



# Land Use Planning Awareness Project

Riverside public health teams with Coachella Valley youth for the land use planning awareness project

Key Themes | Environmental Exposures, Healthily Homes, Social Connections & Safety

## SUMMARY

Building Healthy Communities through Land Use Planning Awareness (LUPA) is an innovative capacity building project for communities across the eastern Coachella Valley and beyond. LUPA fosters community empowerment through critical thinking, civic dialogue and civic engagement as avenues to influence decision making in land use planning. LUPA has three components to:

- » Build youth power through land use planning awareness and knowledge.
- » Foster critical thinking to improve decision making.
- » Introduce participants to the General Plan Elements and show how they connect to planning projects and issues, especially to individual and community health.



## LEAD AGENCY AND PARTNERSHIPS

The Riverside University Health System Public Health (RUHS-PH) conceived the LUPA Project as part of its ongoing involvement with the Building Healthy Communities Initiative in eastern Coachella Valley, and provides core staffing for the LUPA team. Since the project's inception in 2014, several key partnerships have been formed with various organizations, including:

- » NOVA Academy (High School)
- » Coachella Valley High School
- » Esperanza Youth and Family Center
- » Coachella Unincorporated
- » Health Corps
- » Eastern Coachella Valley Bus Shelter Collaborative
- » Recreation Education Culture Route (REC Route)
- » UC Davis Center for Regional Change

## DRIVERS

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LUPA was originally created to address The California Endowment's requirement of "building people's power" for all Building Healthy Communities-eastern Coachella Valley grantees. The RUHS-PH used that request as an opportunity to empower through educating youth about the intrinsic role of urban planning's affect on public health outcomes. This concept grew from the Building Healthy Communities eastern Coachella Valley's Youth Council efforts to address the lack of bus shelters in their rural communities. After the Youth Council disbanded in 2013, RUHS-PH staff capitalized on their initial efforts by creating a space for youth to learn how planning affects community health and how to get involved to make positive changes where they live, work, play and learn. In September 2014, the LUPA team began a journey with a group of motivated students at two high schools and one after school program, the Nova Academy, Coachella Valley High School and the Esperanza Youth and Family Center's Environmental Youth Alliance, respectively. Each group learned about basic land use planning concepts, shared ideas and collaborated to increase public awareness of the importance of land use planning.

## ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

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As noted above, the engagement process for LUPA stemmed from a group of motivated students at two high schools and one after school program, the Nova Academy, Coachella Valley High School and the Esperanza Youth and Family Center's Environmental Youth Alliance, respectively. Each school's activities and engagement are described below.

## LUPA AT NOVA ACADEMY

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The LUPA team met regularly with the NOVA Academy students for about 10 months. After learning land use planning concepts and discussing what planning meant for themselves and for their community, they focused on a real project: Coachella Valley Link (CV Link). The proposed 50 mile valley trail from Palm Springs/Desert Hot Springs to the City of Coachella provided the chance to apply how various pieces of planning fit together. One of the best opportunities they had to engage was

by participating in Health Impact Assessment (HIA) community workshops commissioned by CV Link's lead agency, the Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG) and RUHS-PH. The youth's work culminated in the production of a photovoice project created in collaboration with Coachella Unincorporated and the LUPA team. Photovoice is a process by which people are empowered by documenting their community's needs, assets and experiences through photos combined with storytelling. The photovoice project results, shown during the HIA public workshop, are now part of the HIA public record: <http://dophlupa.weebly.com/nova.html>.

## LUPA AT ENVIRONMENTAL YOUTH ALLIANCE (EYA)

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EYA students focused on affordable housing to learn basic land use planning. They visited an affordable housing complex in the City of Coachella and collaborated with Coachella Unincorporated to interview residents about living conditions. The youth created a blog to raise awareness about affordable housing needs in Coachella: <http://coachellaunincorporated.org/2015/07/07/cuentos-de-coachella/>.



## LUPA AT COACHELLA VALLEY (CV) HIGH SCHOOL

Use of visual arts was a key ingredient for successful learning for the CV High students, tapping into their curiosity, imagination and critical thinking. CV Art Department students formed an impromptu art collaborative called “CV Artisans” to engage with LUPA. After a joint meeting with NOVA and CV High students, the Artisans created a mobile public art installation that codified concepts they had learned about land use planning, CV Link and affordable housing. The exhibit raised awareness that places that are well planned provide better access to basic needs, services, opportunities and choices. The collaboration between the students and others involved with the project represented the public nature of planning and illustrated that everyone can participate and voice their opinion about issues related to land use and people’s health. The exhibit was featured at the 2015 BHC ECV Hue Festival in the City of Coachella, Nova Academy and CV High School’s Health Fairs, and the CV Link’s HIA community meeting in Coachella:

<http://dophlupa.weebly.com/cv-high.html>.

## EASTERN COACHELLA VALLEY BUS SHELTER COLLABORATIVE

To expand on the Building Healthy Communities eastern Coachella Valley’s Youth Council worked on bus shelters, the LUPA team, health advocates and artists conducted a “tactical ruralism” demonstration project on August 13, 2016 to raise awareness about how important shade is to the community’s health. This activity was one of the initial phases of the “Bus Shelters as Healthy Communities Nodes” project to address the need for additional bus shelters in eastern Coachella Valley. Although bus shelters are an important component of transit infrastructure, not all bus stops in this region have them. This project fosters collaboration between health advocates, artists, non profits, foundations, academics, designers, decision makers, transportation planners and the local transit agency SunLine. It explores viable solutions that:

1. involve the community through a creative engagement process;
2. develop new resident leaders;
- and 3. improve community health by preventing sun exposure and heat related illnesses:

<http://dophlupa.weebly.com/current.html>.



## RECREATION EDUCATION CULTURE ROUTE (REC ROUTE)

The REC Route is an initiative of the Desert Recreation that serves the Desert Mirage High School Campus, offering free, convenient transportation for Eastern Coachella Valley youth. The minibus provides access to various recreation and enrichment activities. LUPA has begun to provide site visits to Riverside County facilities such as the County Administration Center and the Health Administration Building to expose these youth to careers in planning and/or public health. Activities also include learning basic planning topics and conducting walking tours.

## HEALTH, ENVIRONMENTAL, AND/OR CLIMATE IMPACT AREA

According to the [Revealing the Invisible Eastern Coachella Valley report](#) by the UC Davis Center for Regional Change, while Eastern Coachella Valley (ECV) residents have a strong pride of place, they also have considerable concerns about the region's environmental and health challenges. The ECV is the site of chemical intensive agriculture, drinking water contamination, and significant air pollution from interstate traffic and the associated goods movement industry. Dump sites and waste processing facilities also lace the area. Additionally, according to the [Equity In Rural Transportation Policy Brief](#) by the Women's Policy Institute eastern Coachella team, ECV's most vulnerable populations are regularly exposed to temperatures exceeding 120 degrees Fahrenheit while waiting for public transportation at bus stops without shelters (shade structures). This prolonged exposure to extreme weather conditions creates a negative health impact on individuals, especially women, children, pregnant women and the elderly in the ECV. LUPA projects are intended to raise awareness about these issues in the eastern Coachella Valley.

## FUNDING SOURCE

The pilot project was funded by The California Endowment and continues to be supported by RUHS-PH staff and the Building Healthy Communities – Eastern Coachella Valley site.

## RESEARCH AND DATA

LUPA is applying basic qualitative and quantitative research methods, including observing to assess the lay of the land, conversing with community members, and documenting and evaluating potential impacts of its efforts. For these reasons, site visits are important for students to experience places through the planning lens. Other advanced tools and resources for data that LUPA has used include the [UC Davis Center for Regional Change's Putting Youth on the Map](#), [ESRI's Community Tapestry](#), [CV Link's Health Impact Assessment](#) and Google Earth.



## CHALLENGES

Some of the challenges encountered through the LUPA Project's implementation include:

- » Unreliable transportation for youth to attend after school meetings. Meeting at a school was the most effective way to engage them.
- » Lack of funding for backbone staffing to grow, in addition to LUPA's interns and volunteers.
- » Champions/Allies moving to another place or changing jobs. New relationships and connections are constantly being built to identify opportunities for collaboration. LUPA is connecting with the Countywide Youth Advisory Council program to explore a potential expansion.
- » There is a great desire to expand this project countywide – integrating it explicitly into the RUHS-PH strategic plan would help to move it forward.

## OUTCOMES

LUPA is one of the few innovative efforts in the country bringing youth into healthy communities planning efforts and through its work outcomes include:

- » In 2015, the California Chapter of the American Planning Association and the Inland Empire Section recognized LUPA with two Awards of Excellence.
- » LUPA has been included in the RUHS-PH community engagement portion of its Public Health Department's Accreditation Portfolio.
- » Nearly 100 young people have been engaged through LUPA. It has exposed students to the planning profession as a possible career path. Youth reporter Karla Martinez is an outstanding example; her participation in LUPA led to her decision to pursue a planning degree at UC Davis.

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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Case story was adapted for the OPR website from the California Chronic Disease Prevention Leadership Project*

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