plans. They were very process-focused. They relied heavily on face-to-face interactions and visits. These house calls were time-consuming but central to establishing clarity, understanding, trust, and productive ways forward.

In these and many other ways, ACTA mirrored the habits (and drew on the strengths) of the groups themselves. The CLP effort was a hybrid space to which all parties contributed. Together, the ACTA-CLP cohort created a kind of engaged and emergent culture that was stimulating and supportive in different ways for those involved.

Deep cultural organizing

In leading this project, Jerry drew on long experience with nonprofit organizations. He also appreciated, and related to, immigrant communities of color doing cultural work. His fluencies in both the nonprofit world and community culture influenced his project design. ACTA's experience, creativity, and care advanced his efforts.

• Jerry used the concept of a community of practice as a centerpiece for project design. As a requirement of the grant, ACTA asked each organization to develop leadership teams to attend training sessions and convenings, make decisions about how to invest and use grant funds, develop step-by-step plans for where they expected to be in the future, and manage how they would get there. Members of these groups also attended regular meetings. Participants appreciated this peer-learning approach, and it was effective. Ideas percolated through organizations. People shared experiences when they returned home (and on drives home!) The multigenerational groups encouraged by ACTA allowed organizations to incorporate new voices and ideas and to some extent challenged existing hierarchies.

• A seven-year run was a good span: there was time to develop efforts, experiment, assess, and move on. This was a guided effort: groups worked through step-by-step planning charts on paper and, in especially rich ways, during visits or calls with Jerry and ACTA staff.

People were able to reflect and report on what was going on in real time and receive support (or clarify their thoughts) at decision points if they wanted. In a climate of reciprocal coaching and mentoring, the cohort also taught ACTA. And the longer (more realistic) time frame accommodated people's real-life responsibilities.

- Jerry translated nonprofit lingo into culturally meaningful terms: "theory of change" into "step-by-step planning," "long-term capitalization" into "your hopes for your grandchildren." He said, "I look at projects as logic models. If we do this now, then where are they tomorrow or the day after? Without trying to impose the logic-model framework on them, that is what we were doing. It was more a matter of asking, 'What do you want to achieve?' And then we'll figure out what we want to change and what we want to keep. At the end of the day, that's what we really want." Intermediaries who are fluent translators (like Jerry and ACTA) make it possible for people to make better plans.

- Deep and active listening, telling your story, imagining scenarios, role plays, and informal conversation were among the speech acts used in gatherings and convenings. People spoke in their first languages. Translating happened. All of this slowed things down, but taking time and paying attention to disconnects brought people together. This care—ensuring that people be heard, be comfortable, be treated well—extends community hospitality practices into the "professional" realm. The ACTA cohort valued these features of project design: this was relational work.

- It was significant that the people in these seven organizations were people of color, immigrants or refugees (or their children) from Cambodian, Hmong, Filipino, and Mexican American traditions. "We really felt a kinship," Dillon Delvo says. Certain understandings united them. There were also differences, but they found a comfort level, which ACTA supported by valuing their time, insights, local knowledge, wisdom, and cultures.

- Peer learning was empowering and validating: hearing directly from someone who had been there. People valued how they could freely share struggles and successes, compare notes, and report on relevant experiences—for example, how to deal with (recalcitrant or not) elected officials. Some followed up and visited one another's sites as they developed their own building projects. Learning together meant that people had agency and power.

- Providing introductions and bringing people together to connect around (and learn and work on) something they care about is an established ACTA practice. Having organized and facilitated gatherings of California traditional arts practitioners for many years, ACTA has built deep relationships, strengthened capacities, and grown the field in an unusually large and diverse state. Jerry introduced new elements for some aspects of CLP project design, but he also valued and shared ACTA's toolkit, including this movement-building approach.

Some examples of how all of this played out may be useful.

Jerry designed grassroots fundraising trainings to introduce ideas and strategies for shaping solid financial plans that could support long-term sustainability. A role-playing exercise that he used was the single experience that people brought up most often when they reflected on CLP project design. They said that it changed their way of thinking. They thought about what it means to ask for money. They reevaluated their own worth. They began to consider how giving money has historically operated within their own communities.

> Dillon Delvo, Little Manila Foundation: "There is a common notion that if we can just do things the way established nonprofits do it, then we would be OK. But it is a misconception that the same kind of donor cultures exist in communities of color. Getting our minds wrapped around this was a lot of what the training was that we were getting from ACTA, and what was amazing was they were learning from us, and were able to react and really think about it and care."

> Lue Thao, Merced Lao Family Community, Inc.: "ACTA and Jerry and everyone really got involved with us and that really inspired us. It gave us the confidence to make an impact. We're coming from a culture where having to ask for money for a nonprofit isn't done. But if there is a loss in the family, then everyone is more than willing to

> donate. The ideas that have come out of this room are ideas we really want to implement. A lot of great stuff has happened in this room."

Jerry recontextualized what people thought about asking for money, and he challenged taboos. At the same time, he consistently valued, and activated, cultural traditions.[19] He helped people who are often humble and don't make claims to appreciate their own worth. "You are saving people," he said, giving people new language and a new framework that he knew to be true. Yet CLP funding and CLP training were not panaceas. The contradictions and complexities of people's situations were acknowledged. People opened one another's eyes.

People achieved remarkable things with CLP. They didn't do this alone: they moved forward in a loosely interwoven learning community. Repeated trainings, convenings, visits, and conversations helped them settle into a shared cultural space over the course of seven years. ACTA was responsible for creating and nurturing that collective culture.

Jerry's "community of practice"[20] design made it possible for conversations to percolate and perspectives to be shared. People spoke in their first languages, on their own terms, and their words were translated. They shared stories that mattered to them. They laughed together and learned together. They discovered aspects of themselves. They saw the past differently, and the present, and the future—not all the time, but enough that they kept coming back and stayed involved, sending different emissaries to the meetings when life intruded.

People gained confidence, saying that they didn't feel crazy for imagining possibilities, or holding on to and evolving traditions that matter deeply.

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[19] Jerry is ideal as a cultural intermediary in many ways. He is fluent in many languages: foundation/nonprofit and grassroots/vernaculars. He brought to the group, and actively drew on, his own family background and cultural grounding, validating the path and sharing how culture propelled and anchored his own trajectory. He is sophisticated and able to delicately lance internalized oppressions, having addressed his own.

[20] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community_of_practice.

Agustín Lira said CLP convenings were more like home than the usual arts gatherings. This happened because ACTA staff welcomed and supported people in bringing their full selves, histories, cultures, and communities forward. Residential segregation being what it is, this is all the more remarkable, and was all the more appreciated. Grassroots traditions of hospitality helped, too: treating people well, eating together, habits of being good hosts and good guests, sharing basic kindness, respect, and genuine attention.

Concrete knowledge was exchanged, and there were opportunities to learn from one another around particular concerns. People from Kings Cultural Center and Little Manila (both undertaking building projects), visiting Arte América's beautiful building in downtown Fresno, could imagine having something like that for their communities and also learn from Arte's Frank Delgado about the challenges involved in having a mammoth building and footprint to take care of, even when it is a beloved heirloom. People got new ideas and were inspired by one another: by the youth organizing and youth development that Little Manila's Dillon Delvo and Brian Batugo are doing up in Stockton, by the way the MCBS was building its Temple, brick by brick, with community help. They became cheerleaders and resources for one another.

Jerry describes the convenings as a bit like Noah's ark: "We put people on together, but the giraffes and zebras walked down the ramp hand in hand."

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Who ACTA people *are* matters as much as what they did. Their character is what shows. Authenticity, sincerity, shared commitments to community well-being: ACTA people enact these values. Relationships are long-lasting and continuing.

Vision work involves us in collectively sourcing past, present, and future. In these community contexts, it has a lot to do with being accountable to one another and to the well-being of the community. Dillon Delvo says, "Being a director is just getting with great people in a space and letting them be who they are and can imagine." With CLP, ACTA gave people a safe place, peers, and support to imagine and sketch out beautiful and possible futures.[21]

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[21] A culture of "good work" involving ethical, equitable, excellent, empathetic, and engaged practice is recognizable across ACTA-CLP. See the Afterword and Howard Gardner et al., *Good Work: Theory and Practice,* The Good Work Project, 2010: http://thegoodproject.org/projects/the-good-work-project/. Let's not overlook the feminized labor involved in nurturing, long-term, care-giving, love-based cultural work. See Valerie Kaur's talk at the Moral Monday Watch Night service (January 2, 2017): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LCenwgheIBs.

2. Safe and welcoming spaces

The ACTA-CLP initiative stimulated prodigious growth. Little Manila Foundation took a huge leap and opened their first space, which they quickly filled with exhibitions and programs. The Modesto Cambodian Buddhist Society was building a temple, *Sala Chhan*, a place of peace. Merced Lao Family Community, Inc., after decades and generations of wandering, was looking for space for a community center. Kings Cultural Center added a new building, more than doubling their space and quadrupling their capacity. These were all transformative efforts. Others undertook delayed maintenance or upgraded facilities and grounds. Arte Américas invested in their plaza: the only green space in that part of Fresno and the site for the popular annual Dia de los Muertos gathering, as well as a source of revenue from rentals. Teatro de la Tierra soundproofed space for music classes and made other capital investments to strengthen basic systems and reduce overall operating costs. And Danzantés Unidos invested in 65 portable wooden floors for folklorico dance classes at their annual festival.[22]

Each group is an anchor for cultural traditions in its community, but very few look like "conventional" arts groups. There is a temple. There is a social service agency. One group began as a historic preservation and social justice organization. Another operates out of their house. One group has no physical site. For two groups, the ACTA-CLP grant was the first they had ever received. ACTA recognized the power and potential of each of the CLP participants. Taking each group on its merits, and in its own terms, is good practice: this is one important lesson of the CLP. Another lesson: Working with small grassroots groups is not as risky as funders often assume—and the return on investment can be impressive. There is a lot to learn from the resourcefulness of the CLP groups.

Why did building projects take on such importance for the ACTA-CLP cohort? What are people building (in terms of community, spirit, heart, and peace) in addition to physical structures? How do people think about these long-term deep cultural organizing efforts in which young people play such important roles? How are people making sanctuaries in time and space and filling them with love and action?

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[22] ACTA staff in Fresno addressed their own space needs and took a leap into new offices. This was not part of the CLP, but the move surely made them appreciate the difference a good home can make.

“A place we can call our own”

If you’d asked Jerry Yoshitomi at the beginning of the CLP about undertaking a building project, he would have strongly discouraged it, he says, recalling his personal experience of opening and trying to keep a building afloat for 17 years. But when Hmong elders from Merced Lao Family and Community, Inc., asked him directly how the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center in Los Angeles came to be, Jerry recognized the same impetus that drove founding JACC members and motivated his own uncles to build a temple on his family’s farm. “My experience as an Asian American, and my community having done something similar, was really important. I left the meeting feeling like I was talking with my uncle 50 years earlier.” Figuring out how ACTA and CLP could help communities with their dreams and aspirations meant recalibrating mainstream nonprofit management “best practices”: “Each of us on the ACTA-CLP team in our own way functioned to encourage them to have the confidence to do what they and their own stories and histories call them to do. Most consultants to nonprofits would discourage trying to build a building. However, if you have been nomadic and lived in a refugee camp for 20 years, a building becomes pretty important.”

The Merced Lao Family Community, Inc., was established in 1981 to help Southeast Asian refugees resettling in Merced and the Central Valley in the aftermath of decades of war and forced displacement. Now, some 8,000 Hmong, Lao, and Mien people live in Merced. MLFC offers a wide range of social services for elders and youth, mixing traditional cultural practices with western approaches. Their cultural arts programs teach young people the Hmong language, dance, and music central to life-cycle traditions. Young men in Nuj Sis Loob, the cultural troupe, are learning *qeej,* the traditional Hmong bamboo reed mouth organ.[23] They are also learning about Hmong funerals, marriage negotiations, and other rituals where the instrument's voice is necessary. They practice in a parking lot outside the MLFC office, located in an office park tucked into the curve of a highway ramp. MLFC also organizes an annual New Year celebration, which now takes place in the county fairgrounds. Celebrations involve constant negotiation for space. Houa Vang, MLFC director, says: "It's a vision and a goal for us to actually have a place we can call our own and have our own cultures and preserve our culture within this building. A place where the youth can come in, and where the community can meet. A place where elders can meet to feel better, and where people enjoy culture and receive social services."

ACTA-CLP support helped the Hmong community rekindle the dream of developing a cultural and community center that they had conceived years before. Over the course of the CLP, they got help in assessing financing, locating buildings or lots, and surveying the community to see what people wanted and what they would commit in terms of funding. They visited other communities and centers. And they built community support. Houa says, "Now we have good commitments from leaders and advisory boards." Many possible sites have fallen through for one reason or another, but they continue to scour listings and hope that something will materialize.

I keep thinking of my visit, and the young men who gathered on an Easter Sunday morning to dance the *qeej*, with rhythmic steps and otherworldly sounds, in a parking lot near a highway underpass. The *qeej* is a voice that guides a deceased person's spirit back to the ancestors, and these young people are preparing themselves to take on important roles in the Hmong community. Funerals don't happen without the *qeej* group, or wedding negotiations and other life-cycle events. The young men say that they participate out of respect for their elders, and to earn their elders' respect. Being part of the group helps him to be a good person, one says, **“**because it shows other people that if I do this, my parents taught me well.” And “because it’s fun.”

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[23] Tony writes that "Nuj Sis Loob is a person from long ago in the Hmong history. Many elders have told me many stories about Nuj Sis Loob. Nuj Sis Loob is a very talented wise man and he is a master at *qeej*. There are also so many stories about him that it became legends or myths."

Tony Lor, who leads the group, says that this is also a way to learn the Hmong language. Forty years after the first generation of refugees settled here, these young people (and their parents) don’t necessarily speak Hmong. Besides, the special language of *qeej* is at a different level, he says; some of the songs even he doesn’t understand. He grew up speaking Hmong, “but not in the *qeej* world.”

Young people playing a bridge instrument and learning bridge languages are doing profound work. So is the MLFC. As a social service agency, MLFC responds to community needs with a mixture of Hmong and American approaches, helping to bridge worlds. Social workers who are also shamans and skilled in traditional health care are part of the staff.

Hmong people in Merced were in the vanguard decades ago in pushing western hospitals and medical systems to respect Hmong culture, shamans, and the place of soul work and community in healing.[24] Houa says: “Hospitals here are pretty good. It is pretty well known about Hmong culture here. They allow shamans to go to the hospital to help patients. Merced hospitals believe visitors will help people get well sooner. Other hospitals don’t always feel like that.”

Perhaps it needs to be said that for this community, as in other CLP groups, arts aren’t “mere” entertainment. Nor are they individual practices, disconnected from community life. Hmong traditional arts and culture are integral to community well-being in many ways. It makes sense that MLFC, a social service agency, is leading the effort to establish a cultural and community center for Hmong people in Merced after all these years. Their holistic approach and their persistence are important frameworks.

A second home

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[24] See Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures* (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997).

ACTA's CLP was the first grant Kings Cultural Center (KCC) ever received. With it, they more than doubled the size of their space and program. In 2010, KCC offered two programs: now, they run four programs and host other classes as well. They had 30 community shows in 2010. Last year, they had 45. Most remarkable of all, in 2010 they had a single building, a former doctor's office that Juan and Consuelo Medina, KCC co-founders, bought and remodeled with community help. Because of CLP, and with plenty of hands-on construction help from community members, KCC has expanded into two buildings. A large new multipurpose hall now stands exactly where Juan saw it so clearly in his mind's eye.

"CLP was the first grant that we applied for and the first one we got," Juan says. Kings Cultural Center "took full advantage" of all of the training offered: "We got CLP and they offered us more training: like board training and grant-writing, as well as fundraising. As well as sustainability. Words that I never used before! They trained us how to go and ask for cash. I told Consuelo, 'I'm not used to this but I am going to do it.' We went to all the talks." He took time off from work to do this. "I was losing money but I was gaining knowledge. And to me, knowledge was more valuable than the money." He credits CLP for helping KCC develop a stronger internal structure: "We learned so much that we took board members. They came back and disseminated information to other board members to continue the same process. We have grown a lot over the last seven years—not just physically but also mentally."

Juan Medina is a family doctor, and a force. He and Consuelo opened KCC in 2006, but the origin stories go back to Ballet Folklorico Sol del Valle (Sun of the Valley), which Consuelo began in their backyard with 10 students in 1994, the year they moved to Armona. Juan met Consuelo through folklorico, and he told her that if they got married, wherever they went, they were going to give back to the community that gave them so much. Not necessarily the community they come from, but a community where they "could leave a lasting impact on people's lives."

Dr. Juan Medina doesn't just take care of people's bodies. He came to Armona committed to using folklorico (and performing arts and culture) to change health outcomes and future trajectories.[25] Juan says he wants these kids to succeed personally and academically, and to provide for the community in turn. Some students are already doing this, opening folklorico classes in nearby Hanford. People said to him, "Oh, they are competitors." "No they aren't," Juan says. "They are disseminating the same ideas. They are partners in providing that culture. They are allies in making the community greater, in making the arts of folklorico available."

"I believe that if you really want to leave a legacy in people's lives, then you want to allow people to step up and do the leadership role," he says. "I don't believe in starting something and, just because I am no longer involved, it is going to drop." Their oldest daughter, just graduating from UC-Santa Cruz, plans to teach and develop the KCC intermediate mariachi group. "That is leadership coming from within," Juan says.

What does KCC mean to people? Consuelo Medina says, "It's a second home for a lot of us. It's a safe place for a lot of the kids, where they understand that they can come here and express themselves and learn something new and feel comfortable. For me, it's a place to see a lot of these kids grow up and appreciate their culture and continue with that, passing it on to others as well. And it is a place where it encourages them to grow as a person, and feel empowered, and inspired to grow and continue learning." When she sits back, Juan speaks up: "Now you know why we did this! It was because of her."

Armona is an unincorporated community with a population of about 4,000. Juan argues that dollars go farther and have more impact in places like this. He has a dream that the highway will eventually have a sign that says, "Armona, CA. Home of Kings Cultural Center." In many people's minds, that's how Armona is already known. Together, the community of KCC has changed how a place is imagined and how they imagine themselves: who they are and who they can be. Photographs of the KCC high school folklorico group line the hall. Juan and Consuelo proudly point out young people who are graduating and going to college: 17 of the 22 seniors.

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[25] Like other CLP groups, KCC is inclusive. They have sought out and welcomed people working in African and Asian cultural traditions, old-timey music, and zumba: whatever people are interested in. Juan welcomes anyone "who wants to use the art space to instill love of music or dance to children."

Investing in a small place, a place you might overlook, has tremendous benefits. This is a lesson shared by Juan and Conseulo Medina and by ACTA, which applies this principle regularly, and surely did so in CLP.

Putting a roof on a virtual home

Danzantes Unidos held their annual Festival (DUF) in Clovis and Fresno on April 7–9, 2017. Over the course of three jam-packed days, more than 1,500 folklorico dancers from California and far beyond—youngsters to elders—attend dance classes, presentations, lectures, costume showings, visual arts workshops, music recitals, a marketplace, and showcase performances. Besides these opportunities to learn and participate, festival buildings, hallways, and sidewalks buzz with informal gatherings and socializing. For people passionate about folklorico, it is a place to develop their art and a highly elaborated family reunion.

Zooming through the half-mile-long high school campus on a golf cart, photojournalist Juan Esparza Loera[26] and I are being given a tour by Danzantes Unidos Executive Director Maria Luisa Colmenarez. As we drop in on a dozen classes or so, we meet esteemed maestros, each teaching a different suite of regional dances. The students will show each other what they have learned in the DUF class recital later in the weekend. People plan for this: which dance they will study, with which maestro. And companies prepare all year long for the showcase concerts, where they premier their new work—"a gift to their peers," Maria Luisa says, and also a place to get solid critiques. Important scholars, innovators and traditionalists, musicians and artists, students and parents, make up this remarkable community.

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[26] He is also editor of the newspaper *Vida en el Valle*.

This is the magical world that DUF creates for one weekend every year. For 38 years Danzantes Unidos has provided opportunities for widely dispersed Mexican folk dancers to come together to meet, study, perform, connect, and celebrate at the largest Mexican folk dance gathering in the United States. Board members come from six California counties. Danzantes engages people in the San Joaquin Valley, but they have no brick and mortar location here.

How did an organization that produces an annual event take advantage of the opportunity ACTA and CLP provided? Danzantes invested in upgrading basic systems and improving operations.[27] They purchased sound equipment and speakers and constructed 65 portable wooden floors for dance classes, cutting down on the annual cost of producing the festival. They had been peripatetic, rotating between cities to reach members and develop membership within their regions. Now they are storing the floors in a Fresno storage locker and plan to return here (an unintended community economic development impact).

Danzantes also made major improvements to its website. They automated and streamlined registration (previously done laboriously and by hand) and began a blog, featuring profiles of master artists. Maria Luisa comments, “Without us intending it, it became like the red carpet of folklore in the folklorico world. After we would post about a teacher, all the community would jump in: ‘Congratulations!’ As if they had won an award! ‘Oh, you so deserve this!’ And we were just wanting to say this person exists. This is who they are. And they are teaching in our festival, and this is what they are teaching.” The innovations have been a good way to build further connections in a dispersed extended family. CLP monies helped Danzantes to put the roof on their virtual home.

Something we did for ourselves

Juan Arambula was involved in Arte Américas in its early days. After a busy career, including terms as a California state assemblyman, he came back on as a board member. He says, “I think Arte plays a huge role, especially for those young students in families that might not otherwise have access to an institution like Arte. We try to make it open and accessible to everyone. And I think it really fills a void in people's lives."

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[27] Including switching to Quickbooks for accounting and financial reporting, as many groups did.

Arte Américas is 30 years old this year. In 1995 they bought their 18,000-square-foot building, making it into a center for Latino arts and culture and offering exhibitions, workshops, performances, readings, and other programs. The adjacent plaza is the site for community gatherings, concerts, and an annual Day of the Dead celebration. Nancy Márquez, a co-founder, board member, and long-time volunteer, describes the plaza as source of pride and of revenue.

The ACTA-CLP philosophy was to use capital to leave groups stronger for the long term. The plaza produces about 40% of Arte's revenue. They can't operate without it, Nancy says: "ACTA support was essential and came at a critical time. The training and funding encouraged us to deal with the plaza improvements and our bookkeeping needs." Repairs, landscaping, and other improvements made the place more attractive for bookings and kept Arte looking like a place that people are proud of.[28]

Juan says, "We think of Arte as a cultural treasure, as a regional asset. Really, it is the cultural center for the Central Valley of California. To me it is really important that this is an institution that is owned and operated by members of our community. Sometimes in the past we've seen institutions offer little nuggets to our community, but the people making decisions by and large have been folks from the dominant community. Arte has been an experiment of sorts. This is something that the Chicano community has really focused on, has supported. And it's our own. It's something that we created. And it is not something that was given to us. This is something that we started." And it is also something that people are maintaining.

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[28] Frank Delgado, Arte's director, says that CLP training has led people to think differently about long-term goals, strategies, and developing multigenerational leadership. ACTA support helped with transitioning to basic systems that are easier to maintain. Like several other CLP groups, Arte shifted their bookkeeping system to Quickbooks.

Arte's longevity has a great deal to do with the depth and quality of their community engagement and investment. Juan says, "We survive through volunteers. One paid staff and a couple hundred volunteers and that's how we get things done." Calling people "volunteers" doesn't do justice to the relationship. ("People talk about coming to Arte like going to church," Nancy says.) People give 10,000 hours of time to Arte Américas every year. Encouraged to quantify this to better show the level of their staffing (regardless of compensation) and the scale of work undertaken, Arte began to put a dollar value on volunteers' time, first $10 per hour, more recently $15, revealing more than $150,000 in community investment annually.

Nancy says that Arte's survival for 30 years in the San Joaquin Valley is a direct result of this attitude. Fresno's former Metropolitan Art Museum started the same year as Arte Américas, well funded, with a staff of 22, but without a solid volunteer core. "I guess I remember joking with them when they went out. They stretched themselves with a renovation and got the city to back them. Then they went bankrupt. I said, 'Why do you have to close?' They said, 'We don't have money anymore.' I said, 'Why does that close you?' They didn't have to pay for the building. But they didn't have that mentality like we have. That doesn't stop us! If you're not going to get paid, you're not going to get paid. But keep working! But it is a totally different mentality, and that's what's driven the volunteer efforts here."

Frank Delgado, Arte Américas' director, credits community culture: "There is something about the core of people who created this. So many people were farmworkers and come from large families where they had to stretch dollars. Some of the board members now were former farmworkers. That sort of saves us—that good will and that ability to do things and really stretch dollars." People make food for receptions; family members pitch in with equipment, maintenance, and repairs. People know how to do things.

He says, "People think that Arte is a strong organization because we have outlasted other groups, but mostly we are strong in spirit."

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Juan Arambula takes a long view of the San Joaquin Valley. He says, “I grew up in the San Joaquin Valley since I was five years old. My parents are originally from Mexico, and we came in years ago to pick cotton until we got deported, and then my sister said, ‘Why? There’s enough cotton for everybody!’”

But his mind is less on his own childhood and more concerned with deportations and anti-immigrant policies, and with the children living in the Valley now, growing up in poverty and facing huge challenges: “We ought to be concerned about the totality of people’s existence. I think sometimes we look at problems instead of people. And in my view what people need is a real balance of things. One of them that oftentimes gets overlooked is the cultural component. And I think that’s extremely important because during tough times, that’s what gives us our will to continue, to struggle, to try to find solutions. And it also ties us to our own past. It gives us pride in who we are. And it helps us to sort of pick ourselves up and dust ourselves off when life hits us, and it lets us continue.”

ACTA-CLP participants are immigrant and refugee peoples—Cambodian, Hmong, Mexican—now settled and making lives in the San Joaquin Valley. The safe and welcoming spaces people create and sustain through CLP are especially important now, in the face of racism and rising anti-immigrant sentiment and policies. Hard work, persistence, and courage brought and keep people here.

Arte makes some of its volunteer involvement visible on a spreadsheet, but most groups don’t calculate the time and labor that people put in. Their size on paper doesn’t match their real size. In many ways, the currencies on which people rely—spirit, heart, and will—escape the conventional measures of grant applications.

3. Putting a roof on the community

A dozen community members sit around the table in the lovely space of the Modesto Cambodian Buddhist Temple. Construction work is going on around us. Now, a few weeks after my first visit, at New Year, the drywall is up. The beautifully decorated Temple grounds were filled on New Year with hundreds of community members as families worshipped and paused for rituals at colorfully painted shrines of the life of Buddha and at the sand mountain, *poun phnom khsach*. People socialized, picnicked, ate delicious foods prepared by vendors around the Temple grounds, and enjoyed Cambodian classical and folk dance, music and other performances. But now the place is quiet, and the work of completing the Temple continues around us. One after another, Cambodian elders and younger people around the table speak, mostly in Khmer, sometimes in English. They share how much the Cambodian Buddhist Temple they are building means to each of them (and to them all). They talk about what roles they have each taken in getting to this moment with the building and the community. And they talk about the role ACTA and CLP played in bringing the community to this point.

Leng Nou Power: “The Temple is built with the purest intentions. It is built on hope that the spirit and the grit and the strength of people is what is going to allow everyone to live the life that is going to be meaningful to them. It is about understanding and not avoiding the past and the collective history and tragedy that we share. But it is also about finding strength within each other. One of the advantages and values of outside support such as ACTA support is that it allows us to dream, and feel that support outside our community. And that does wonders for the people that call this their temple.”

Brick by brick

How can I do justice to what it means that a Cambodian Buddhist Temple is going up in Modesto, California? People are building it together by hand: brick by brick, mixing cement, putting up drywall. They did absolutely everything themselves except the air conditioning. (And they passed every inspection, people say proudly.) Dr. Van Prom's father was a mason, which is how he came to love the art of building. He called on an uncle, also a mason, and others. Moeurn Doung**,** a contractor, spends all of his time here, working on the building, teaching others. Before building the Temple, he did chimneys and block walls, but for this project he learned electricity, raftering—everything! He has learned to become a general contractor from building the Temple. And he trained all of his friends, Temple members, so that everyone could pitch in. One elder has been helping even though he has been ill. He comes because he wants to model coming no matter what. He wants to help the community to move forward and have a productive future. He wants to improve the quality of people's lives. He wants to give back, even through sickness.

Chantol Ma says that the Temple is a place that can heal people: "Like stress from the war and like that, and when they came here. So the Temple is the greatest place to help people, to heal the mind."

People intersperse stories about why they are helping, and why the Temple is so important, with memories of loved ones and family members who were murdered by the Khmer Rouge or on the streets of Modesto. A special spirit is being created in this place, where people who have been through terrible trauma (and truly are not all free of it) find a way collectively to create beauty. They are using their hands and bodies and hearts to build a sanctuary of peace. This feels like a metaphor for CLP practice, and a way forward for all of us, in this broken world, following the leadership and example of humble and hopeful people.

Chantol Ma: "That's why everybody here, who are putting in time to help out, don't care about the time. What we care about is that there is a place where everybody can join together and help one another."

Our big home together

Venerable Lorn Vibol, the head monk, was born in Cambodia. He came to Modesto in 2011 to serve the community: “The Temple is a place where we come together to heal, to socialize, to gather. To keep our culture alive. And to better our community and better our lives here.”

Kunna Vath: “This is our life. Our big home together. The Temple can heal people. Some people have stress. When they come here, they talk to us and the monk and they get relief. When we join together at the Temple, the stress, little by little, goes away.”

Neay Nun gives concrete examples of how coming to the Temple can make someone a better person. An angry person can come to the Temple, do a little bit of work, and see the bigger picture: “So it makes you a calmer person, a better person to come here.”

People taught themselves how to put up trusses for the roof. A survivor of the Khmer Rouge regime grieving for her murdered son, her lost family, is on the roof, hammering. It gives her solace. Sala Chan is a place of peace and a place of healing. And people are making it together, by hand and heart. Love is in every nail and cement block.

Dr. Van Prom, the Temple president, led this effort: “I think it is more meaningful that we are doing it ourselves. That we’re not having someone else build it. And Moeurn Duong, he turned down side jobs. He wants to be here to help out. He’s the same way as the monk: he eats a lot of food! He hasn’t lost any weight!” The talk turns to jokes about food and weight in Khmer. Laughter is in the room, and many kinds of good feeling.

Folding people in

The Cambodian community in Stanislaus County is small: some 300 families, less than 5% of the county’s population. Leng says: “But in these times, in the national landscape, immigration and minority populations have been scapegoated. In Stanislaus County, I feel like we have a voice. We are always being vigilant in dispelling myths and being open to visitors and people who are curious."

They have come far since they first purchased the 12-acre plot. They initially faced opposition from some neighbors and had to convince the county board of supervisors. They also had to unite the Cambodian community behind the plan. ACTA-CLP funding helped people move forward and made outsiders take the community more seriously.

ACTA was the first outside funder to support the Modesto Cambodian Buddhist Society. Some Temple members had experience with grants, but the Temple itself was new to seeking and receiving outside funding. Leng says, "We had to build the leadership team to meet the requirements of the grant and the convenings and to be good partners and really build our skill sets."

The MCBS community rose to the challenge, using the CLP opportunity to learn together how to address sustainability and a succession challenge at the Temple. Elders made room, allowing younger people to be involved. Managing all of CLP's requirements and a building project meant reimagining roles and responsibilities. "The group was hungry for new ways of addressing challenges," Leng says. Her generation stepped up, but she says, "What I'm always impressed by is the Temple leadership who are older. How open they were. It has been an exercise in adopting a new format of making critical decisions around funding, around direction of the community. And it has allowed Temple leadership opportunity to fold people in, in different ways."

The building project has allowed many kinds of collaboration across groups and generations.

Dr. Van Prom: "We all came from different parts of Cambodia, Battambang, Phnom Pheng. We all have different dialects and culture, and we have different histories. Some people escaped the war and didn't suffer as much as other people. Other people went through the war. And although millions of people were killed, somehow by faith we came together here. And that’s what bonds us together to help build this Temple, and to build the community. Because we love the community and want nothing but for the community to move forward and to continue on and to provide a better life for the next generation. And for the elders.”

Leng Nou Power: “The Temple is about having a home for elders to practice culture and everything they lost. For middle generations, it is a place to learn about identity, tradition, language, and culture and self. For younger generations, it is a place to uncover possibilities, a place to come to get a better understanding of where you come from and where you are going. For all, it is a place of refuge if you are having trouble. It is a place of recreation so you don’t need to wander the streets, and it is a place of peace. And it is a place to learn Cambodian classical and folk dance. This is important because those arts were not permitted to exist under communist rule. People who have that skill set are rare. To offer this sacred treasure to the world is important to us.”

Dr. Van Prom: “Our board members actually grew up at the same time that ACTA gave us our grant. So back then, our board had just formed, and we were starting to build, and had shared a lot of our struggles and dilemmas with the county. And ACTA came along and helped us through all of that. We used all the grant money to put the roof on our building. And by putting the roof on there, it is putting a roof on our community.

And we are so appreciative of what ACTA has done for us. And that is only part of the grant. The other part is that ACTA has shown us how to lead the community, how to bring the people together for this common mission, through Jerry and Amy and Lily and Nayamin. We all appreciate what they have done for us. I don’t know how to word it in a way—it is kind of priceless what they have done for us. And we don’t know how to pay them back other than just telling our story and our appreciation for them.

We are just a small group of people. We can’t do it ourselves. We have to have everybody helping. One person can’t build it. One person can’t fund it. But if everybody gets together and funds a little bit of it, and helps a little bit, we can get it done. And I think that’s been the key that’s been our inspiration. That together we can get it done.”

4. Leaps of faith

It should be clear that capacity building, for ACTA, was not a process of turning grassroots organizations of color—for whom culture is, in many ways, a major shaping resource—into more "mainstream" groups guided by bureaucratic norms. Instead, ACTA asked each group to determine how investments could prove potentially change-making for the long term. Together, they tried to remove obstacles and nurture strengths.

ACTA is practiced at seeing different kinds of strengths and appreciating different types of organizations. The fact that the CLP groups were of so many types and shapes is a sign of vitality and variety in community cultural formations.

Dillon Delvo says that CLP was totally game-changing for Little Manila Foundation, the organization he now leads. When CLP came around, Little Manila had no office and no paid staff: the conventional marks of "readiness." But over 18 years they had become a major force in Stockton, with an impressive record and, among their most important assets, people with character, values, commitment to social justice, and a history of successful long-term organizing and teaching. In Little Manila I recognize "transformative movement-builders": people who think not only "what do we need to do?" but "who do we need to be?" in order to make the changes we want to see in our communities and society.[29]

Every investment in CLP has been an investment in dynamic change-makers.

Origin stories

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[29] See Movement Strategy Center, *The Practices of Transformative Movement Building* (Oakland: Movement Strategy Center, 2016), pp. 2–6: http://movementstrategy.org/b/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/MSC-Practices_of_Transformative_Movements-WEB.pdf.

The Little Manila origin story begins in 1999. See Dawn Bohulano Mabalon's excellent *Little Manila Is in the Heart*[30] and the Little Manila Foundation website for a fuller account of the organization and for the longer history of Stockton's Filipino community.

From the 1920s through the 1960s, Stockton's Little Manila neighborhood was home to the largest Filipino community in the United States. Hemmed in by racist laws that restricted people of color to the south side of town, it was a thriving community with vital institutions. In the early 1970s, the city built a crosstown highway that cut through the heart of Little Manila, destroying precious landmarks: places on which people depended. City disinvestment continued. Dawn Mabalon and Dillon Delvo grew up in South Stockton. They went away to college, and in ethnic studies classes they learned "about the significance of their home town to Filipino American history."[31] It was eye-opening. They began to ask why they knew so little about their own community history.

They came back in 1999 to confront, literally, a wrecking ball in front of the last remaining blocks of Little Manila. Dillon says, "All of a sudden our personal goals had to be put on hold to deal with an immediate threat." They organized to stop the proposed sprawl-generating development plan, which, like the earlier destructive highway project, targeted historic Filipino, Chinese, and immigrant neighborhoods.[32] In an impossibly short time, they activated networks of people and presented the city with an alternative: an innovative and forward-thinking plan that respected historic assets. They lost the fight over development, but what they gained has been transformative for them, for the community, and for Stockton.

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[30] Dawn Bohulano Mabalon, *Little Manila Is in the Heart: The Making of the Filipina/o Community in Stockton* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013). Also see Joan May Cordova and Alexis S. Canillo, eds. *Voices: A Filipino American Oral History*. Stockton: Filipino Oral History Project, 1984.

[31] http://www.littlemanila.org/advocacy.

[32] For one thing, by knocking on every door in the Little Manila neighborhood—an area that is no longer Filipino—and asking people what they would like to see, they found out that the community had been under threat of eminent domain for decades. Stockton hadn't put money into the neighborhood because the city expected to destroy it. Dillon says: "People were grateful to talk to the Little Manila organizers because, they said, 'No one has ever asked us what we wanted.'"

They co-founded Little Manila Foundation. They saved three buildings and got four blocks designated the Little Manila Historic Site. (Because of their efforts, the National Trust for Historic Preservation named it one of the 11 most endangered historic sites in the United States.) They hung banners with historic images: reclaiming the past. They documented what was going on.[33] Dillon filmed and Dawn wrote a dissertation, then a book. Aiming to "change people's mindset," they did symposia, went into schools, and started an after-school program about Filipino American history for high school students. Eventually, they expanded to offer an after-school ethnic studies program, connecting the experiences of other communities of color.[34] They kept this going through tough years, when Stockton became the foreclosure capital of the United States. They saw that it was "a moral bankruptcy that [helped lead] to a financial bankruptcy."[35] By then, they had a clear analysis.

In 2014, however, Little Manila was everyone's side job. There was no staff and no physical space. CLP let them ask themselves: When are we actually really going to do things with Little Manila? What can we do with these funds? "Because to do it right," Dillon says, "I think what we are really trying to do is culture change. The big thing about CLP and this inundation of unrestricted funds is that we actually get to dream at a higher level. CLP changes everything for our organization."

"It is such a personal thing for us. It is my father. For Dawn, it is her father. So it is a labor of love. It's about family. It's kind of about looking around in the room and saying, 'Someone should take care of this.' But then you're the only ones in the room!" So they took a leap of faith, Dillon says.

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[33] Mabalon, *Little Manila,* p. 271.

[34] Students in the after-school program became tour guides for the historic site, created a living museum, became docents, and came to see themselves in the context of past Filipino community experiences and struggles and as active agents addressing historical injustices. This is the same kind of engaged critical pedagogy that Little Manila brings to U.S. history. This past year, history students and Little Manila educators led a successful effort to get the Stockton Unified School District to mandate ethnic studies as part of the curriculum. See http://www.littlemanila.org/education/.

[35] "The activists of Little Manila are dedicated to bringing multifaceted equity to Stockton. After generations of neglect of communities in the margins and the notion that diversity is a hindrance to progress, we believe in cherishing all communities and that diversity is our city's greatest asset." The advocacy section on the Little Manila website has a powerful description of their vision and values: http://www.littlemanila.org/advocacy/.

Asking what they really wanted to do with Little Manila raised deeply personal questions. "I'm just trying not to be a hypocrite," Dillon says. As a youth minister at St. George's Church, he stands up weekly and talks about faith in action: fighting injustice, fighting for the poor, standing for love, making sacrifices: "All these things that embody the gospel. Well, either you live it or you don't. You've got to put your money where your mouth is. Otherwise, you're standing up there lying. And I can't live with that. I really had to confront the idea, 'Is the direction of my life dictated by a market or by the needs of humanity?'"[36]

Dillon did a lot of soul-searching, talked it over with his wife, and took a $30,000 pay cut, walking away from his dream job as principal of a social justice–themed high school. He took on the job of executive director of Little Manila Foundation in 2014, becoming their first paid staff member. What they did with the CLP opportunity in less than three years is extraordinary. They found and opened their own space. They expanded from one program to seven. They nearly tripled their operating budget, and they now receive more than six times as much in annual donations.[37]

And when you open the door of the Little Manila Center, you walk straight into the reconstructed living space of a *manong,*[38] a Filipino farm laborer. A narrow cot and a small bedside table hold a few photos and treasured mementos. There are a handful of important papers—naturalization documents, notes, letters—along with clothes, shoes, cooking utensils, everyday needs. Rescued from the basement of the Daguhoy Lodge, where many Filipino farmworkers lived, these artifacts from a nearly forgotten man's life date to the 1920s and 1930s and speak to us across the decades.[39] Young people coming to Little Manila for programs, and visitors like me: we come face to face with a history, once hidden, now a source of inspiration and strength.

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[36] The Bible wasn't Dillon's only influence. "Rap and hip-hop culture was all about where you come from. It was all about having very little and making something out of it."

[37] They also launched a new website, developed a logo, branding, and social media presence, and attracted "passionate and dedicated volunteers": report, LMF to ACTA, n.d.

[38] This word, an Ilokano term of respect for a male elder, is used to refer to the first generation of Filipino immigrants to America, who arrived in the 1920s and 1930s and primarily worked as farm laborers. *Manang* is the term of respect for women elders.

"The idea of seeing yourself is so important"

In less than three years, Little Manila has also revitalized Filipino dance and music in Stockton.

People needed a place of their own after so much of the community, including beloved gathering spaces, was bulldozed and urban-removed. For Brian Batugo, Little Manila Center is "a long awaited center for the community. Now people can come here and study and practice. This space is a haven for youth. They are hungry for this knowledge, and they want to be taken seriously. I am proud of this space. I am proud that it has become such a haven for the community."

Brian is a dancer. He is also a high school teacher. He teaches in the Little Manila U.S. History program and, since CLP, has directed arts and culture programs at Little Manila. As soon as Dillon Delvo opened the door to the place they were thinking of renting, Brian felt his heart leap at the sight of the large open space: "Yes!! The floors were not even clean, and by the time we left, my feet were black. I just wanted to dance—not in the park or in a garage."

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[39] The objects represent many legacies: that of the *manongs*, whose lives are now teaching others, and that of Anthony Somera, who made sure that the first legacy would endure. The artifacts exhibited come from a few of the 26 trunks discovered and rescued by Somera, a grandmaster of Bahala Na Martial Arts and a board member of the Little Manila Foundation before his untimely passing. He set up a display of some of the objects in the basement of the historic Daguhoy Lodge, and Dillon promised his friend that they would be made accessible to the public. The foundation has received funding to open the trunks and catalog the contents. See Shane Williamson*, The Daguhoy: A Time Capsule,* 2010, posted by Dillon Delvo, November 19, 2015: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jj_0urLQ6Zw&t=203s. Also see Jeff Jardine, "A Trunk-Aided Version of Filipino History in California's Central Valley," *Modesto Bee,* January 30, 2016: http://www.modbee.com/news/local/news-columns-blogs/jeff-jardine/article57530428.html.

With no dance studio, he used to be creative in finding reflections and shadows that could reveal to him his own movements: “The idea of seeing yourself is so important.” Folk and traditional arts help people see themselves in multifaceted ways and from many perspectives, even better than the mirrors that now cover a back wall of the studio at Little Manila.

There were active traditions of Filipino dance in Stockton, Dillon explains: “And when a generation faded, it went away, in the early ’80s to ’90s. Brian comes at the very tail end. His role model was Ms. Carmen Tomek, a *manang* who had a dance troupe for decades, teaching in her home.” Brian wanted young people to have the experience he had: a role in a tradition with a long history, fluency in a practice that is central to community life (and a point of pride), a connection to many other people, an avenue for self-discovery and creativity, an expressive language that has resonance, and access to a safe and welcoming space.

But he gives them even more. Dancer, educator, and activist, Brian uses lessons as scaffolds, building a student’s bodily awareness literally step by step. He teaches the youngest students how to follow directions and how to connect movements. He offers students multiple ways in. He narrates as he moves: “If we are going to stretch, I might as well talk with you. Sometimes you need the teacher’s voice to coach you through. I don’t have the kids for long, so I am going to talk. Some kids can’t sit and listen: I can have part of their brain doing this, when their muscles are doing something else.”

Along with repertoire, Brian is teaching people to become more conscious through dance: “Once you teach that sensing of your body—how you can manipulate your limbs—you become very sensitive to others. If I am really thinking of myself, then how I am relating to others? Sometimes you have to take care of yourself before connecting to others.”

At annual community showcases, young people perform dance, poetry, and theater, “and they see they are part of something. And part of the message they are sending is advocating for community.”

It is astonishing that only three years after opening their doors, Little Manila is home to the Little Manila Dance Collective (LMDC), the Kulintang Academy, and Bahala Na Martial Arts school.[40] This revitalization of Filipino arts and culture wouldn't have happened without CLP or the building that is truly a center.

It came just in time.

"It's really the story of Little Manila," Dillon says. "When we started, we only had three buildings left. We were asking, 'How do we make sure this doesn't get lost forever?' Now, with our *kulintang* academy, we're expanding into indigenous instruments. Sadly, we just lost *kulintang* master Danny Kalanduyan. And so it's kind of ironic that it's our students that were Master Danny Kalanduyan's last. Of course we wish he was around and to be training under him, but it was a huge blessing to at least get a year and to see our children perform for him, and to see him so proud of them. That's the way we envision, hopefully, that generation looking down on us. And so that is an amazing thing, and so wherever Brian wants to go with arts and culture, we're going to figure it out."

Little Manila Foundation Dance Collective has already become a locally based feeder school, connecting students with larger communities of dancers and with Filipino culture and social movement circles. Brian says, "The purpose is to create more critical dancers who can then leave and find a place to practice." He is asking (and teaching) about where people are in a spectrum of approaches to traditional dance. Appropriating? Creating original work? Restaging? Dances are wonderful ways to feel, and move, your way through complicated historical, political, and personal imaginaries. For himself, and with his students, Brian is "finding ways not to let go of any part of yourself." These are lessons for life as well as dance.

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[40] See http://www.littlemanila.org/arts/. Also see Leo M. Giron, *Giron Escrima: Memories of a Bladed Warrior*. Los Angeles: Empire Books, 2006.

Seeing yourself in different ways is central to the critical folklore pedagogy that goes on here. How do we teach one another what we need to know and need to be able to do in order to be decent people and imagine and build freedom?[41] It helps to have role models.

When he was in eighth grade, Brian Batugo saw Dillon Delvo speaking in front of the Little Manila Historic Site. He credits Dillon with "planting the seed that you have to leave Stockton, but you have to come back." Dillon opened his eyes: "*Manongs* didn't talk about their own history. I grew up five minutes away. I always wondered why the south side of Stockton was so run down. I was conscious of the disparity with the north side. Then I went to Berkeley and learned that Stockton was one of worst sprawl developments in the Central Valley. And I realized that this is what Dillon was talking about. And the reason why we have to come back is to fix some of what we experienced growing up. Even not knowing how to fix it." Brian got critical thinking and expanded networks from college. "All of that has fueled what is happening now at Little Manila. I didn't just come back alone, I came back with a huge network. I came back to be part of that think tank that historically had not been here."

After Brian started teaching kids to dance, Dillon says, "Something crazy started to happen." All of a sudden they had dance mom and dads. The level of volunteerism went way up. Kids attracted by the arts joined after-school programs that were academic and about social justice. "It happened organically. When you work with young people, amazing things happen. We just want to invest in their goals and dreams and guide them a bit."

"Arts are like a gateway drug," they joke. "Arts are underrated," Brian says, "in their ability to bring people together."

Individual dreams connected: "It led to culture change. It led to more people that cared about this place. We grew up here and didn't even know what Little Manila was. And now there are people that identify themselves with the place. Now we have a tradition that when kids graduate, they come back in their cap and gown and get their picture taken in front of the three remaining Little Manila buildings. It's not about going to a studio. It's about 'I want to wear my cap and gown in front of these buildings because this is what I want to say about who I am.'"

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[41] This definition of critical folklore pedagogy reflects practice at the Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures Charter School, with which I have been involved since its beginning. It moves past tolerance models of folk arts education to transformative ones and mixes deep cultural resources with education for liberation. For another example, see essay 5.

Activist and philosopher Grace Lee Boggs says that "the role that labor played in building the movements of the Thirties is now being played by people involved in education. And that involves parents, teachers, and children because education is the creation of human beings. What's important to us today is not the manufacture of things as much as it is the creation of people. This work is about creating the people we need to be together."[42]

The successes of Little Manila Foundation can be reckoned in many ways, but the best measures are those that come out of the community itself. The new tradition of taking graduation photographs in Little Manila is testimony to how, together, people are changing their image of who they are, what they stand for, what they can do, and who they can be (and are) together.

Putting love on the spreadsheet

The transformational organizing that people are doing in Little Manila, this labor of love, is multidimensional: spiritual, moral, intellectual, cultural, and imaginative work. People are holding themselves accountable.

The work going on in Stockton is surely a sign of hope, part of the movement and moment that Reverend William Barber describes: "We are going to be the moral defibrillators of our time, and shock the heart of this nation and build a movement of resistance and hope and justice and love." He calls for coming together around a moral agenda and what is just. He calls for standing up and says that standing down is not an option."[43] CLP stories are stories of communities rising, and also of people rising to the occasion.

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[42] Boggs, a movement teacher and thinker, has influenced generations of activists. See Scott Kurashige, "Grace Lee Boggs and Immanuel Wallerstein: A Dialogue Between Two Visionaries": http://www.ucpress.edu/blog/28372/grace-lee-boggs-immanuel-wallerstein-a-dialogue-between-two-visionaries/; Grace Lee Boggs, *The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the Twenty-First Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

Dillon is on the board of Catholic Charities: "And I always say, on this spreadsheet that we're looking at, 'Where's God? Where's the column for God, and taking this leap of faith?' If a nonprofit is the way you incorporate love into society, then how can you hold to the same measures of how to make a decision as for-profits, because, obviously, love is not on a stock market analyst's spreadsheet? This is something I struggle with."

Putting love on the spreadsheet is part of the work that all the CLP groups are doing. They are paying attention to the dimensions of people's lives that matter the most: heart and spirit, love and justice. The work is about embodying values and building community around these values: being the change we want to see.

The work is inspiring and it calls for change: more leaps of faith. Dillon says:

> "For us, I think it is about a group of people, just kind of like taking a leap of faith together. I don't think that we're doing anything extremely special, because there are so many beautiful stories. D'you know what I'm saying? Every group of people's stories is important. I can't believe that we're the only compelling story. And so I really hope that our story inspires other folks to pursue this. And then you gotta find good mentors. If anything, that's what CLP was. The only reason why we took a leap of faith is because here are a group of people who are just really reaching out to us. They believe in us. Well, if they believe in us, maybe we should believe in ourselves as well.
>
> I hate the fact that foundations may become more businesslike and that they aren't willing to take a chance on people. That was always our problem. The story was extremely compelling, but the infrastructure was never there for any of us to be trusted. For a long time I was like, 'Well, how does everyone else do it? Why are we the

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[43] See Reverend William Barber, "How Americans Can Fight Hate Under Trump," *AJ+* (January 23, 2017): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hcdgz7lMcSg.

> only ones that can't do it?' And it'd always come down to, 'Well, they had someone wealthy.'
>
> But if that's what you need, then how are you ever going to tell the story of poor people? And in the end, that's what we are doing! We are telling these fieldworkers' stories and valuing them. And seeing it as this kind of priceless thing. We're their children.
>
> We're just trying to tell the American story from our point of view. And why aren't we investing in this? Especially at this time when we need to understand who we are as a nation? What I appreciate about ACTA is they had faith in us. And I can't understand why there is no faith for other folks.
>
> The power structures that exist—it's so weighted against underrepresented communities. And there's no infrastructure in these communities. It's the reason they are underrepresented. And for foundations to understand this, to get this—in the end, I had to take a huge leap of faith. I don't know if they're willing to take a leap of faith. I haven't seen anything, with the exception of ACTA. And then now, for us, the Sierra Health Foundation, who has taken, I think, a leap of faith on us, and I think we've been able to pay back dividends."[44]

The header on the Little Manila Foundation website asks, "How do you truly save Stockton's Little Manila?" This is a question for all of us to take seriously right now: "How do we truly save ourselves?" Little Manila answers the question with history, education, arts and culture, advocacy, and organizing. Their work is intersectional, a long game, grounded in love. This is deep cultural organizing: slow and patient, locally grounded, globally interconnected, self-determining, collectively sourced. These ethics and values are saving Little Manila and contributing to a renaissance in Stockton.[45]

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[44] Little Manila Foundation was one of a dozen Stockton non-profits to receive grants in April 2017 for projects addressing health disparities. See "SJ non-profits receive Sierra Health Foundation grants." *Stockton Record* (April 13, 2017): http://www.recordnet.com/news/20170413/sj-nonprofits-receive-sierra-health-foundation-grants

I think about a story Dillon told about his father. He would water the community garden in South Stockton, standing there all day long, patiently holding the hose while the water slowly trickled out—and growing the most delicious vegetables. I wonder if Dillon thinks that he is following the family tradition.

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Faith and ethics—how we treat one another, how we act, and how we live out our beliefs—are important for many of the people involved with CLP groups. Hmong *qeej* players say that learning the instrument helps make them good people. People say that coming to the Modesto Cambodian Temple can help make you a better person. In different ways, people describe working within a framework of dignity, justice, and love.[46]

This isn't just the territory of formal religion. It goes deeper.

At a CLP gathering in 2016, after a report from members of the Modesto Cambodian Buddhist Society, Jerry Yoshitomi reflected on the importance of the Cambodian dance group to young people facing personal struggles:

"Being in the dance group has really helped them to overcome some of that adversity. And it is my opinion that actually by doing the same dances that the ancestors actually did, they are actually bringing the ancestors back into their lives. They are people that they may not even have known: maybe it is a great-grandmother or somebody in Cambodia, but they are channeling it through you, and then into their own bodies, and then it becomes a place of belonging that they might not otherwise have when they go to school or when they go out in the greater world."

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[45] Dillon says that this is a story about Stockton, and how a group of small progressive nonprofits are making headway and leading a renaissance: San Joaquin Pride Center, Fathers and Families of San Joaquin, Reinvent South Stockton, and Little Manila. "We're not trying to provide services. We're looking to create institutional change. These are the folks that are actually doing it, at a local level."

[46] CLP people draw on many sources for the traditions they call on: folk cultures, social justice movements, the Catholic Church, Buddhism. Some would not call themselves religious at all, but there are deep spiritual and ethical dimensions to how people approach and carry out their work.

For some activists, transformative organizing means shaping new forms of culture and ways of relating to one another. Jerry's comment reminds us that Little Manila and other CLP groups are embodying change by calling on older forms of culture, with deep resonance and power.

5. “*Quihubo, raza?—What’s happening, people?*”

Looking at the important artistic work that Agustín Lira and Patricia Wells Solórzano are doing through Teatro de la Tierra, I focus on the thinking behind that work. What motivations, values, and philosophies ground their basic practices?

I draw on their own words because there is wisdom there, and I want to honor it. Agustín and Patricia are justly recognized for their artistry and their commitment to the community. Their theory and practice are as compelling as their art. Agustin speaks with great clarity about the values, principles, and models that ground his life’s work and Teatro’s. There are resonances between what he and Patricia say (and do) and the practices of other CLP groups. There are, of course, differences as well (for example, around politics and analysis), but a great deal is shared, especially traditions that are part of the survival skills and deeply humane value sets of communities of color.

Agustín and Patricia are radical artists. They are unafraid. They tell the truth. These liberation folklore practices are how we can learn to get free, and these lessons are sorely needed at this moment. CLP didn’t change the hostile environment or untangle all the contradictions, but it valued who Agustín and Patricia are, what they do, and how they do it. And it looked for ways to keep Teatro strong and sustainable without changing who they are.

I discuss above the perspective that ACTA brought to this kind of work: the perception that grassroots groups have endured because they have strengths and assets, notably culture. Here I center the words and wisdom of Agustín and Patricia: their own perspectives on their work and on CLP.

Enter CLP

Teatro was in the CLP program from its inception: seven years in all. ACTA has long valued

Teatro, worked with its founders, and encouraged them to apply to the program.[47] Patricia said: “When this fund came out, Agustín and I were seriously thinking of quitting our community classes because it was just such a struggle to be able to survive with little help.” Teatro knew how to be effective and manage on very little, but it was not easy. The timing was important.

Teatro received $119,000 over seven years (2010–2017), as well as training and support for infrastructure investments. They upgraded the building to improve practice and rehearsal space, invested in computers and media equipment “to achieve more with less human resources,” and revamped outdated systems. Day-to-day operations became easier. Patricia took primary responsibility for managing these changes, a sometimes herculean job.[48] Most of the work of maintaining and operating these “improved systems” also falls on her—an unanticipated burden. But Teatro emerged stronger, its basic operations and functions enhanced, and its values intact.

Like other CLP groups, Teatro wanted to create long-term sustainable revenue streams. They experimented with approaches. They developed marketing strategies and built visibility,[49] and they rethought basic assumptions: they accepted payment for some of their classes, formerly all free. Patricia says, “We changed our policy and said those parents who could afford to give could give. And so they are giving. Even though they are farmworker families and they are people who are challenged economically. They still come in and they give. And sometimes it pains me to take their money.”

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[47] They have been long-term grantees through ACTA’s Living Cultures program and were part of ACTA-curated national programs with the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, American Folklife Center and the Kennedy Center.

[48] They also shifted to Quickbooks for bookkeeping. Patricia’s willingness to try new things was an inspiration to others in the CLP cohort, as was her example of speaking out on social issues. Patricia attended training sessions at Rockwood Leadership Institute, supported by CLP. This experience built her confidence, she says, especially when she saw how much Teatro was doing with how little, compared with the large and well-funded arts groups at those sessions. Like Patricia, other CLP participants gained energy from feeling validated and affirmed. For more on these aspects of CLP’s work, see the first essay included here: “Being Responsible to the Community.”

[49] They put a brochure together, launched a website, and gained an online presence. They also did work around the release of a new Smithsonian recording, *Songs of Struggle & Hope by Agustín Lira*.

From Agustin’s perspective, the consistency of the funding relieved burdens and freed and inspired him:

> “The CLP stabilized us quite a bit over the years. So this allowed us to focus on our teaching, which is ideal. What does an artist want? An artist wants to be able to have the time to be able to do their work, but they also want to be able to have the time to deal socially, to find out what is happening in the world. It inspired us in that way because it gave us the time to study and also time to reflect. Without reflection you cannot move ahead. You can’t be creative without reflection. You can’t be creative without time. And that is one of the main things that artists fight for. I’ve been fighting for time all of my life—to be able to do things, to write a song. The CLP empowered us and allowed us to be able to do our work.
>
> I think that’s tremendously important. All of these different groups and the way they use the arts in their communities inspired me, too. But I knew, from all the years of being involved, that human beings are very creative, and we can figure stuff out for our own selves. And that’s what all the groups have done. And this particular group that the ACTA got together was a lot more *home*. They were *home* more. There have been other groups in there that are just art. That’s it.
>
> But these folks, they come from different communities where they see what is going on. And they have been involved themselves. And they may not say, ‘This is what is happening in our community,’ but you know they know what is happening there. So they are a lot more in tune.
>
> Also, too, notice they were Asian and Mexicanos and Chicanos and so forth. That makes a big difference. If you’re going to mix people together, then really get them

> mixed up, OK?! And they did that. So that was really good. I enjoyed all of these gatherings."

What is the quality of "home" that Agustín describes? He says that it means people are "aware of themselves, taking action against injustices and righting some of those wrongs." I think that he is also naming a certain culture that emerged among the cohort. Convenings were an important part of CLP program design. A majority of those present were people of color, so participants felt free to bring more of their whole selves into the room. That included cultural values: a sense of accountability to a community, and to people before and after you. Habits of reciprocity, respect, and generosity of spirit. Traditions of working within frameworks of dignity, justice, and love. ACTA supported people in carrying home values and wisdom into public settings.

People in the ACTA-CLP cohort found many ways to connect, of course. They related to one another around community needs and issues, and opened one another's eyes to the particularities of current struggles, with plenty of shop talk around cultural traditions and organizational situations. People brought their deep knowledge of San Joaquin Valley history into the room. As in an extended family gathering, they found and shared connections, adding dimensions to each other's perspectives. It mattered a great deal to the Little Manila people, for example, that Agustín had known and worked with important Filipino labor organizers in the 1960s and '70s.

"I swore that I would come back to work here"

Agustín was 19 when he joined the United Farm Workers in Delano. Activists Larry Itliong, Philip Vera Cruz, Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, and Gilbert Padilla were his mentors:

> "These were people who taught me that it was not all right *not* to fight back. They taught me how to fight back. They showed me how to do it. I was on picket lines, and I learned it was important to organize and fight back when someone threatens you and your family. You do not turn your back when someone threatens you or your family.

> Let's name him—Trump. When he comes out and says what he will do, we need to take that seriously, and we need to fight back.
>
> What were we interested in doing in the farmworker movement? We were interested in motivating our community and teaching them the culture and the history.
>
> What motivates me is the fact that we were thrown out of here,[50] one thing. And I promised and I swore that I would come back to work here and to face my enemies again. Face to face. And that I would fight them the rest of my life."

Why were they thrown out? Pure racism and bigotry—and an angry desire to squash the farmworker movement. What were Agustín and the others doing? Organizing: talking to the people, explaining that everybody has a right to fair treatment, safety, food, water, shelter, and dignity. Showing that people have the power to act. Making songs and plays out of what was going on: motivating people, bringing them together, moving hearts and minds and lifting spirits. Waking up the people almost got him killed by FBI thugs, who targeted the UFW as they did the Panthers.

Agustín Lira came to California's Central Valley from Mexico as a seven year old. His family were farmworkers, following the crops. He hasn't forgotten the suffering. But even then, when you sang, things got a little better. Agustín wrote songs about deportation sweeps that took his family and about the loss of his mother when he was very young. He wrote antiwar songs later, when he was being harassed about his opposition to the war in Vietnam. He wrote songs to lift up the people and gather a crowd.[51] By the time he was 19, he was using music and theater to unite people and build the farmworker movement. Co-founder of Téatro Campesino, Agustín spoke and sang so that people could learn what was going on, and he investigated and organized, shaping and reflecting the messages people were sending by their actions. He has never stopped doing this work.

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[50] In Fresno. By FBI agents, brutal and abusive in their efforts to stop this early UFW organizing. See Andrea Castillo, "Former United Farm Workers Volunteer looks back on 1964 Delano grape strike," *Fresno Bee* (September 24, 2015): http://www.fresnobee.com/news/local/article36494277.html.

[51] The messages of his songs remain current, and he is still writing songs based on all of these experiences. Some appear in *Songs of Struggle & Hope*.

Agustín came back to Fresno because he refused to give up his home to racists and bigots, and because of the kids. He and Patricia moved into the Lowell neighborhood, one of the poorest in the country. They began teaching music and theater and performing wherever they were needed, addressing the issues, and organizing. Agustín and Patricia do everyday practices: resisting, reflecting, paying attention, speaking out, talking with the children on the shady porch. Being musicians and artists and intellectuals and activists and unafraid. And teachers: loving and beloved. Modeling how to stand your ground, know who you are. Free and accessible, an open door.

Grace Lee Boggs says that the most radical thing she ever did was stay put.[52] We need to think about change in different ways, she says: more in terms of quantum physics. Acts may seem small but have revolutionary impact. This is what deep cultural organizing looks like: everyday acts of persistence, patience, being there and fighting back. Your character is what shows; it is how people recognize you, and how they recognize who they would like to become.

Training kids how to defend themselves through culture

> "Using the culture has been tremendously wonderful. We are training kids how to defend themselves, to use culture, and what to fight back for. This is the time and this is the season to fight back.
>
> For us, we were out to save some kids.[53] Because that's what it is for us. We're trying to save children. And if we get them for a while, for long enough, we can save them. We

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[52] See Scott Kurashige, "A time of hope and danger: On the 101st birthday of Grace Lee Boggs." *Race Files* (June 26, 2016): https://www.racefiles.com/2016/06/26/a-time-of-hope-and-danger-on-the-101st-birthday-of-grace-lee-boggs/

[53] In talking about "saving kids," Agustín uses some language that Jerry Yoshitomi had offered in an effort to get CLP participants to explicitly name and claim the worthy and priceless work they do.

> can send them out with some knowledge. And if we work with them for two or three years, they will be smart enough to do anything, to apply whatever they learn in our classes to life.
>
> Besides music, we also teach theater. Both of those disciplines are wonderful because the music heals and so does theater. But more than anything else, these are the type of disciplines that help you speak out and get more involved.
>
> It takes more than just one thing. You've got to involve different parts of your body and your brain when you do it. And that's what forms the connections in your brain, which make you smarter. Of course, I didn't know that when I started teaching a long time ago. It just felt really good.
>
> And that's the model we have kept."

Harriet Tubman famously said that she could have freed more people if more people knew that they were enslaved. Agustín and Patricia are doing this work, waking people up, activating them (us) with a holistic approach: integrative, regenerative.[54] Agustín describes growing a person's body and brain with music and theater. But just as important, he and Patricia are working in the domain of heart and spirit: they also grow these in people, along with their voices and musical skills. I know this as critical folklore pedagogy.[55]

In other ways, too, Agustín and Patricia draw on traditions of organizing to activate students. They teach young people the virtues of cooperation and mutual support, showing what we can do by working together (and demonstrating that we cannot be stopped):

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[54] A holistic approach that engages the whole person is one of the cardinal virtues of folk arts education. Brian Batugo at the Little Manila Foundation similarly engages students' critical consciousness along with their bodies. ACTA has done work for many years around folk arts and community well-being; CLP can be seen as doing important community health work and community cultural development work in many local settings.

[55] See more on this in essay 4.

> **“**The way Patricia and I teach here in the community, the model was picked up in 1965 during the grape strike. We were bringing in students and people that were interested in doing theater. We were trading the instruments and loaning them to each other because we didn’t have any money. So the whole idea, this cooperative type of thing, is based on no money and the cooperation of everybody. And all these models are used all over the world. You have them in Africa. You have them in Mexico. They’re called cooperatives, and that’s what it is. If you have an instrument, you could have 15 students.”

Jerry Yoshitomi mused that the CLP cohort were “pre-monetary societies.” If you think of this as an exchange system that people haven’t given up and practice in parallel and sometimes in contradiction to the capitalist system, he is right.

A gift economy is another name for it.[56] Or call it folk culture: where people share and invest time and effort in one another. This is an economy fueled by love and accountability, grounded in ethics and values, and expressed in practices and action.[57] Activism (it has been said) is about the kinds of questions we ask, but it is also about what we pay attention to. Love and caring (the domains of heart and spirit) are central to the world many activists imagine and fight for:

> “I can tell you from my perspective that the reason that I teach is because there were several people when I was growing up that cared enough about me to inspire me, to help me, to push me along. They saw something in me. But in the kind of condition or state I was **in** at that time, I needed someone to help me. To say, even symbolically, ‘You’re worth something.’

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[56] A deep sense of humility keeps many people from promoting themselves or their organizations. Jerry Yoshitomi affirmed that it was OK to feel worthy. Other CLP people recognized that community-based cultural work is part of a different economy. “We are priceless,” Dillon Delvo says. He asks fellow foundation board members: “Do we do our work for the market or for humanity?” And, as quoted in essay 4, “Where’s the column for God?” This is a different ledger.

[57] Parallel economies appeared in many ways in CLP. People made building projects happen through huge amounts of hands-on labor and collective effort. Some of the groups rely primarily on “volunteer” staff (a word that does not do justice to the roles people take on).

Because I grew up in labor camps. And I grew up out there in the fields. And that kind of lifestyle ruins the way that you think about how much you think you are worth.

Because constantly hitting your head against the wall because you are not wanted and you are not accepted—that is something that all people who come to this country and are immigrants live through.

But what motivates me is the kindness that people showed me. And I know how important it is and how it helped me. How it shaped me.

Especially children need to have care. They need to be shown love. They need to be shown that they are worthwhile. They need to be shown humor, *cariño*, that they are accepted. It doesn't matter if they make mistakes or not. That they are loved. Especially in this community where the kids don't get very much of that.

And 30 years from now, if I'm alive, we will still have classes and things going on in the community. Because if you don't give to a community, it won't grow. And if you don't let children and teenagers and other folks understand that there is a history, that we have a right to be here, and so forth, it's just terrible.

But that's who I am. I come from a political background. Which is also an artistic background. And I use my art to fight and to defend the community and our point of view and the fact that we belong here.

As I have always said, before I went to Delano, I had seen people in the fields fight to make a living, but I had never seen people fight for their rights. And that was tremendously important to me. It gave me a tremendous amount of pride in myself, and for ourselves, that we could solve our own problems. That we could fight. That we could win. That we could *win*. That we *won.* That we defeated over 40 growers that were tremendously powerful, that controlled not only California but the United States, that shipped out their food to the rest of world. That we brought them to their knees. That showed me the power of people."

Transformational organizing, long-term, deep, cultural organizing—the kind of work that Agustín and Patricia have given their lives to—is grounded in love and dignity. We have to change ourselves first, Patricia says; it begins from there.

"I have a responsibility to move our community in a direction."

When Agustín and Patricia talk about core values, they emphasize (and model) our larger collective responsibility for one another and the world:

> Agustín: "I'm interested in motivating people. And in doing it first-hand. I'm interested in motivating them and I have a responsibility to move our community in a direction. To make these kids who come here, and these adults, understand that our culture, and everybody's culture, is important. Languages are important. And that there is a right and wrong way to do things. And whether our country and our so-called president behaves like a dumb idiot, it isn't our fault."

> Patricia: "People want this right now: to sing something with some meaning, with a little history and a punch. To me that's what our job is. Through music uplifting people. And telling them, 'You can do it. It comes from you.' That is the one thing that they can change. They may not be able to change all the other stuff that is going on in their homes, in their schools. But inside out. They can change themselves. And man, after they learn that little piece, they even comb their hair different. You can see the difference. I feel that leadership is something that is going to be built in them because of what we teach in classes. They are going to be leaders because they are already not afraid. You are not going to sell them whatever. They already have a healthy sense of themselves."

> Agustín: "I see a hopeful future based on the fact that the people in this country have decided to fight back. And decided to become vocal. That makes a big difference. When you go talk to people, they are aware they can be involved, and they want to be involved. And that makes a big difference. Folks are turned on around the country, and

> it is beautiful to see their involvement. Patricia and I kept working, and eventually the people caught up with us!"

"If you don't give to the community, it cannot survive"

The foundations that funded CLP aimed to invest in organizations of color, but they had their own ideas about what financial stability, leadership, and resilience look like. Amy Kitchener observes that "funders turned to the tried and true nonprofit capacity-building playbook, which does not take into account cultural ways of knowing or community asset–based approaches." ACTA looked at how financial stability, leadership, and resilience were defined by grassroots groups and within particular communities of color.

There are many models of leadership besides the top-down and hierarchical. ACTA recognized that grassroots organizations often have servant-leaders: leaders who serve the people in collaborative and trust-based relationships. And in distributed and democratic leadership models, people with many different relationships to an organization take responsibility and share authority and power.

Inside and outside CLP organizations, on a day-to-day basis, leadership comes down to character. It is horizontal, not hierarchical: we are in this together, growing one another by what we can do together. Many traditional artists talk about leadership—and excellence and good work—in terms of character: they will say that their measure, as artists and as people, is what kind of people their students are. They choose to be judged by the character they help cultivate and by commitment to the community.

Patricia tells about the two guys from Visalia who came by to pick up some old windows (replaced with CLP funds, to soundproof the area where music lessons happen). They realized whose home they'd come to: "Agustín Lira? Maestro?" They were crying and hugging: they didn't know he was still alive! These men had been students in a theater group that Agustín started in Visalia many years ago. Hearing the story, Agustín adds, with pride, that the men are still active in their communities.[58]

Agustín is pointing to character. He is proud of the people his students have become and their engagement with issues that matter to their communities. Patricia is explicit that building character is central to their work: "Because it is so important to put out individuals that are going to be good people in the community."

Agustín speaks for many people involved in CLP in describing leadership as something we all need to do:

> "To me, leadership has to do with responsibility and being responsible to the community, and giving back. Not only giving *back* but *giving* to the community.
>
> Because if you don't give, it cannot survive and it won't go on. Not just our culture, but all cultures will die. Without them being replenished from our community and from our own people, from communities like this.
>
> And if I had three or four lives, I would put them all into teaching and working with people. And not just children, but adults and teenagers and so forth. Because that is the power. That is the energy that we have. And it is an untapped energy."

Agustín has received many awards. His favorite honor is what the neighborhood kids call him: "The greatest compliment I have ever had came from this community here," he says. A group of kids with untuned guitars came to the house and knocked. Patricia opened the door. She says, 'Hi, can I help you?' They say, 'Is the guitar captain here?'" Agustín and Patricia tuned the instruments, then sat in the front yard and talked a little bit. "That's the greatest compliment I've ever had!" Agustín says.

A nickname or a title codifies opinion. Brief and memorable, it is condensed and collectively sourced vernacular wisdom. According to local knowledge, Agustín is "the guitar captain" because he is loved and respected and knit into the community. He is valued as a resource: the person you go to so the music keeps flowing and you can keep playing and singing, using your voice and spirit. He encourages people's voices by keeping us in tune. There are many facets to this work of building character and hope and possibility, just as there are many facets to the compliment people pay him in calling him into his name.

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[58] What are they doing? Agustin writes: "My ex-theater students from Visalia came by for our old windows because they and community folks are putting together an installation having to do with activism, tradition and culture."

Thinking about life after CLP funds end, Agustín isn't worried. Multimillion-dollar organizations in Fresno like the Metropolitan Museum folded, he says; some organizations come and go. But, he says, "Patricia and I have been in our community for years and years and years. It doesn't take very much to support us. We figured it out. We know what to do, and we know how to communicate with our communities."

There is authenticating community evidence—the vernacular evaluations held in nicknames, stories, and what people say and do—to back him up.[59]

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What does leadership look like? I sit across the table from Agustín Lira, and he tells me about the children, his students, and his hopes for them (including the wish that they will have hopes for themselves). I witness his patient teaching, Patricia putting instruments into children's hands, teaching them to sing their own songs, in their own languages.

This is leadership. Coming to where you are needed and staying. Showing children love and helping them hear and grow their own voices, with others, in ensemble. Showing what dignity, self-respect, and fighting for your rights looks like: day in, day out. Standing up for what is right, no matter the cost. Enduring in hostile surroundings.

And naming what is going on: "Don't come to Fresno if you are homeless. . . . We look down on anyone that makes our town look bad," Agustín and Patricia sing, one of many songs by Agustín that call out the truth about the shameful politics of greed in his hometown and beyond.

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[59] Toni Cade Bambara talks about being accountable to our authenticating communities and to the communities that name us in *Deep Sightings and Rescue Missions* (NY: Pantheon, 1996), pp. 143, 215–16.

As the title of his song "*Quihubo, Raza?*—What's Happening, People?" reminds us, Agustín Lira has been waking up the people, singing and acting for justice and freedom, for a long time. I describe aspects of his and Patricia's work as fundamental practices for getting and being free, and for imagining and building a more just future. In a work of philosophical anthropology, Jonathan Lear explores how the Crow leader Plenty Coups practiced radical hope at a time when the Crow people's history seemed over.[60] At this moment, Agustín and Patricia offer radical hope.

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[60] Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006)**,** pp. 103-7, 123.

Afterword

These essays are observations about work.[61] I pay attention to cultural workers and their practices (what they do), and to particular kinds of folk cultural work: cultivating community well-being and long-term social health, trying to be (and to grow) decent people, getting woke and being free.

I am reporting on good work: ACTA's good work and good work in seven different CLP sites. That is, I am reporting on work that is **excellent** craft, skilled, wise. This is work in which people are **engaged**, both personally and socially. It is **ethical** and moral work: it serves the community and the greater good. It is deeply **empathetic** work that engages feelings. And it is work that is **equitable** and done with a commitment to justice and fairness. These five dimensions, explored by Howard Gardner and others in the *Good Work* project, are enacted by people working in the San Joaquin Valley.[62]

The domains of ethics, empathy, and equity seem especially important. They may get less attention than they deserve in many quarters (including my home discipline of folklore), but they are certainly prominent in people's practice and in how CLP people talk about their work. While ACTA offers many good practices to emulate, the most important things that they bring to this work are their values: deep engagement with heart and spirit and mind. They have this in common with many CLP people.

The CLP unrolled over seven years. In its final phase, it involved seven groups, located in five towns. More than a million dollars was expended. In April 2017 I was privileged to visit each of the seven sites described here. I was introduced to some people when I tagged along with Russell Rodriquez and Sara Aguilar on four ACTA video shoots (a great pleasure, and a great way to begin). At CLP sites in the San Joaquin Valley, I observed wonderful music and dance classes and vital festivals and gatherings. I talked with students and parents, staff and board members, and random passersby. Busy people took time to sit down for interviews. And I reviewed folders and folders of documents, notes, and reports. It would be impossible for me to do anything summary or conclusive. I offer a sampling: two overviews and three close-ups, character studies of people and places. I try to highlight some of the dimensions of this important collective effort, but I am unable to do justice to everyone.

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[61] Paying attention is itself an occupational folklore practice, and ACTA folks are very good at it. It gives me pleasure to think that we public interest folklorists are working within a tradition of occupational folklore shaped by a shipwright, organizer, and folklorist from the California docks: the late Archie Green. The work of ACTA and CLP—what I describe as grassroots folk theory and practice—is work for the public good, in the people's interest.

[62] Gardner et al., *Good Work: Theory and Practice*.

I am oriented by people's generosity of spirit, honesty, and openness. Agustín says (and I agree) that the CLP group was more like *home* than many arts groups. Critical folklore practice is about paying attention to what is recognizable,[63] and to ways in which inequity and equity shape social life. I am acknowledging the importance to people's work of values, character, and love: different currencies than the ones that appear on spreadsheets. I have begun to think of this as grassroots folklore theory and practice.

I take this approach for many reasons. For one: ACTA values the strengths and resources that come out of grassroots communities of color. They embarked on CLP aiming to support people's particular and distinctive strengths. It seems important to name and explore some of those strengths.

Grace Lee Boggs says that we need to know what time it is on the clock of the world and where we are in movements. It is late on the world clock. All the more reason to pay attention to people who improvise ways forward, activating long traditions of folk culture and social justice. This work is both vanguard and deeply embedded: what people think of as "old" as well as creative and forward-thinking. And it is surely movement work: field-leading and inspiring. I have focused on work that offers hope and good practices.

Dillon Delvo speaks about the challenges of sustaining nonprofit organizations in communities of color with long traditions of generosity that have been deeply shaped by 400+ years of colonialism and capitalism. Agustín Lira warns that people do not want to hear some kinds of messages. I owe it to them—and others, who show such great courage and heart—to center what I describe in the fourth and fifth essays as liberation folklore practices.

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[63] That is, culturally marked, perceivable, named.

There are many lessons here, and in the first two essays I try to surface what I heard. Part of my job as a cultural scribe is to collectively source, and share back, community wisdom. This is a story-based strategy: I highlight themes that emerged repeatedly in narratives and responses to my open-ended invitations to tell me about their CLP experiences, stories, and learnings. What should people know about CLP?

Another part of my job is to be a channel. I logged and/or transcribed 33 interviews. It is important to me to preserve spoken voices, and I share some of them directly, particularly in the last three essays. In essay 3, about the Modesto Cambodian Buddhist Society, I try to convey the feel of the conversation around the table. ACTA people spend many, many days around such tables and speak of deep listening as a core skill. This account does not do justice to that practice, but it was important to me to evoke the sense of many people kindly sharing their thoughts about what CLP meant to them.

As much as possible, I want you to hear people speaking to you, as they spoke to me. I use quoted speech and do not overcorrect their spoken words into written language. These are small ways of disturbing the hierarchies of the written page and the conventional report, and the habit of erasing vernaculars of many kinds. I also refer to people by their first names throughout to foreground the personal relationships that shaped this collective effort.

A word on arts. Arts *per se* get short shrift here. That has nothing to do with their importance: culturally meaningful arts anchor everyone's work in the CLP. Other people more skilled than I can speak to these traditions and their roles. Young people playing *qeej* in a Merced parking lot aren't waiting for a community cultural center to be built while they play this crucial instrument and learn music and language vital to people's lives. And a renaissance in Filipino arts is clearly happening in California (alongside other important and praiseworthy flowerings**.** The work that people are taking on along with **the** arts—and have taken on, and will continue to take on, before and after CLP funding—is my focus. I am looking at how people are taking responsibility for giving to culture (as Agustín says).

A great deal more can and should be said about the importance of local work, youth organizing, and critical folklore pedagogy, the importance of culture to long-term movement building, and the need to invest in work and communities like this. My hope is that this document will stimulate conversations. These essays are intended as a contribution to thinking about what all of us can learn from cultural organizations of color serving low-income communities.

These pages are filled with people with character. People with integrity. People who walk the walk. People who are brilliant. People with huge hearts, and people who have paid a price.

The values that people live by are values to hold ourselves to. These are useful practices. "Good equipment for living," rhetorician Kenneth Burke called folklore, many years ago. I hope that I have lifted up some of the wisdom that people shared: the virtues of leading with love, getting woke, playing the long game, taking leaps of faith, knowing that we are all there to catch one another, doing together what we cannot do alone.

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Appendix: The ACTA-CLP cohort

Alliance for California Traditional Arts is committed to promoting and supporting the thriving of cultural traditions in California and beyond. Our vision is for a culturally and racially equitable society where every culture's unique value is respected and sustained. Through various programs, services, and funding opportunities, ACTA weaves an integrated, just, and empathetic social fabric with both local and global impacts. As a thought leader in public folklore, ACTA conducts research, convenings, and advocacy to champion traditional arts. Our partnering artists are tradition-bearers, sustaining expressions reflective of their community’s shared values, life experiences, and collective wisdom. Through these collective traditions, practitioners have mobilized and become catalysts for the transformative and restorative value of arts in society.

For more information on ACTA or folk and traditional arts, please visit http://www.actaonline.org.

Appendix: The ACTA-CLP cohort (cont.)

Arte Américas is one of the largest and most significant Latino cultural centers in California. Located in downtown Fresno, it is visited by over 25,000 people annually. Thirty years old in 2017, Arte Américas curates visual and folk arts exhibitions in their galleries, presents an annual “Nights in the Plaza” summer concert series in the acre of land next to their building, and develops collaborative programs. Over the years, traditional arts have been featured in a variety of ways. Their signature program is an annual Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) celebration, in which both contemporary and traditional artists participate.

Danzantes Unidos functions as a cultural nexus for Mexican folk dance artists throughout California, the western United States and Mexico. It serves the folklorico community, providing a forum for collaboration, leadership training and exchange of resources and best practices. The annual Danzantes Unidos Festival, held in recent years in Fresno, is international in mission and scope, and the largest celebration of Mexican folk dancers in the world. It includes workshops for dancers of all ages and skill levels, showcase performances, and more.

Kings Cultural Center expands artistic opportunities for youth and fosters and promotes traditional and multi-cultural folk music and dance in Kings County. Established in 2006, KCC engages young people with Mexican music and dance ensembles, like Ballet Folklorico Sol del Valle and Mariachi Los Reyes. They also offer classes in other performance traditions. Instrumental music programs have included bluegrass fiddle, guitar, piano, and trumpet. Dance and movement programs have included Hawaiian, salsa, and zumba.

Little Manila Foundation was founded in response to social injustice, and today, it stands as a symbol of hope and a force for change. Little Manila advocates for the historic preservation of the Little Manila Historic Site in Stockton, California, and provides education and leadership to revitalize Stockton's Filipino American community. In 2014, they opened the Little Manila Center in downtown Stockton, now the home of arts and cultural programs: The Little Manila Dance Collective. Kulintang Academy and Bahala Na Martial Arts school. Little Manila offers on-site and off-site education programs in ethnic studies and U.S. history. They are also working on environmental issues, like urban regreening, linking cultural, social, and environmental health.

Merced Lao Family Community, Inc. (MLFC) was established in 1981 to serve Southeast Asian refugees and their families then settling in Merced County. It has continued to develop social services and cultural programs, helping people find ways to balance between traditional Southeast Asian cultures and modern American life. MLFC teaches and supports traditional Hmong dance, music, language, cultural knowledge, and storytelling. Annually, MLFC organizes the Merced Hmong New Year celebration attended by 20,000 people and featuring traditional dance and singing, cultural sports and cultural arts exhibitions.

Modesto Cambodian Buddhist Society, Inc. aims to preserve the cultural and spiritual heritage of the Cambodian people and to serve as a beacon for the Khmer community. The Temple that MCBS is building on a 12-acre lot outside Modesto is a new home for the community, and a place of peace for all. MCBS hosts community observances and celebrations, as well as a Cambodian classical dance troupe that has grown from six beginners to 40 trained dancers. Seeking to ensure equality and civic engagement, MCBS is also active in voter registration and education.

Teatro de la Tierra (Theater of the Earth) is a Fresno-based arts organization led by NEA National Heritage Fellow Agustín Lira and musician Patricia Wells Solorzano. Teatro offers free bilingual musical and theatrical training to the community, develops new generations of artists, creates and produces original works that reflect contemporary issues and living cultural practices, and works for social justice for Mexican and Latino immigrant laborers. Since 1971, Teatro has been producing high-quality performance of theater and music that represent the cultural heritage of Mexicans, Chicanos, and Latinos, specifically Chicano theater, a descendant of the popular *carpa* style of theater that developed in Mexico in the late 1800s. Teatro also houses the performance ensemble, Alma.

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About the author

Dr. Debora Kodish is a practicing public interest folklorist. She was the founding director of the Philadelphia Folklore Project (1987-2014) and a co-founder and board member of the Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures Charter School (2005-2014). Some of her publications can be found at http://deborakodish.wixsite.com/wordofmouths