isby

# Border Region/ La Frontera Phase 0

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# Introduction

## ioby's MISSION AND THEORY OF CHANGE

ioby directly supports residents rebuilding and strengthening healthy and sustainable neighborhoods, towns, and cities. We blend resource organizing and crowdfunding to help leaders of local projects find the resources they need within their own communities. Our vision is to create a future in which our communities are shaped by the powerful good ideas of our own neighbors. Our mission is to mobilize neighbors who have good ideas to become powerful civic leaders who plan, fund, and make positive change in their own neighborhoods.

ioby removes friction from neighborhood action, helping people to make positive change. ioby supports resident leaders in every step, from idea through implementation. We focus on local residents because we know that they have great ideas to improve the neighborhoods where they live, work, and play. But there are many barriers to leading positive change, such as: lack of funding, lack of confidence, lack of knowledge about permitting processes, lack of 501(c)3 status, lack of teammates, and fear that no one will help.

ioby's model—including a crowdfunding platform, coaching, fiscal sponsorship, resources, and project implementation support—removes these barriers, so that great ideas from residents can be implemented locally, quickly, and with neighbor support. Making it easier for residents to take neighborhood action is important because neighborhoods are the most tangible, relatable, accessible places for us to practice civic participation and flex the civic muscle we need for a healthy democracy.

While ioby is available to residents across the United States, we currently have Action Strategists—community organizers who work intentionally to support residents, increase civic engagement, and strengthen community power in neighborhoods with histories of disinvestment—working with residents in Memphis, Cincinnati, Detroit, Cleveland, and Pittsburgh to support them in making positive change happen where they live.

## WHAT IS PHASE 0?

Before we begin a deliberate phase of work in a new place, ioby strives to learn as much as possible about the civic landscape from the very people who we will eventually be supporting. We do not make any assumptions at the outset about the skills, needs, and resources of the community leaders whom we hope will eventually be using our platform and services. We aim to support and contribute to, rather than supplant or duplicate, the services of existing local technical assistance providers. The Phase 0 research reveals residents' goals for their communities and helps us develop a strategy to best position our services toward those goals.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

ioby aims to identify opportunities and craft a strategy for our team to increase civic engagement and enable residents to complete projects that improve public spaces and make their neighborhoods, towns, and cities stronger. To be successful in the Border Region, ioby must first:

1. Improve ioby's understanding of the region's civic landscape.
2. Assess competition and new opportunities for ioby to add value to the region's civic sector.
3. Measure the region against ioby's predictors of success.
4. Evaluate potential demand for ioby's services in the region.
5. Identify the trends that drive communities' interest in taking on projects like those that ioby typically supports.
6. Characterize civic participation across the region.
7. Recommend strategies to source and serve ioby project leaders across the region.

# Methodology & Limitations

## LOCAL RESEARCH FELLOW

To conduct Phase 0 research in seven regions in the South, ioby felt that it was essential to engage with local research fellows who had deep roots and connections in their region. In the Border Region, ioby hired Cemelli de Aztlan for this role. Cemelli de Aztlan, a native El Pasoan, has been engaged in community organizing, social justice advocacy, and cultural education throughout her career. She holds a Masters in Divinity from Harvard University and received her Bachelor of Arts from Concordia University at Austin. Presently, de Aztlan serves as the Network Weaver for the El Paso Equal Voice Network, a coalition of community organizations rooted in social justice, human rights, environmental justice, and women's rights; as an adjunct lecturer at The University of Texas at El Paso; and on the board of La Mujer Obrera.

## GIS FELLOW

ioby hired a GIS Fellow, Sarah Kontos, to help us understand and visually represent the diverse social, economic, and physical landscapes in each of the southern regions. Using data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the IRS, and other sources, Sarah Kontos created maps that informed many of the findings and strategies presented in this report. Sarah Kontos is a spatial analyst and urban designer based in Brooklyn, New York. She has worked for a wide and varied range of nonprofits and city-adjacent agencies to translate lived experiences into novel spatial and analytical frameworks. She also has previous experience as a GIS analyst-for-hire, a data visualization specialist, and a teacher, and has served on volunteer boards related to pedestrian and bicycle advocacy. She holds a B.A. in Urban Studies and History from the University of Pittsburgh and an M.S. in Design and Urban Ecologies from Parsons, The New School.

## WORKSHOPS

ioby's Local Research Fellow led two grassroots fundraising workshops, on October 3, 2019 in Brownsville, TX and November 21, 2019 in El Paso, TX. Attendees provided valuable feedback on ioby's mission, training content, and approach to grassroots fundraising.

## INTERVIEWS

From a total of 47 one-on-one conversations with civic leaders and 27 attendees of ioby's grassroots fundraising workshops in the Border Region, ioby began to identify the context, opportunities, and challenges involved in working in the region. While the Local Research Fellow was already connected to a majority of the interviewees, she also relied on partners at La Mujer Obrera in El Paso, the Carrizo/ Comecrudo Tribe of Texas, La Union del Pueblo Entrero in San Juan, Proyecto Azteca in San Juan, and ARISE in Alamo to connect her to additional interviewees.

## INTERVIEWEES AND WORKSHOP ATTENDEES

| Name of Interviewee or Workshop Attendee | Title and Affiliation(s) *at the time of interview or workshop |
|---|---|
| Peter Svarzbein | El Paso City Council Representative, District 1 |
| Raul Garcia | Program Manager, City of El Paso Planning and Inspections Department |
| Dr. David Romo | Historian |
| Xochtli Rodriguez | Artist and Co-Founder, Caldo Collective & Director of Community Affairs, State Senator Jose Rodriguez's |
| Paulina Lopez | 2020 Census Partnership Specialist |

| Name of Interviewee or Workshop Attendee | Title and Affiliation(s) |
|---|---|
| Alexandra Annello | El Paso City Council Representative, District 2 |
| Dr. Kathy Staudt | Political Scientist, professor, co-founder of Center for Civic Engagement and Women's Studies Program, Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), EPISO/ |
| Jud Burges | Brave Bookstore, Graphic Designer |
| Sister Phyllis | Proyecto Juan Diego |
| Ann Cass | Proyecto Azteca |
| Tania Chavez | La Union Pueblo Entero |
| Mike Seifert | Border Advocacy Strategist, ACLU |
| Dr. Jenny Bryson Clark | Political Science Professor, University of Texas, Rio Grande Valley |
| Claudia Ioli | Assistant Director, Deed Not Words |
| Jed Untereker | Assistant County Attorney |
| Juan Mancias | Chairman of Carrizo Comecrudo Tribe of Texas |
| Rebeka Hinojosa | Organizer, Sierra Club |
| Lourdes Flores | Director, ARISE |
| Christina Houle | Network Weaver, Equal Voice Network & Co-Founder, The Imaginistas |
| Xavier Miranda | Teacher & Organizer, Grassroots El Paso |
| Eric Pearson | President/CEO, El Paso Community Foundation |
| Liz Chavez | Founder, Wise Latina International |
| Aaron Montes | Watchdog Reporter, El Paso Times |
| Alex Burnside | Chair, Democratic Socialists of America & Field Director of 2016 Bernie Sanders Presidential Campaign |
| Elisa Tamayo | Candidate for State Representative & Scheduler for State Senator Jose Rodriguez |
| Msgr. Arturo Banuelas | Pastor, St. Marks Church & Founder, Tepeyac Institute and Hope Border Institute |
| Adri Perez | Community Specialist, ACLU |

| Name of Interviewee or Workshop Attendee | Title and Affiliation(s) |
|---|---|
| Alex Hoffman | Director of Planning, City of El Paso |
| Bob Mosher | Director of Columban Mission Center |
| Tracy Yellen | CEO, Paso del Norte Health Foundation |
| Anna Aleman | University Medical Center & Children's Health Foundation |
| Melissa Lopez | Director/Attorney, Diosian Migrant Refugee Center |
| Carlos Marentes | Director/Founder, Centro Sin Fronteras Farmworkers Center |
| Lorena Andrade | Director, La Mujer Obrera |
| Rubi Orozco | Health Educator, Writer/Poet |
| Jennie Hamilton | Director, Marfa Live Arts |
| Hannah Siegel-Gardner | Marfa Public Radio |
| Elise Pepple | Marfa Public Radio |

## SURVEY

ioby designed a survey to uncover new perspectives on the civic landscape and asked community-based organizations to share it with constituents. The survey included questions about civic pride, attachment, trust in institutions, and the region's existing culture of giving to grassroots projects. As an incentive for residents to complete the survey, respondents were entered to win one of thirty $200 gift cards.

We received 109 survey responses from across the Border Region:

| **Race/Ethnicity** (Self-reported) | **Count** | **Share of Total** |
|---|---|---|
| Black | 0 | 0% |
| Latinx | 68 | 62% |
| White | 19 | 17% |
| Asian | 0 | 0% |
| Mixed Race | 6 | 6% |
| Native/Indigenous | 4 | 4% |
| No response | 12 | 11% |
| **TOTAL** | 109 | 100% |

## LIMITATIONS

We have identified limitations in our market research in the Border Region. Because the region is large and varied, compared to the way ioby has typically focused Phase 0 research on a single city, the perspectives of interviewees are not representative of the entire region. Rather, perspectives are only representative of the town or city of the participant.

In addition, the racial composition of our survey respondents does not accurately reflect the diversity of the region. We are particularly interested to learn more from:

- Black residents of the region, who compose 4% of the population of El Paso County (El Paso), 1.4% of the population of Presidio County (Marfa), and 0.8% of the population of Cameron County (Brownsville). [1]
- Asian residents of the region, who compose 1.4% of the population of El Paso County, 3.1% of the population of Presidio County, and 0.8% of the population of Cameron County.[2]

# The Border Region's Assets and Challenges

> "This community does not know justice, they know charity." - Padre Arturo Banuelas

Guided by the tenets of asset-based community development, ioby always aims to understand the existing conditions of a place before we make plans to grow our local presence. Based on our interviews with residents and leaders in the Border Region, the region's assets include:

- A strong bi-national identity and culture.
- A strong sense of community that binds residents together in a common identity and cause.
- Commitment to voluntarism.

These assets have aided the region as residents and community-based organizations have grappled with profound challenges in their towns, cities, and neighborhoods. According to interviewees, these include:

- Inequities in access to high-paying jobs, high-quality education, health care, and affordable housing.
- Elitism and systems of oppression that drive all new economic development in the region and entrench income and wealth inequality.
- Legacies of colonialism that have had lasting impacts on the region's communities of color.
- Rather than address root causes of the issues, nonprofit leaders have positioned their organizations as collectors and distributors of charity.

1 "QuickFacts." U.S. Census Bureau. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/.
2 Ibid.

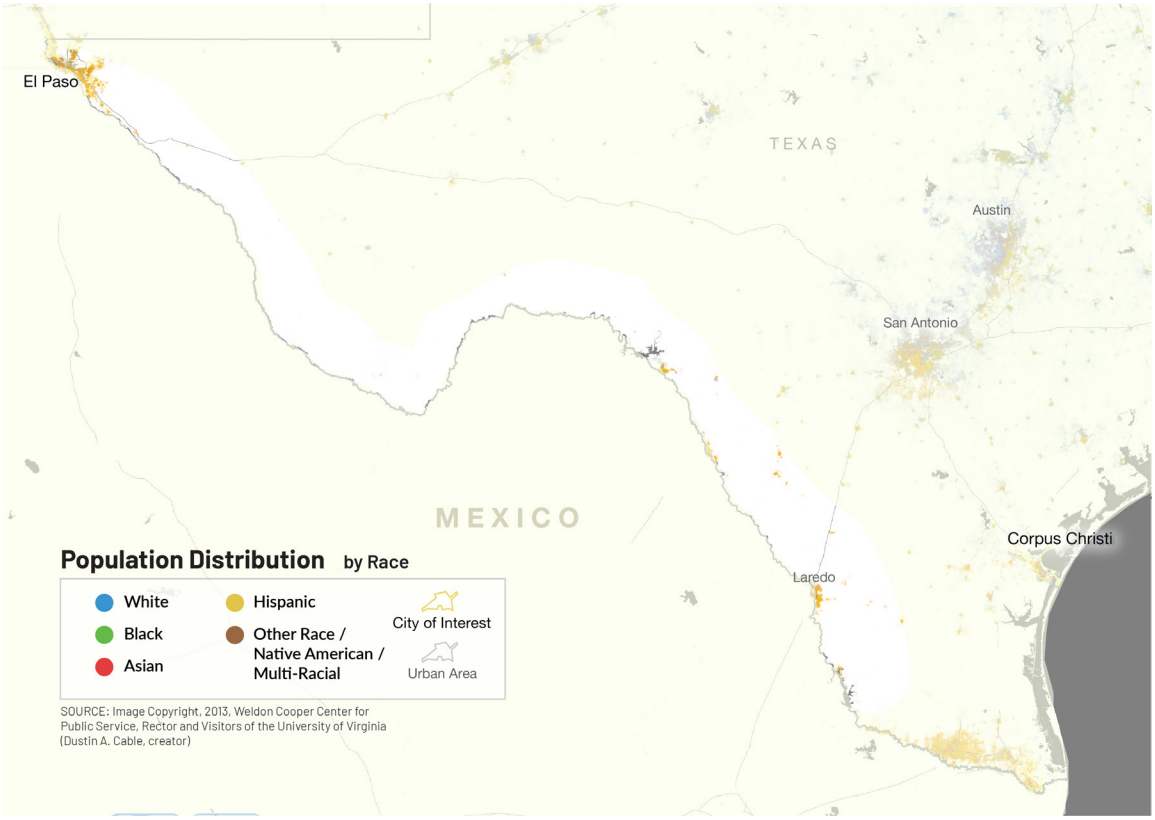
# Objective #1: Improve ioby's understanding of each sub-region's civic landscape.

Synthesizing interview content, survey results and research on the region, several themes emerged. They are (a) legacies of racism and classism, (b) government-sanctioned displacement, (c) brain drain, (d) digital divide, and (e) mass incarceration.

## LEGACIES OF CLASSISM AND RACISM

It is very clear that racism, classism, and disinvestment have had a lasting impact on the border region and continue to affect poor communities of Mexican descent. Though the majority of the population along the Texas southern border is of Mexican descent, Mexican Americans are not represented among the region's most powerful institutional actors. The prevailing perception among residents of color is that white-led institutions do not serve the interests of the majority population.

There is a long history of repression and colonialism that is cloaked in a culture of apathy. One interviewee argued that the wealthy elite benefit from cheap labor and an exploited workforce, and that they expect to make decisions for the community without opposition and without community input: "they have a patronizing attitude and prefer a submissive population." Rather than invite meaningful conversation about curbing the threat of displacement, developers and public officials streamline new market-rate developments that forcefully uproot Mexican immigrant communities. For many, it is perceived that the legacies of racism, classism, and colonization continue to shape and sculpt the future of this region.




**Map 1. The population in the region is heavily concentrated in El Paso, Del Rio, Laredo, and Brownsville. The majority of each city's population is Hispanic.**

In El Paso, the investment strategy for historical preservation is disproportionately focused on the city's "white" history. These efforts are animated by images of the cowboy, pioneer, and gunslinger. These images do not not reflect the histories of the majority of the population, whose heritage is instead grounded in stories of indigenous peoples, Mexican revolutionaries, labor organizers, farmworkers, women workers, and immigrants.

Several interviewees reflected upon the current injustices happening in areas south of I-10

in El Paso, specifically Duranguito, a historic neighborhood under threat of demolition for the construction of a tax-funded arena downtown. According to Carmen Rodriguez, an attorney, organizer and member of the El Paso Community First Coalition, "The dispute (over Duranguito) has been riddled with concerns over the excessive influence of private interests in city projects, the proposed use of eminent domain, gentrification, hostility over history preservation, city government neglect and indifference, including the displacement of low-income immigrant, among others."

The southside of El Paso (south of I-10), specifically the Chamizal neighborhood, is one of the poorest districts in the nation and is composed predominantly of immigrant families. The schools in that area were known as the "Mexican Schools" until a federal civil rights case in 1970 determined that the school district was discriminating against Spanish-speaking students and implementing a segregated, dual system of education.

Douglass Elementary in the Chamizal area, the first African American segregated school in the district, opened in 1920 when the majority of district school board trustees were openly affiliated with the Ku Klux Klan. At the time, parents complained about the surrounding hazards, including emissions from nearby industry, a train that traveled on tracks directly behind the school, and a canal that ran openly alongside the school. The school has not been renovated since it first opened. In 2015, Douglass Elementary was granted historic designation.

When the district decided to close another school in the Chamizal area, they voted to send all the children to Douglass. Parents were outraged at the decision, wary of the dangers that surrounded the school and armed with data confirming lead contamination in the Douglass School playground. The racist past continues to affect the children of the Chamizal, as all of the area's children are now exposed to high levels of toxins. The institutionalized racism that was implemented in this area 100 years ago persists in El Paso's schools today.

> "The school district is the perfect example where open enrollment was created to actually divest from the center core from the city, where it looked like it was a good option for people who had the resources to drive their children halfway across town to a good school. This happened five years ago." - Alexandra Annello, City Council Representative

In Brownsville, the city's historic preservation efforts amount to the erasure of Mexican culture. There are growing concerns about the protection of a Confederate monument in Brownsville and about a recently passed downtown facade ordinance that required that all buildings be a certain muted color, thus pushing out Mexican business and communities in the area. When asked about the relationship between historic preservation and erasure, one interviewee said, "It's all under this oppressive coding under historic preservation, who's deciding what gets preserved, what's important and what's erased. The historic preservation society literally adopted the preservation pallet of Sherman Williams arbitrary pallet of muted colonialist colors, which results in you can't paint a mural downtown. We're Mexican. We want murals with color and we want to paint our house a bright color, but we can't. Who is telling the cultural narrative in this region is so tightly tied to white supremacy and colonialism."

In Marfa, Texas, the population has dropped from 2,000 residents to 1,700 since Marfa experienced an art and economic boom. Most of the original Mexican families that lived there for generations have been forced to move, many to cities like El Paso. When asked about the exodus, leaders of local organizations explained that property values skyrocketed when the area became a trendy art hub. In addition, county commissioners recently added an "Adobe Tax," a tax on adobe homes. This tax created a burden for the poor who live in these homes because adobe is the cheapest and most accessible material to make a home. With the new tax, these families were priced out of their own homes.

In an interview with the Chinati Foundation, the director claimed that public schools in Marfa are suffering from high property taxes. Public schools do not qualify for Title V funding for disadvantaged students, and the school district has to send surplus tax revenue to the state. This damages schools' ability to serve the majority of students in Marfa's public schools who are from low-income, Spanish-speaking homes. She also shared that Marfa's teachers and firefighters can no longer afford to live in Marfa, and many have moved to Alpine or Presidio.

## DISPLACEMENT

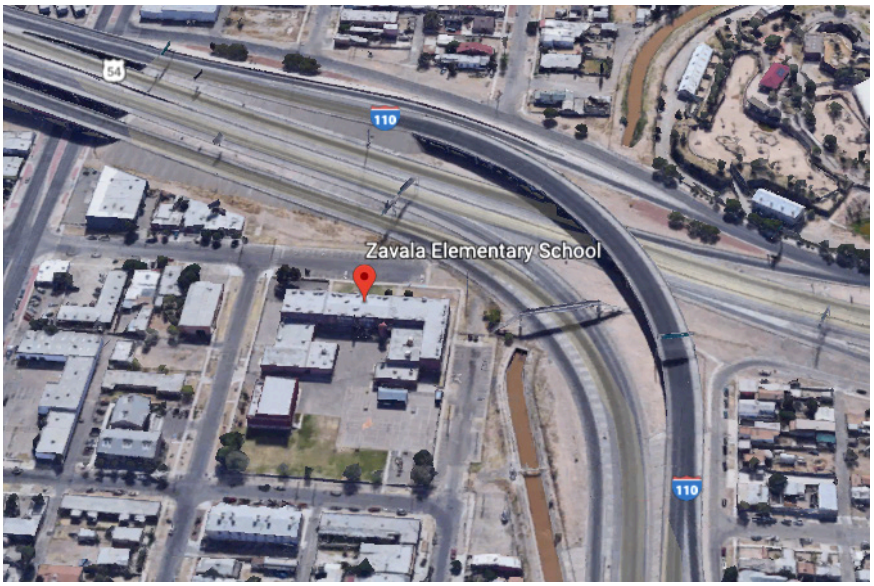
> "Displacement is real in this region." - Anonymous Interviewee

The Chamizal, one of the poorest neighborhoods in the nation, was bisected in a land exchange between the U.S. and Mexico that was negotiated in 1963 and formally settled in 1964. Homes, schools, and businesses that were once in the United States now belonged to Mexico, and a bridge was built to connect those communities cut by lines negotiated by the federal government.

On September 1, 1963, eight months after the U.S. government settled the Chamizal dispute, the City of El Paso was tasked with the creation of the city's first freeways, the creation of farm-to-market roads, working with state and federal government agencies to build ports of entry after the Chamizal Treaty, and building Transmountain Road.[3]

In 2014, residents formed a human chain and organized a 24/7 vigil to oppose the demolition of the historic Lincoln Center for a highway. Local leaders engaged in years of negotiations, meetings, and planning before they reached a compromise to save the building and move the plans of the highway extension.[4] [5]

The revised plan resulted in the demolition of neighborhoods, communities, and homes in the most impoverished pockets of the city, as well as the destruction of an important Chicano mural (pictured below). To accommodate the expansion of the highway, officials used their powers of eminent domain to seize 10 feet of the Zavala Elementary School playground and constructed a stretch of Interstate 10 adjacent to the school. The highway now stands over the school and semi-trucks transporting products and industrial waste from the factories in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico idle in traffic for hours.

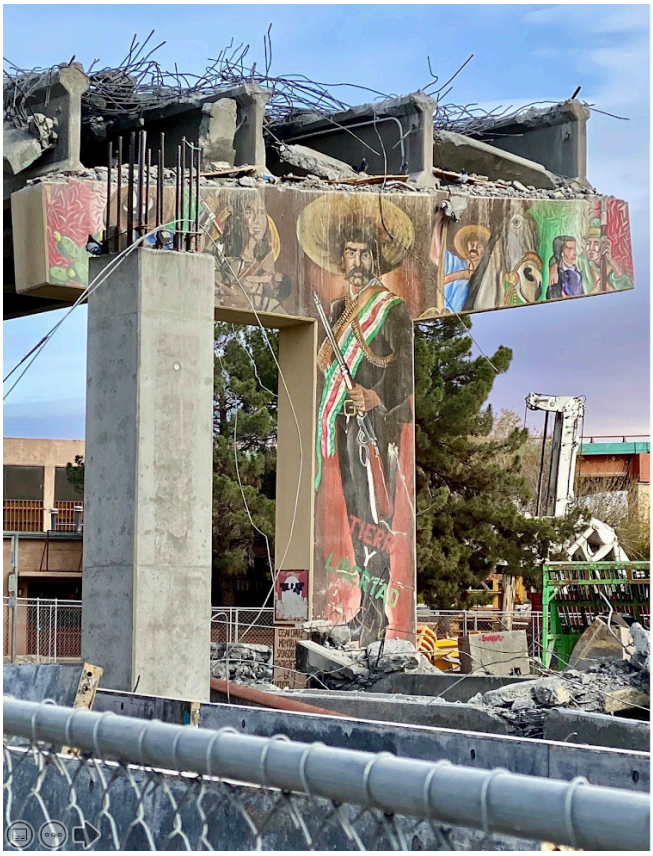



**Officials used their powers of eminent domain to seize 10 feet of the Zavala Elementary School playground to construct a stretch of Interstate 10 adjacent to the school. Source: Google Earth. 2020. Zavala Elementary School 31°46'09.17"N, 106°26'27"W, elevation 1,126M. 3D map, Buildings data layer, viewed 12 July 2020.<http://www.google.com/earth/index.html>.**

3 Juárez, Miguel. "How will we celebrate 50 years of I-10?" El Paso Times, 1 Mar. 2018. https://www.elpasotimes.com/story/opinion/2018/03/01/how-we-celebrate-50-years-10/379438002/.

4 Keener, Cassie. "Saving Lincoln Center: An El Paso Community's Effort to Protect its Heritage." National Trust for Historic Preservation, 25 Jul. 2014. https://savingplaces.org/stories/saving-lincoln-center-el-paso-communitys-effort-protect-heritage#.XqXTD1NKjOQ .

5 Lincoln Park Conservation Committee. http://lincolnparkcc.org/.



**The revised Lincoln Center plan called for the demolition of an important Chicano mural in the neighborhood. Photo credit: Luis Hernandez.**

In recent years, "revitalization" has become a code word for gentrification in El Paso. In 2006, the City of El Paso introduced the "2015 Downtown Plan," a development plan that was designed to add economic, cultural, and entertainment opportunities that would attract new residents and stem the out-migration of young people from the city by 2015.[6] When it was announced, the plan immediately stoked fears of displacement among low-income residents in South El Paso.[7] In a presentation to the City Council in support of the plan, the investment group Paso del Norte contrasted current perceptions of the city with their new vision of the city.[8] They presented a slide of an older man wearing a cowboy hat, with the words: "dirty, lazy, speaks Spanish and uneducated" next to another slide with the faces of actors Penelope Cruz and Matthew McConoughey, with the words: "30-40 years old, educated, entrepreneurial, bi-lingual, enjoys entertainment."[9] This explicitly racist, classist, and derogatory message followed a study by the Paso del Norte that was endorsed and paid for by the local city council.

Although most interviewees in Brownsville did not identify with the terms "revitalization" or "gentrification," many of the most pressing issues in the community may be appropriately characterized by those terms. One organizer shared: "Because it's a community that's been historically impoverished, there's confusion about what gentrification means as a term because they associate it with better amenities, better quality of life. [...] There's not a collective understanding about how the city should evolve, and how the region is viewing revitalizations, it's really hot but really troublesome on how it's being implemented. The ruling class here is interested in revitalization and that's what's pushing the downtown neighborhood."

## URBAN RENEWAL IN THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY

Many in the Rio Grande Valley are frustrated with the lack of infrastructure in the colonias, unincorporated areas where low-income residents have built their homes. Residents of these areas have organized to demand basic necessities such as

6 "El Paso Downtown 2015 Plan." The City of El Paso, October 2006. http://legacy.elpasotexas.gov/muni_clerk/agenda/10-17-06/10170609A(PLAN).pdf.

7 Welsome, Eileen. "Eminent Disaster." Texas Observer, 4 May, 2007. https://www.texasobserver.org/2483-eminent-disaster-a-cabal-of-politicians-and-profiteers-targets-an-el-paso-barrio/.

8 Saul, Stephanie. "Beto O'Rourke Once Supported an El Paso Real Estate Deal. Barrio Residents Remember." New York Times, 29 Oct. 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/29/us/politics/beto-orourke-el-paso-texas-senate.html.

9 Ibid.

water, electricity, bus services, streetlights, and paved streets as new industry encroaches on the land. In one of the colonia communities between the towns of Mission and Mercedes, a youth group organized to remove a sewage waste plant from their neighborhood. When the youth-led campaign revealed that the sewage waste facility processed another town's waste, they won the community's support and successfully petitioned to kick this waste facility out of their neighborhood.

Urban renewal projects in Mission (169), Mercedes (403), Edinburg (231), and Port Isabel (125) displaced a total of 928 families between 1958 and 1974.[10] Less than 1% of these families were people of color.[11]

## ONGOING BATTLES OVER DISPLACEMENT

Major funding initiatives currently underway are heavily subsidized by taxpayers via the 2012 Quality of Life Bond, and downtown development projects catalyzed by these funds include the baseball park and the arena. Both projects promise economic development and jobs, but residents argue that private investors have reaped the most benefits from the projects financed by the bond. Residents argue that the ways in which the funds have been used, including subsidizing the elite's pet projects and financing the purchase of a baseball team, are not what the voters agreed to when they approved the bond.

The lack of trust between elected officials and the community stems from the outsized influence of wealthy, predominantly white developers in City Hall. One interviewee, political science professor Kathy Stuadt, was a member of a collective of concerned community members who co-authored *Who Rules El Paso?*, a 2020 book that likens the relationship between developers and public officials to a puppeteer (i.e developers) pulling the strings of a puppet (i.e. elected officials and other government decision-makers). A recent Texas Observer article about the book reads:[12]

> When it comes to decision-making about matters like public land use, property tax rates, and what to include in bond projects, ordinary El Pasoans ask for one thing, but City Council reps and the mayor push for the opposite—and almost always get it. "The system in place in El Paso," according to the authors, "caters to developers and other business elites, while, with some exceptions, city representatives show little regard for what the citizenry thinks." In recent years, during public comment at council meetings, salt-of-the-earth residents have railed against proposals to destroy the historic, working-class Duranguito neighborhood to build a glitzy sports arena; to sell beautiful, undeveloped public land that locals use for hiking; and to shrink the city library. In response—as one of the book's authors, retired political science professor Kathy Staudt, has commented—many council reps and the mayor stared blankly, like zombies. Then, they overrode popular wishes in favor of those held by the rich people who finance their campaigns. Meanwhile, city officials are shamefully short on ideas to spur economic development, stabilize El Paso's notoriously high homeowner property taxes, raise persistently low wages, or halt brain drain. Other Texas cities are gaining people; El Paso is losing them, particularly young adults and their children.

## OPPORTUNITY ZONES

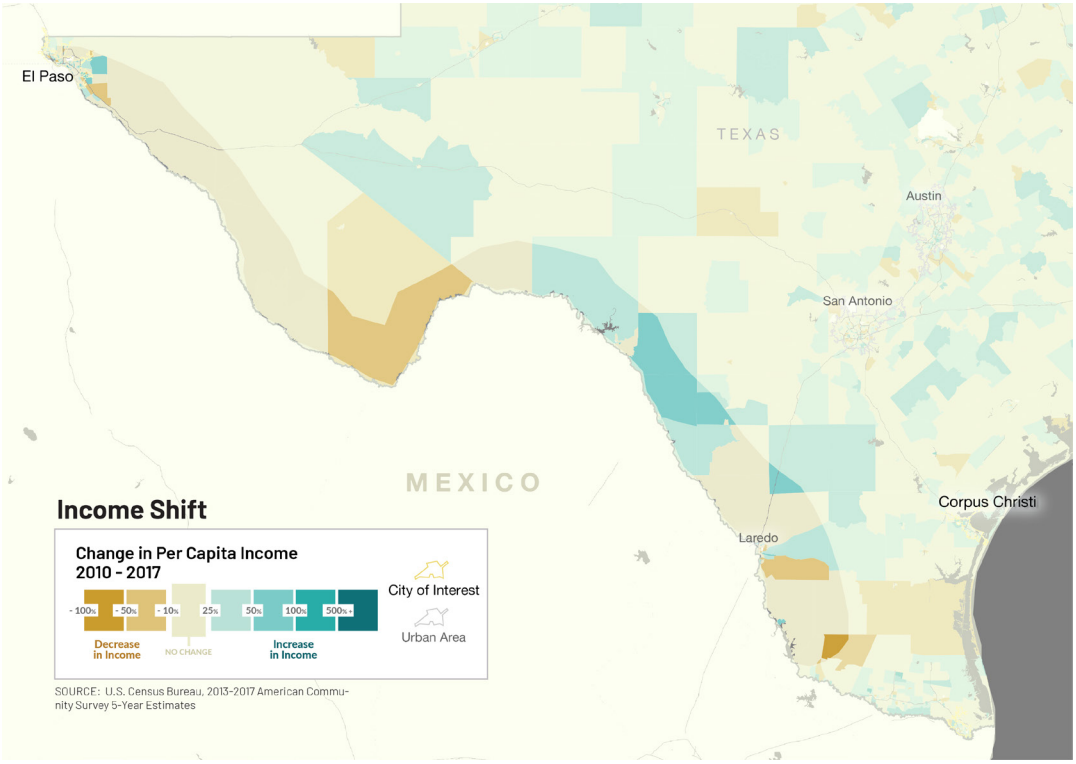
ioby anticipates that the introduction of new funding for real estate projects catalyzed by the federal Opportunity Zones program may deepen residents' concerns about the threat of displacement. Through this program, investors are offered a set of attractive tax benefits for their investments in real estate, housing, infrastructure, and existing or start-up businesses in designated Opportunity Zones.[13] These Opportunity Zones, nominated by the governor, are typically in low-income neighborhoods with histories of disinvestment.

10 Nelson, Robert K. et al. "Renewing Inequality." American Panorama. https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/renewal/#view=0/0/1&viz=cartogram.

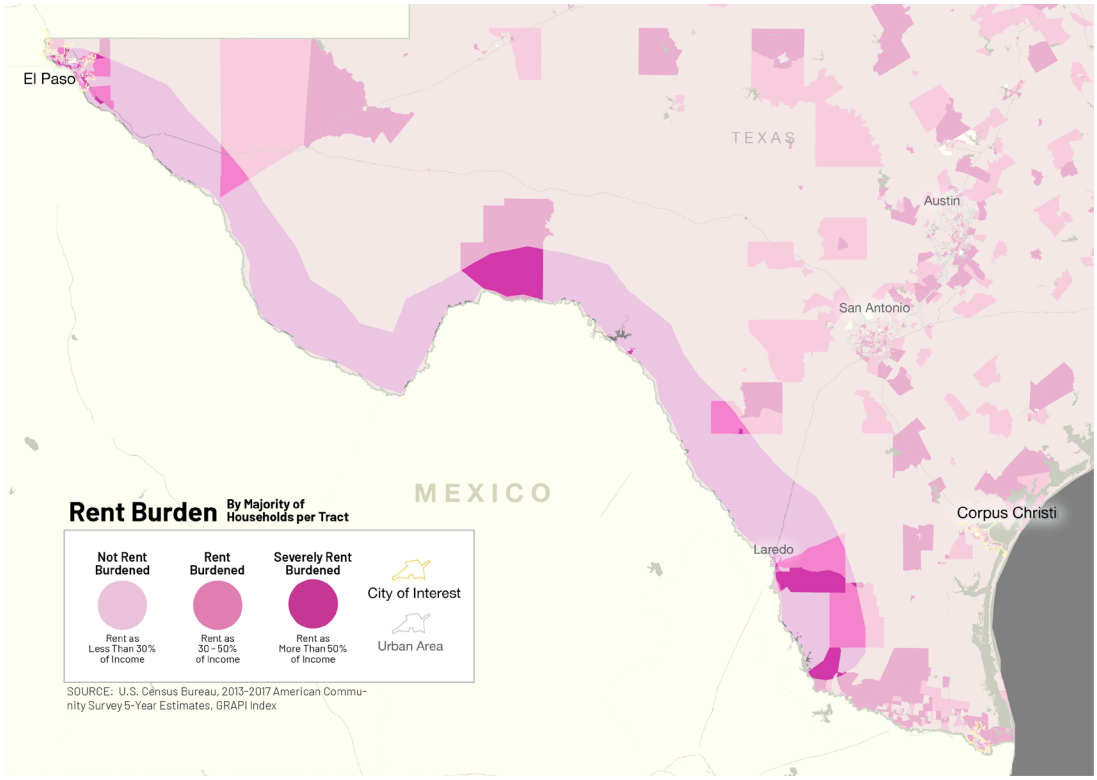
11 Ibid.

12 Nathan, Debbie. "An Incendiary New Book Reveals How Politics in El Paso Are Rigged." Texas Observer, 30 Jan. 2020. https://www.texasobserver.org/el-paso-beto-orourke-duranguito/?fbclid=IwAR3ty3WqGJLAE__BWFW0kf9Yr2f8Wt8UTsM8YOszA8tTnRIOG-tLxtu9mro.

13 "Opportunity Zones Frequently Asked Questions." IRS, 5 June 2020. https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/opportunity-zones-frequently-asked-questions.




**Map 2. Cities' downtowns and suburbs are attracting higher-income residents, even as income falls in outlying urban areas and rural areas.**




**Map 3. Residents in urban, suburban, and rural areas across the region are severely rent-burdened.**

There are large Opportunity Zones along the border, from El Paso to Brownsville.[14] In El Paso, the swath of land from downtown to the medical center sits within an Opportunity Zone, likely due to the high percentage of low-income residents living in that area.[15]

## BRAIN DRAIN

To attract new businesses to El Paso's downtown, the City offers tax abatements and waives construction and permit fees. Tax rebates are guaranteed for decades so that these developers are able to reinvest their long-term savings in construction and renovation. Interviewees suggested that residents generally prefer that their tax revenue be allocated to more educational opportunities for young people, and that there is widespread frustration regarding the City's spending. El Paso loses a considerable portion of its youth to major cities, as people who study and develop their skills in El Paso's schools and institutions ultimately leave when they discover a lack of opportunities. Many civic leaders feel that public officials are not doing enough to keep young people in El Paso.

## DIGITAL DIVIDE

> "We would love to go completely digital but the concern is that a lot of the people we serve are older and the question is, would they be able to navigate?" -Melissa Lopez, Diocian Migrant Relief Services

In El Paso, Brownsville, and Marfa, there is a digital divide in the low-income and rural communities. Poverty, age, and geography are all factors in this divide. Civic leaders in low-income communities say that there is no digital culture; people generally do not use online tools to connect with each other. In these same neighborhoods, the residents are forced to obtain an email in order to register their children in school, but the access to computers is limited. Often, local community organizations fill that gap by working closely with parents to ensure that they are able to enroll children in public schools.

In 2019, Microsoft announced a $1.5 million investment in programs to build digital skills and increase access to broadband in El Paso. The City of El Paso had made plans to invest in free wifi in the downtown over a decade ago, but residents say that this has not panned out and that those programs have stalled.

## MASS INCARCERATION

The Border Region has long been affected by the mass incarceration of immigrants, evidenced by surrounding detention centers, privatized immigrant detention centers, and sub-contracts to local county jails that service the immigrant mass incarceration industry. A growing concern regarding the inhumane treatment of immigrants has catalyzed a movement demanding that municipal and county local governments refuse to subcontract with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.). Williamson County in Central Texas is one of the only counties to officially end its contracts with detention centers.

In Tornillo, TX, where I.C.E. began separating and detaining children from immigrant refugees, the public outcry and organizing pressured the program to shut down for a year, but the local county has not ended its subcontracts with I.C.E.

Texas is the state with the largest number of people (15,852) in U.S. immigration detention per day, and 60% of detained immigrants nationwide are held in privately-run prisons.[16] Freedom for Immigrants, a California-based nonprofit, says that this problem is only getting worse: "Federal government data obtained by the ILRC indicate that, on average, immigrant prisons and jails are holding people for longer periods of time under the Trump administration than under the Obama administration."[17]

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14 "Opportunity Zones in Texas: Promise and Peril." Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, Oct. 2018. https://www.dallasfed.org/cd/pubs/opportunity/opportunity2.aspx.

15 Ibid.

16 "Detention by the numbers." Freedom for Immigrants, 2018. https://www.freedomforimmigrants.org/detention-statistics.

17 Ibid.

# Objective #2: Assess competition and new opportunities for ioby to add value to the region's civic sector.

## CROWDFUNDING IN THE REGION

As we begin to raise ioby's profile in new places, we find that our platform is often compared to other crowdfunding platforms with which residents are already familiar.

When asked to characterize their understanding of crowdfunding, interviewees were most familiar with GoFundMe. Some expressed that they had used Facebook's fundraising tool but complained of its difficulty, citing long waits for verifications and deposits.

The most popular and successful crowdfunding campaigns in El Paso include "We Build the Wall," a campaign to privately fund the construction of a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border.[18] This page has drawn wide condemnation from community leaders in the Border Region and nationwide. In contrast, GoFundMe pages created by the Fianza Fund to post bail for immigrants in detention were also very successful.[19] The 2019 El Paso Giving Day crowdfunding event also raised $3 million total for various local organizations.[20]

We assessed data from El Paso, Brownsville, and Marfa and found that more than 11,500 residents have used crowdfunding platforms like GoFundMe (8,299 fundraisers currently listed)[21] and Kickstarter (388 projects currently listed)[22] to meet their personal and creative funding needs. 2,771 teachers in schools located in and near these places have successfully fundraised with DonorsChoose for classroom supplies.[23]

ioby's intention is to supplement, rather than compete with, these crowdfunding platforms in the Border Region. ioby differs from these platforms in key ways:

- We support projects from idea through implementation, and focus our support and evaluation of success on the development of the leader of the project, rather than on the project or on the financial transactions. Informed by organizing models such as asset-based community development (ABCD) and resource organizing, ioby's training and coaching are designed to build the confidence and fundraising capacities of grassroots leaders.
- As a nonprofit, ioby is able to guarantee that all donations made on our platform are tax-deductible. For groups without 501(c)(3) status, we offer project-specific (Type C) fiscal sponsorship.
- ioby believes that residents know what is best for their neighborhoods. We only require that projects be based in the United States or its territory and have a public benefit.
- ioby is mission-driven to focus on communities with the most need, and so we deliberately build networks of leaders in areas with histories of disinvestment.
- ioby stewards a national network of civically engaged neighbors that project leaders join when they run a campaign with us. We encourage our nationwide network to learn from each other, and provide opportunities for them to do so.

## FUNDRAISING FOR GRASSROOTS PROJECTS

Several leaders of local nonprofit organizations shared that they are funded by a combination of traditional philanthropy, community donations, public funding, and volunteerism.

Nonprofit leaders are generally frustrated with local funding initiatives, and several said that El Paso, the 19th largest city in the U.S., is underfunded. The local United Way, which raises and disburses funds for local non-profits, has a budget of $3 million. The organization is only able to fund a small fraction of the non-profit organizations in the El Paso community.

18 "We Build the Wall." GoFundMe. https://webuildthewall.us/gofundme/.
19 "Free Felipe from detention." GoFundMe. https://www.gofundme.com/f/free-felipe-from-detention.
20 Dearman, Eleanor. "Paso del Norte Community Foundation raises $3 million for El Paso nonprofit groups." El Paso Times, 15 Nov. 2019. https://www.elpasotimes.com/story/news/2019/11/15/el-paso-giving-day-community-foundation-profits/4201643002/.
21 GoFundMe. https://www.gofundme.com/.
22 Kickstarter. www.kickstarter.com.
23 DonorsChoose. www.donorschoose.org.

The City of El Paso invests in small and mid-sized arts projects led by local community members, primarily through funding to the Museum and Cultural Affairs Department (MCAD) Artist Incubator Grants. This funding has shifted funding in recent years and local artists have expressed that MCAD's funding requirements and reports have changed, making the process more difficult and less accessible. According to City Council Representative Svarzbien, MCAD has changed to include film and filmmaking as a priority.

The El Paso Community Foundation manages the local Giving Day effort. In 2019, despite overwhelming support and matching donations from corporations such as Walmart, small organizations expressed a feeling of deliberate exclusion from participating in those matching opportunities. Some said that they were not offered information about the opportunity in a timely manner. Most of the matching funds supported larger organizations, specifically direct service organizations.

## PERCEPTIONS OF OTHER FUNDERS

> "El Paso is a desert in many ways, including a financial desert." - Anonymous interviewee

Organizers expressed that, despite their dedication and passion, there is not enough funding for organizers and many are overworked, underpaid, or unpaid. This reality has caused a drain on experienced organizers, who often have to move to bigger, more affluent cities, like Austin, TX in order to work for a decent wage.

Interviewees shared a belief that the Border Region deserves more funding and foundation support, yet organizations often do not meet the minimum financial threshold to qualify for certain funding. A representative from the Paso del Norte Community Foundation shared that the foundation serves as the fiscal agent for various community efforts because most foundations require that an organization's budget be at least $500,000 in order to qualify for support.

## SCARCITY OF FUNDING FOR ORGANIZING EFFORTS

Most organizations in the region struggle to secure grants from national foundations and the federal government. In addition, interviewees agreed that wealthy donors and corporations do not fund organizing efforts for systemic change. Rubi Orozco Santos, a local public health expert and author, said that this scarcity of funds for organizing efforts has resulted in a local nonprofit sector that is dominated by direct service providers: "I think that 98% of the local non profits have the culture of charity and don't have that systems thinking and challenging power approach. It's the difference between a food bank and a food sovereignty initiative. But, again, who gets the money? The food bank."

El Paso City Council representative Alexandra Annello agrees, stating, "Unfortunately, I think there are people that are hard working everyday to create change, but I don't think that there is an investment from [funders], national or state-wide."

## THE CITY OF EL PASO'S PUBLIC ART PROGRAM

The City of El Paso allocates two percent of every capital improvement project budget to fund a robust Public Arts Program.[24] Since 2006, the City has worked with over 120 local artists.[25] Despite this commitment, some artists feel that their City-commissioned work serves the purpose of promoting a curated brand and public image that public officials are looking to promote.

Xochtli Rodriguez, founder of Caldo Collective, said, "The City of El Paso has the highest percent allocated for public art projects–and that something to be proud of–but I think, when we support art, it shouldn't be branding or image [...] Public art needs to be a tool to shape healthy and beautiful perceptions of the reality." Rodriguez suggested that, although the money is available to artists through this program, funding is heavily restricted and the process for receiving and spending the funds can be difficult to navigate.

24 Spencer, Paulina Astrid. "El Paso City Council Adopts Annual Public Art Plan." KTSM, 21 Jan. 2020. https://www.ktsm.com/local/el-paso-news/el-paso-city-council-adopts-annual-public-art-plan/.

25 Ibid.

# Objective #3: Measure the region against ioby's predictors of success.

ioby measures success by the number of leaders trained in online grassroots fundraising and supported on our platform, as well as the amount of "citizen philanthropy" funneled to projects led by neighbors and community-based organizations. Based on our experience working in Pittsburgh, Detroit, Cleveland, Memphis, and New York, ioby has identified five predictors of success.

## 1. CULTURE OF GIVING

**Background:** A strong culture of giving is characterized by general participation in charitable giving across income brackets and a general comfort with grassroots fundraising among would-be users of ioby's platform. This is measured using a combination of interviews, survey responses, and IRS charitable giving data.

**Why this matters:** In a place with a robust culture of giving, ioby leaders are more likely to succeed because they are more comfortable asking for donations and their neighbors are already accustomed to donating to charitable projects. For example, the average household in Memphis donates about 5.6% of adjusted gross income to charitable organizations, a figure considerably higher than the national average of about three percent. Coming from Memphis' culture of giving, most ioby leaders in the city have felt comfortable making asks of donors and have had great successes in their grassroots fundraising campaigns.

**Finding in the Border Region: STRONG**

Most interviewees expressed that limited income, poverty, and the overwhelming number of urgent issues facing the region stifle people's ability to give money. Instead, they said that the culture of giving may be best characterized by people contributing volunteer hours and tithe to their churches.

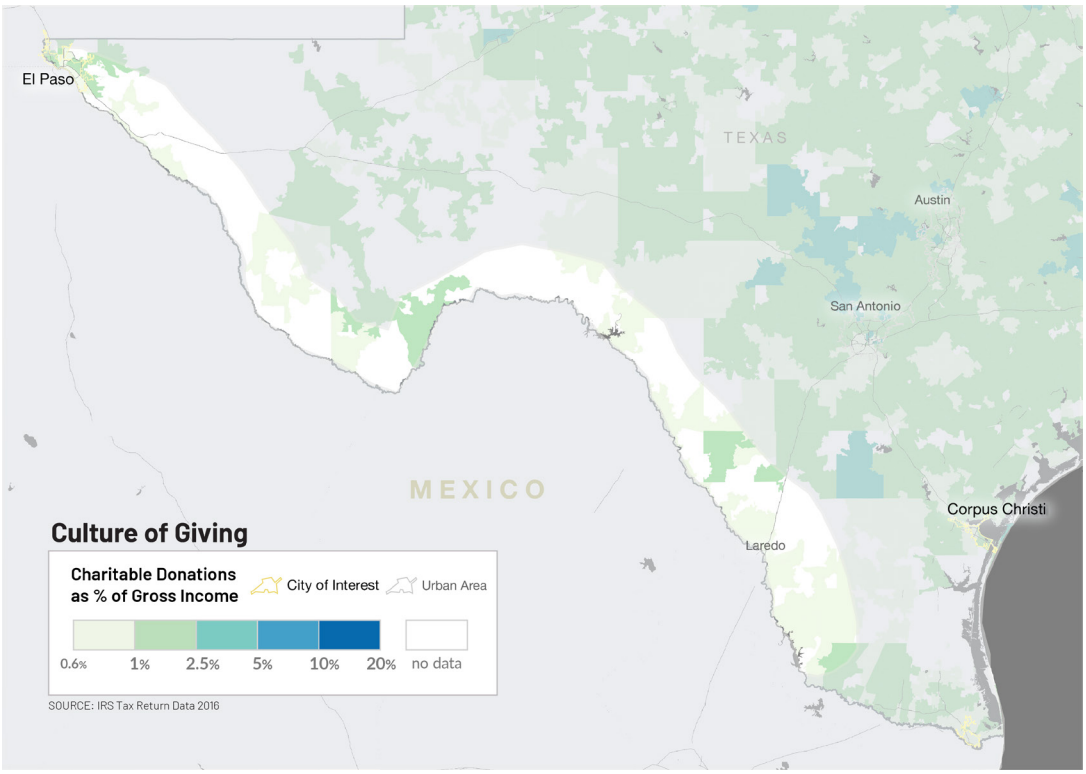
Others disagreed, claiming that people in the region are extraordinarily generous to the organizations and causes that are important to them. Peter Svarzbein, a member of El Paso's City Council, said,"This is one of the most giving communities in the world [...] this city as a whole is very giving of their time, writing a check, mentorship, time helping with the community, volunteering. There's a lot of ways they are giving."

Eric Pearson, CEO of the El Paso Community Foundation (ECF), shared this view. He said that people from all backgrounds are donating in great numbers to organizations and causes in the region. Pearson claimed that the Border Region is the most charitable in the country in terms of the number of people in the population giving to charitable and faith-based organizations: "We don't have corporate money coming in. We have a very generous community that comes together but it's meager and that's one of the reasons we are on the ground and trying to seed and water and grow the folks that are addressing issues." According to Pearson, the average gift to the ECF is less than $300, and they receive an average of about 2,000 small donations every month.

Using the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*'s "giving ratio" (calculated as itemized charitable deductions as a percentage of gross income) as our metric, charitable giving appears most heavily concentrated in El Paso and Brownsville.

Importantly, in areas where income is very low, it is unlikely worthwhile to itemize deductions. For this reason, the "giving ratio" is often criticized for being a great measure of who itemizes donations and little else. We do not find giving ratios to be a complete look at generosity, which would include giving to faith institutions, helping family members in need, and giving cash at local organizations' fundraising events.

The survey data reveals a widely held perception that residents in the region are generally willing to donate to organizations and projects that are important to them. About 60% of survey respondents said that people in their community are very likely to donate to projects that they think are positively impacting the community.




**Map 4. Charitable giving appears to be most common in El Paso and Brownsville.**

## 2. COOPERATIVE CIVIC SECTOR

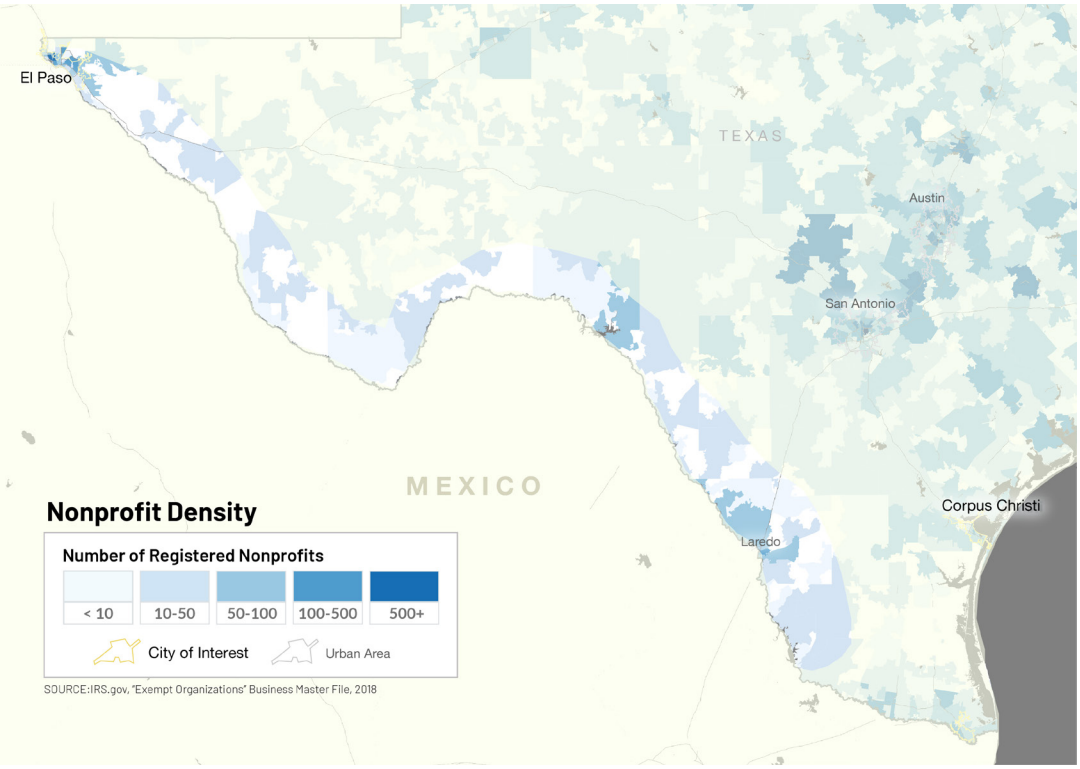
**Background:** A cooperative civic sector is characterized by a culture of collaboration among organizations and government, where collaboration is born out of a mutually enforced creative or strategic ethos rather than from a funder.

**Why this matters:** ioby finds it easier to build meaningful connections to organizations and grassroots leaders in cities where nonprofit leaders are deeply committed to each other's success. For example, Memphis nonprofits have deeply interwoven staff, board, and members, that are reinforced by social connections. Because Memphis boasts this supremely collaborative environment for nonprofits, our local partners and champions have had great success encouraging other organizations in the city to work with ioby.

**Finding in the Border Region: STRONG**

The map below reveals large clusters of incorporated nonprofits in the region's metropolitan areas, with the greatest concentration in and around El Paso.

Although there are occasional clashes between organizations that stem from differences in personalities and politics, most interviewees do not feel that there is a broad culture of competition between organizations in the region. Instead, some said that coalitions between local leaders and organizations seem to have strengthened in recent years. Father Robert Mosher shared, "There used to be a sense of competition, but there's a lot more collaboration and mutual support. I think it's one of the effects of the Trump administration." Nonprofits in the region that had previously been competitive for limited funds and resources are now united in their resistance to new federal immigration policy.




**Map 5. The greatest concentration of nonprofits is in and around El Paso.**

## 3. OPENNESS TO GRASSROOTS FUNDRAISING

**Background:** To successfully motivate and prepare residents to crowdfund for their ideas, ioby depends on a general openness to the tenets of grassroots fundraising and asset-based community development. This includes willingness on the part of residents and community-based organizations to ask neighbors, relatives, friends, colleagues, and strangers for donations to their projects.

**Why this matters:** ioby may predict the extent to which residents and leaders of community-based organizations will embrace ioby's model of online grassroots fundraising by looking at local examples of successful fundraising campaigns and by surveying residents about their proclivities for fundraising. Example: When ioby first set down roots in Cleveland, leaders of some community development organizations were already looking at how they might use crowdfunding to extend their reach to grassroots donors. This openness to grassroots fundraising enabled ioby to quickly grow our presence in Cleveland.

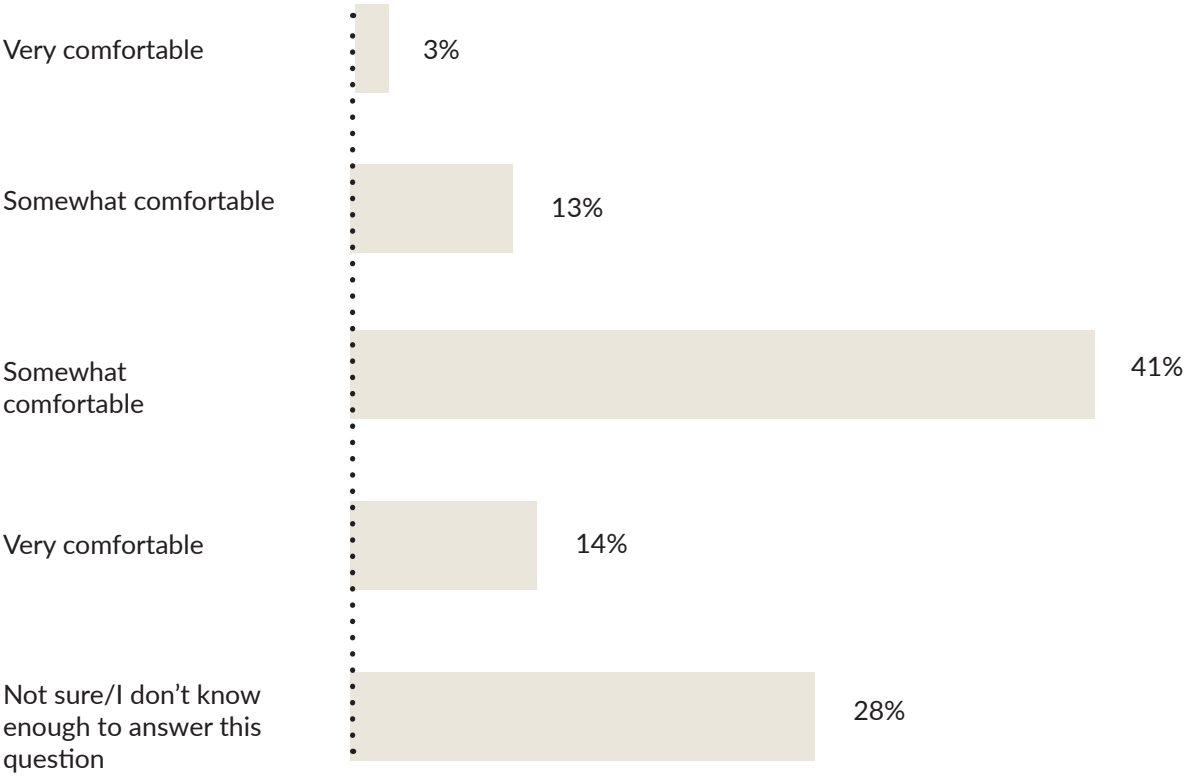
**Finding in the Border Region: STRONG**

To more accurately predict the degree to which ioby's model will be embraced, we must know how residents' proclivities for grassroots fundraising translate to their attitudes toward crowdfunding. Although ioby's approach to community development is shaped by the principles of asset-based community development and has been informed by grassroots fundraising tactics, the core functionality of our website is a "crowdfunding" platform.

Several interviewees told us that local funders tend to favor the well-connected, mostly white leaders of the city's largest and most established organizations. Because they do not generally expect to receive large grants from local funders, small community-based organizations depend primarily on a combination of government contracts and a small number of grants that are available to them from national foundations. For many organizations, individual donor fundraising has been one of only a few sources of reliable revenue.

This culture of grassroots fundraising for nonprofit organizations and projects was revealed in the responses to the survey. Only 16% of survey respondents said that their neighbors were very uncomfortable or somewhat uncomfortable with fundraising from their neighbors, friends, family, and colleagues, compared to 57% of respondents who shared that they would be somewhat or very comfortable.

**How comfortable are people in your community with fundraising from their neighbors, friends, family, and colleagues?**
**Based on 109 survey responses*




## 4. TRANSPARENT, ACCESSIBLE GOVERNMENT SERVICES

**Background:** ioby determines the transparency and accessibility of local government by examining the extent to which residents find it easy to obtain permission for projects in public spaces.

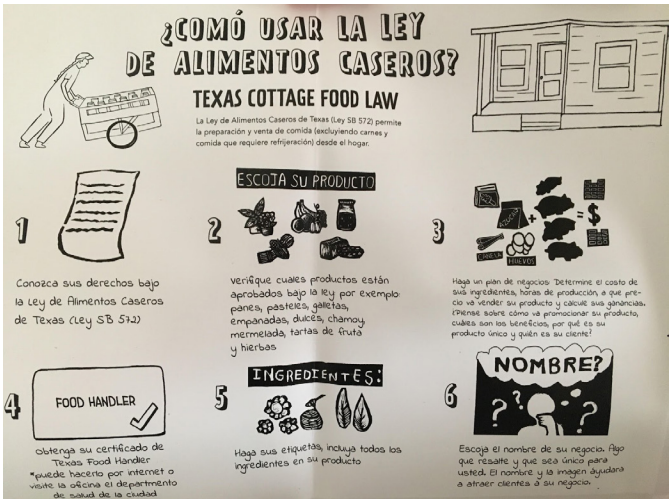
**Why this matters:** Because many ioby projects take place in public spaces, project leaders often seek permits for their work. In municipalities and counties where residents are easily able to obtain official permission to execute a project, ioby leaders are able to complete their projects more quickly and, often, with greater efficacy. Example: In Pittsburgh, the Office of Community Affairs and the Mayor's Bureau of Neighborhood Empowerment proactively educate residents at public forums in neighborhoods across the city about the kinds of permits that are required for projects in public spaces and assist them in navigating bureaucratic processes. The City of Pittsburgh's willingness to assist residents as they seek support for their projects has been an asset for ioby in the city.

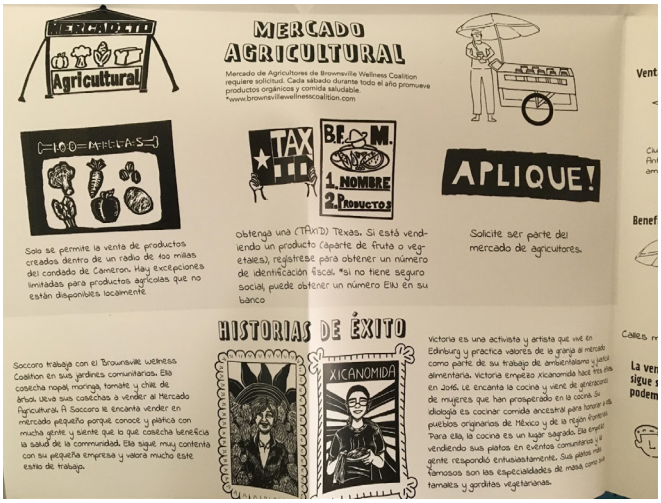
**Finding in the Border Region: WEAK**

Organizers in El Paso expressed that the permitting process for special events in public spaces is difficult to navigate. One planner with the City of El Paso recognizes this shortcoming in the permitting system: "When the rules are excessive or not accessible or don't make sense, that's when people go around them. We should be looking internally and change our process."

Civic leaders often engage with their elected representatives to ensure and expedite approvals for their projects and events. In this way, organizing efforts are subject to the approval of elected officials, many of whom rely on campaign contributions from mostly conservative, white developers whose profits depend on the exploitative policies of border transactions. Organizers who protest these policies are often at a severe disadvantage when they pursue permits and approvals for direct actions in public spaces. Despite this, some groups of organizers have successfully secured permits. Xavier Miranda, a community organizer and teacher, said that his group received a permit to occupy downtown El Paso for 21 days.

In Brownsville, a group of artists called *Las Imaginistas* are taking on the City's permitting processes because they say that they discriminate against low-income, Spanish-speaking populations. Permits are in English and permitting offices are scattered throughout the city. Las Imaginistas are drawing attention to the difficulty that low-income small business owners face when attempting to gain official permission for their businesses. According to one organizer, "There's no way to start a legal business unless you have a $40,000 investment. The eloteros are not regulated and those micro-economies exist despite the city, not because of it!" She shared that unlicensed eloteros, street vendors who sell traditional corn on the cob, are fined $200 each time that they are found to be in violation of public space ordinances: "The eloteros maybe make $8,000 a year and they are still absorbing those $200 tickets because they don't have another option." Las Imaginistas use art, design, and English-to-Spanish translation to help business owners understand municipal permitting and help the City see the gaps in their processes so that officials can make new codes that accommodate the demand for micro-vendors.




**Above: A permitting guide for Spanish-speaking small business owners in Brownsville, created and distributed by Las Imaginistas.**

Another interviewee in Brownsville shared that permitting processes are also affecting nonprofits' ability to serve the area: "ACLU National, which is perhaps the most powerful civil rights legal entity in the nation, wanted to come out here and spotlight the border but they couldn't get a permit! They're going in circles trying to get a permit. What is going on with this city that makes it so difficult to navigate these municipal processes?"

## 5. CIVIC PRIDE

**Background:** Civic pride refers to residents' demonstrable sense of pride to be from their town, neighborhood, city, and region. ioby measures pride through interviews and survey.

**Why this matters:** When residents are proud to be from a neighborhood, town, city, and/or region, ioby is more likely to be able to motivate them to create and fund civic projects. Example: ioby has found that many New Yorkers have a strong pride in their city, and connect their personal identities to their borough. Project leaders in New York City are willing to spend time working with neighbors to fundraise for and implement an ioby project because they have personal and long-term interests in making their neighborhoods stronger and more sustainable.

**Finding in the Border Region: STRONG**

All interviewees expressed that people are proud to be from their community, and 90% of survey respondents shared that they think that people are generally proud to be from their towns or cities. Notably, in both El Paso and Brownsville, some interviewees have noticed a shift in young people's

perceptions of their communities. Where youth once wanted to leave, today, young people are excited to create spaces for themselves in their community. Even so, interviewees said that there remains a "brain drain" as employment options are not as diverse or high-paying as in other major cities. Some told ioby that the Border Region is a place for Spanish-speaking people to safely practice their culture. Padre Arturo Banuelas said, "In this area, it's easy to affirm your cultural dignity. This place allows for a deeper cultural affirmation of our dignity. We can speak Spanish, even though there's racist people who say, 'go to Mexico if you want to speak Spanish.'"

Lorena Andrade, the Director of La Mujer Obrera in El Paso, warned that although people have civic pride and feel rooted in their communities, many low-income residents and people of color are acutely aware that their labor is exploited: "People are proud to be from the region and also from their neighborhoods, like the Chamizal. Specifically, this community, it's really rooted in history and you can feel it. Many people say they moved out and had to come back [...] but, for example, women are proud to be garment workers but they aren't proud to be exploited."

"People are proud that El Paso consistently responds with compassion to the precedence of migrating people and refugees among us." - Father Robert Mosher

"We have a very strong culture. There is a sense of comradery and neighborhood here because people in El Paso are raised with a lot of respect for each other and a lot of respect for where we are. People here work really hard because they believe in American ideals that if you work hard enough you can have a good life. It's part of the American Dream, the promise. A lot of the people that live here are the descendants of Mexico of the 1920s that came here during the Mexican Revolution, and as those families progressed and generations took branch here, that ideology has stuck here. We try to be model citizens for this country and I think it shows in how safe it is. It's a very welcoming place, talk to anyone who visits here, they love it here. People do have a sense of pride in that." -Aaron Montes

"Out of [the August 3, 2019 mass shooting] came this message of 'El Paso Strong,' which is a beautiful call to unify the community [...] But suddenly, these words become a brand–copyrighted–and now our resilience is our identity, but I think it just further allows people to ignore the fact that a community should not have to be this resilient [...] If we had a choice, I would rather not be resilient anymore. Why us? Why anybody in a country that could just fix it?" - Xochtli Rodriguez

The August 3, 2019 mass shooting in an El Paso Walmart has fundamentally changed the ways in which residents identify with their city. Adri Perez, a community engagement specialist with the ACLU, told us, "People are generally proud to be from this city, until what happened on August 3rd and now all of a sudden lump in our throat when we have to say where we are from. That deserves being said because never in my life did I have that hesitation. I've been on conference calls where in just saying who we are and where were from, and the whole first five minutes of the call turns into, 'I'm sorry.' And now, this is the narrative that you know about me and where I'm from."

## COMPARING THE BORDER REGION TO IOBY'S FOCUS PLACES (AT THE TIME OF IOBY'S ARRIVAL)

When measured only against other places where ioby has hired local staff, the Border Region appears to be a strong fit for ioby's services. We expect that our efforts to source and cultivate local leaders with ideas for their communities will benefit from the region's strong culture of giving, cooperative civic sector, openness to grassroots fundraising, and civic pride. Given many grassroots leaders' distrust in their local governments, we will need to be judicious about the types and scopes of partnerships we seek with city officials.

Some scores from ioby's previous Phase 0 reports have been changed to more accurately reflect the nuance in our findings.

| | The Border Region | Cleveland | Pittsburgh | Detroit | Memphis | New York |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Culture of Giving | STRONG | STRONG | STRONG | MIXED | STRONG | STRONG |
| Cooperative Civic Sector | STRONG | STRONG | STRONG | STRONG | STRONG | MIXED |
| Openness to Grassroots Fundraising | STRONG | STRONG | STRONG | STRONG | STRONG | STRONG |
| Transparent, Accessible, Government Services | WEAK | MIXED | STRONG | MIXED | MIXED | MIXED |
| Civic Pride | STRONG | VERY STRONG | VERY STRONG | STRONG | STRONG | STRONG |

# Objective #4: Evaluate potential demand for ioby's services in the region.

> "We aren't waiting for someone to give us reparations, we are building this thing. We know this idea of 'progress' is being imposed on us. They need to get out of our way and let us create community. That's the corridor for humanity, these relationships; it's investing in a real community so we can develop and take back what was stolen from us, it's not just about money, it's about land and community. We can't wait around for someone to give us that."
> - Anonymous interviewee

Before determining ioby's approach to working in a place, we must predict the degree to which residents will be interested in using ioby's crowdfunding platform, grassroots fundraising coaching, and fiscal sponsorship service. This prediction hinges on the extent to which residents and community-based organizations have led and donated to the types of "DIY" and tactical urbanism projects that ioby tends to support.

Although there is a robust "DIY" culture in the Border Region, funding for artists and civic leaders is scarce. Resident-led projects include building homes in the colonias (unincorporated areas that lack basic utilities), growing vegetables and harvesting water, and painting murals in honor of a loved one or to protest an injustice. The Border communities are often lauded for the quick response of their volunteer efforts, as well as for providing hospitality, food, shelter, and transportation to thousands of refugee migrants dropped off by border patrol agents on the coldest days of the year.

There is also a culture of taking over public space, including sprouting exhibits made from found objects, building colorful little free libraries, yarn-bombing trees in public parks, screening films on sidewalks, and occupying downtown's plaza for eight weeks to demand and create systemic change. Interviewees told ioby that local resident leaders with ideas to strengthen their communities are burdened by a lack of compensation for their work. Liz Chavez at Wise Latina International said, "There's pockets of DIY, a lot of young people with the will to do it, but they get caught in the web of 'I also have to work, pay my bills, go to school. [...] People have the will, but the financial support isn't really there. Burn-out is real."

One organizer argued that "It sometimes feels as if we are living in a war-zone, and we work with urgency because these policies are impacting us directly, daily; whereas the rest of the nation hears about these things in the news, later, we are grappling, battling, and struggling with it in real time, which is traumatic and exhausting. We need more people doing the organizing work. We need an investment in paid organizers. We need legal services. Many of us who are working against systemic racism are not paid and are working other jobs to make ends meet and put food on the table. All of us make it work, because we love our community, but it's not sustainable and many people that are good at doing this end up leaving so that they can get paid their worth."

Xochtli Rodriguez began the Caldo Collective in response to the limited amount of unrestricted funding that is available to local artists. The Caldo Collective invites residents to pay to attend communal "feasts," where local artists present their ideas. At the end of the feast, attendees vote for their favorite pitch and the artist with the most votes is awarded the funds that had been collected at the door. Xochtli recalled, "The first one we had in my mother's backyard, and she invited as many friends as she could and we raised $1,000 and funded a contemporary dance project. The most recent feast was to fund a filmmaker to complete a film for the Femme Frontera women's showcase, the only showcase in the region highlighting women's voices on the border. We were interested in representing underrepresented narratives. We raised $6,000 in one night."

Interviewees agreed that there is significant demand for direct support for community-based organizations doing important work with residents. There is also a perception that if a civic leader speaks openly about structural inequality or the willful displacement of low-income residents of color, their organizations or causes may be willfully ignored by local funders. Many leaders told ioby that because such a large share of local philanthropy comes from wealthy developers, funding typically goes to leaders and groups who are less vocal in their opposition to powerful interests.

# Objective #5: Identify the trends that drive communities' interest in taking on projects like those that ioby typically supports.

Learning from our work in New York, Memphis, Detroit, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and places around the country, we know that ioby's services are most helpful to grassroots leaders working in areas with histories of disinvestment. To be most impactful, we aim to understand how conditions of institutional disinvestment and resource scarcity have shaped residents' approaches to creating projects in their towns and neighborhoods. We also must understand how new investment, particularly in towns and

neighborhoods with histories of disinvestment, has impacted residents and how community leaders are responding to these changes.

### POVERTY IN THE REGION

El Paso was among the cities in the U.S. that suffered the most after NAFTA was passed in 1994. 29,000 jobs were lost when American companies moved manufacturing into Ciudad Juarez.[26] The multinational corporations manufactured products cheaper and faster, exploiting cheap labor and lax environmental laws in Mexico. The job loss in El Paso affected the community and recovery has been slow and staggered.

The Chamizal neighborhood was one of the most devastated and today is considered to be among the poorest neighborhoods in the U.S.[27] Interviewees said that the neighborhood of 8,000 residents battles against the continued injustices exasperated by NAFTA, such as the metal and battery recycling processing centers servicing the industrial trash from the factories in Juarez, Mexico and the onslaught of semi-trucks that block bridges, streets, and school cross-walks while polluting the neighborhood.

### "THE STRENGTH OF OUR CONVICTION"

Civic leaders in the region are engaged in a fight for economic and racial justice for their neighbors and migrants. Carlos Marentes told ioby, "We have to fight everyday for our city, for our barrios, for our space to be able to live in peace, with dignity [...] We don't want privileges, we just want to live here. It's our history, our identity. Our ancestors were here before the USA was invented. We keep fighting and try to have the strength of our conviction."

Carlos noted that federal immigration policies that have resulted in the militarization of the border have fundamentally changed the landscape of organizing in the region: "During the past ten years, the situation has changed in El Paso, it actually started to change during Reagan admin, [but] we are now under a different environment, we are now under a militarization of the social life of the community, it's totally different than in the past. [...] we are now doing our organizing under a situation that resembles a war against poor people."

These conditions of concentrated poverty and the militarization of the region serve to both inspire and constrain local civic leadership.

## Objective #6: Characterize civic participation across the region.

By most accounts, residents in the Border Region do not suffer from widespread apathy or a lack of interest in civic activities such as volunteering, donating to a civic project, voting, and meeting with decision-makers. Instead, survey respondents reported that the chief barriers that prevent residents from becoming more civically engaged are:

- A belief that their neighbors are disheartened because they do not believe that their participation will result in any important changes (58%)
- Civic participation just takes too much time for some people (51%)
- A lack of knowledge about where to begin (45%)

More than a third of respondents (40%) also claimed that people don't have enough spare cash to donate to causes or campaigns. Only 32% of respondents said that their communities are apathetic or simply do not care enough.

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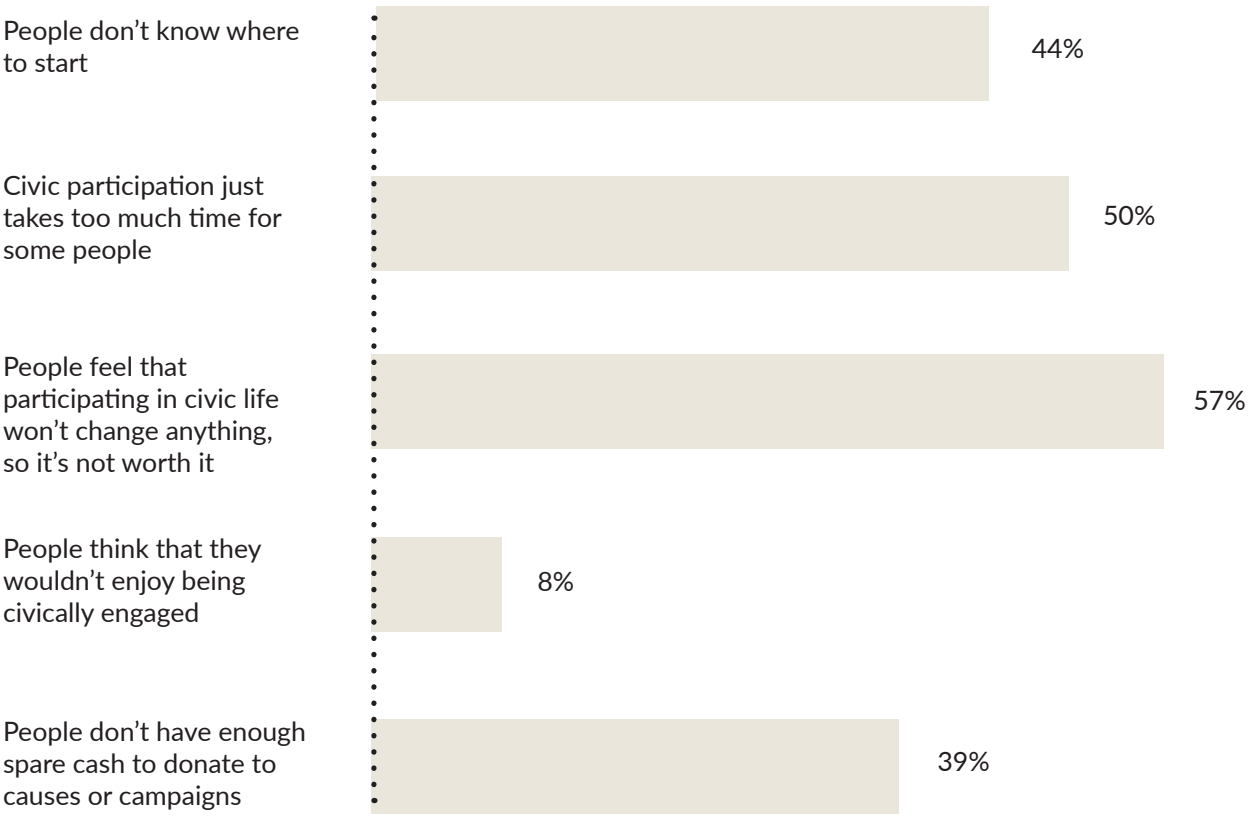
26 Saphir, Ann. "NAFTA struck El Paso hard, an exit by Trump could hurt more." Reuters, 13 Nov. 2017. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-trade-nafta-elpaso-analysis/nafta-struck-el-paso-hard-an-exit-by-trump-could-hurt-more-idUSKBN1DD1E8#:~:text=THE%20NAFTA%20EFFECT,2016%2C%20Labor%20Department%20data%20shows.

27 Price, Crystal. "El Pasoans living in poverty speak out as rate remains above national, state average." KFox14, 23 Oct. 2014. https://kfoxtv.com/archive/el-pasoans-living-in-poverty-speak-out-as-rate-remains-above-national-state-average.

**Which of the following barriers prevent people in your community from becoming civically engaged (i.e. volunteering, donating to a civic project, voting, meeting with a decision-maker)?**
**Based on 109 survey responses*




Given that ioby's success depends in part on the robustness of a place's culture of giving, we are concerned by the 40% of survey respondents' belief that residents are simply unable to commit any of their income to causes and campaigns that are important to them. Earlier in this report, a study of household giving to charitable organizations revealed that the culture of giving in the Border Region is not quite as weak as these survey responses might suggest.

Importantly, research indicates that there is no correlation between a community's median household income and the success of a crowdfunding campaign in their neighborhood.[28] Even so, this perception, regardless of whether it is grounded in an accurate assessment of residents' giving habits, may prevent civic leaders from attempting to lead grassroots fundraising campaigns.

The data suggest that, in order to broaden and deepen community engagement in the Border Region, leaders in government and the nonprofit sector may consider working with ioby to:

- Offer opportunities for "quick wins," or community-led projects that are funded and implemented quickly, that prove to neighbors that real and meaningful change is achievable in the short-term.
- Increase the number and accessibility of entry points for residents who wish to become involved in public decision-making processes but who do not know where to begin.

Interviewees added that the region suffers from low civic engagement because the population is both overworked and underpaid. Melissa Lopez of Diocian Migrant Relief said, "It's all about work, work, work,

28 Brent, Daniel A. and Lorah, Katie. "The Geography of Civic Crowdfunding: Implications for Social Inequality and Donor-Project Dynamics." Louisiana State University, July 2017, https://www.lsu.edu/business/economics/files/workingpapers/pap17_09.pdf.

so neither one of my parents were ever civically engaged."

Public meetings are often on weekdays, during regular work hours. For example, in El Paso, the County Commissioner's public meetings are Mondays at 9:00am and City Council meetings are Tuesdays at 8:00am. Recently, the new mayor of El Paso, Donald Margo, implemented new rules that limit the number of public comment speakers if three or more attendees ask to speak on the same agenda item.

Father Robert Mosher added, "One of the frustrating things about going to a City Council meeting, especially if you are going to say something during the meeting, it's a commitment of four to five hours."

Rubi Orozco Santos recalled an El Paso Independent School District public meeting in 2019, where the board ignored and excluded Spanish-speaking parents from the South Side who were hoping to speak in opposition to the closing of their children's school. The school board refused to provide translation during public comment. "At a school district meeting, you see the kids there with their parents, mothers and grandmother, waiting for hours. We were there from 5pm to 10pm. Our kids were hungry and tired. There are groups of committed people that go to community meetings, but that commitment puts a strain on families."

Padre Arturo Baneulas noted that systems of oppression also prevent people from participating in decision-making: "There's a racist narrative that's anti-poor and blames us for using the system and public funding and that keeps people away from participating. It's a narrative that keeps getting repeated against the poor and it continues to justify policies, rules, and culture that dehumanizes people [...] We don't know power, we don't know how to use it, because we don't have it."

## GOVERNMENT DECISION-MAKING VS. COMMUNITY NEEDS IN DOWNTOWN EL PASO

Community opposition and legal battles have stalled the razing of historic buildings for the construction of the downtown sports arena. Even as they continued to draw harsh criticism from the community, the City relocated hundreds of residents from the area. A local investigative journalist discovered that the City had paid out more than the property value to well-connected building owners in the downtown arena footprint while refusing to pay most local property owners the full value of their homes.

The downtown development plan also includes the Streetcar Corridor plan for the historic trolley installation that was funded by the 2012 Quality of Life Bond and the Department of Transportation. A city planner shared that "the south side of El Paso is the ideal community to implement the streetcar" because they "identified that area for historic preservation while at the same time invested in infrastructure." The planner further shared, "Sensitivity to which words we use, [like] Special Revitalization Ordinance, comes across as being 'ignorant' and when you use words like that, it makes it seem as if the neighborhood needs to change in order to be good. We are aware that these words communicate a different idea. [...] It's a cocktail for displacement if it isn't done right." Public use of the trolley has lagged and has been criticized throughout its various phases of development. The community engagement plans have shifted and the city has invested in various public relations campaigns in hopes to attract ridership.

Interviewees noted that the singular focus on investment in the city's downtown has come at the expense of long-time residents. One resident said, "We have this trolley line that nobody needs, while we lack transportation in other parts of town and the downtown redevelopment according to people's visions, moving people out of the way to put their pretty things in their place."

Rubi Orozco Santos places much of the blame for the dissonance between government decision-making and community needs on weak engagement strategies: "There's a complete lack of interest for assessing community needs, the city, the school board, the decisions aren't based on genuine community needs. There might be a superficial meeting held just to check off to meet requirements for planning processes but there's never been a genuine community assessment methodology implemented in any department; not the planning department, not in public health, and not the school district."

## WHAT DOES CIVIC ENGAGEMENT TYPICALLY LOOK LIKE?

In both El Paso and the Rio Grande Valley, most interviewees expressed pride in the fact that their constituents attend public meetings, meetings with elected officials, public rallies, and protests. Each interviewee also said that they usually see the same people participating at each event.

In low-income areas, including in rural areas, organizations have to make a concerted effort to provide transportation to accommodate the lack of transportation options that are available to the community. In speaking to community organizers in these areas, they share that when executing the most successful community-led campaigns, they are providing food, transportation and child-care. These are financial hurdles for all organizations with limited budgets and resources.

El Paso and the Rio Grande Valley have strikingly similar demographics: a predominantly Hispanic population and culture, low-income, Spanish-speaking families on the border struggling with similar political and civic issues, and growing numbers of registered voters and steady increases in voter turn-out.[29] [30] In the 2018 midterm elections, both communities registered an overwhelming number of new voters, and more than half of registered voters in Texas made it to the polls.[31] [32] Despite strong voter turnout in 2016 and 2018, municipal races tend to attract far fewer registered voters to the polls.

The 2018 race for the open Senate seat in Texas attracted a great deal of national attention, with a tight race between Republican Ted Cruz and Democrat Beto O'Rourke. The election was the closest race in decades, with Cruz winning the seat with 50.9% of the votes and O'Rourke losing with 48.9% of votes.

The immigrant and low-income communities in the Border Region struggle with representation in government because many residents are not able to vote. Notably, interviewees told ioby that the El Paso County Voter Registrar Training only holds their training in English, despite a predominantly Spanish speaking population. Statewide, various barriers have made voting difficult for Hispanics, including voter purges and a campaign to flag voters to verify citizenship status.[33] [34]

# Objective #7: Recommend strategies to source and serve ioby project leaders across the region.

Our research suggests that there is considerable opportunity for ioby to positively impact the region's civic landscape. When developing a strategy to grow ioby's presence in a place, we ask the following questions:

**How do we reach people who might be interested in leading fundraising campaigns with ioby?**

We seek to hire a City Action Strategist in El Paso with deep personal connections to their city and region and who is well connected to the local civic sector. This person will need to be comfortable and experienced with working in neighborhoods with histories of disinvestment, including in low-income communities and communities of color.

**How do we attach to and work with forms of civic participation that are already working? (e.g. Public meetings, charrettes, etc.)**

ioby will form strategic partnerships with organizations and agencies led by people who have already earned the trust of civic leaders and potential users of ioby's platform. By positioning crowdfunding as an effective supplement to organizations' fundraising and community-building activities, ioby hopes that community leaders will perceive ioby to be an important addition to the local civic infrastructure.

**How can we reach well-connected residents in the region?**

As we begin to grow our presence in El Paso, ioby will likely need to depend on referrals from highly regarded organizations in the region. These include introductions to community leaders from our partners, as well as the leaders whom we interviewed for this Phase 0 report.

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29 Castillo, Susy. "How did El Paso's voter turnout compare to past years?" KTSM, 7 Nov. 2018. https://www.ktsm.com/election/elections-2018/how-did-el-pasos-voter-turnout-compare-to-past-years/.

30 Novack, Sophie. "In the Rio Grande Valley, New Citizens Turn Out to Vote for the First Time." Texas Observer, 7 Nov. 2018. https://www.texasobserver.org/in-the-rio-grande-valley-new-citizens-turn-out-to-vote-for-the-first-time/.

31 Castillo.

32 Novack.

33 Chokshi, Niraj. "Federal Judge Halts 'Ham-Handed' Texas Voter Purge." New York Times, 28 Feb. 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/28/us/texas-voter-rolls.html.

34 Ura, Alexa. "Texas again mistakenly flags voters for citizenship reviews." The Texas Tribune, 11 Mar. 2019. https://www.texastribune.org/2019/03/11/texas-again-mistakenly-flags-voters-citizenship-reviews/.

**How do we circumvent barriers to civic participation in order to reach the deep roots?**

1. **People don't know where to start.**

To address this barrier, ioby should create resources that help residents understand how to create and fund projects for their neighborhoods. We may position civic crowdfunding as a first step for residents hoping to become more civically engaged by: helping leaders create their campaign pages, sharpening leaders' grassroots fundraising skills, and connecting them to technical experts in the city and across the region and country who can assist with implementation.

2. **People don't have enough spare cash to donate to causes or campaigns.**

ioby's local staff would be trained to address this myth in trainings and conversations with leaders who are considering running a campaign on ioby's platform. As stated previously, research indicates that there is no correlation between a community's median household income and the success of a crowdfunding campaign in their neighborhood.[35] In fact, compared to people who live in high-income neighborhoods, people in low-income communities tend to give larger shares of their incomes to organizations and causes that are important to them.

From our work in neighborhoods with histories of disinvestment across the country, we have found that "quick wins" are the best way to counter deeply rooted perceptions that low-income people are unable to donate to campaigns. Trust should be easier to gain, and strategic partnerships should be easier to forge, when we are able to point to a series of strong examples of how ioby's model works in El Paso and across the Border Region. When ioby has successfully supported grassroots campaigns across the city, including in neighborhoods with histories of disinvestment, we may begin to see momentum build as well-regarded community leaders and leaders of organizations refer people in their networks to ioby.

3. **People feel that participating in civic life won't change anything, so it's not worth doing.**

By sharing stories of leaders who have successfully funded and built projects in their own neighborhoods, ioby can inspire residents to take action. At the same time, we would encourage leaders to fund and deliver projects quickly in El Paso so that residents understand that they are able to make meaningful changes without much difficulty.

## WORKING IN RURAL AREAS

Based on our conversations with leaders of organizations across the region, it is clear that residents and civic leaders in rural areas are generally distrustful of organizations led by people from outside of the Border Region. This distrust seems to stem from a common feeling that solutions are only reasonable or palatable when they come from people in the area. Philosophically, this aligns nicely with ioby's founding principle–that people closest to a problem are best suited to solve it –and signals a strong fit for our services. In practical terms, this distrust presents a significant barrier to our work. An organization like ioby, from outside of the region, may find it difficult to build trust with civic leaders.

In addition, our research suggests that people in rural areas have been relegated to the position of "passive recipient of change" rather than change agent. Civic leaders who aim to bolster engagement in their communities contend with a sentiment that there is simply no point in trying to change anything because no one is listening anyway.

**Strategy #1: Hire a City Action Strategist**

When funding is secured, ioby will hire an El Paso Action Strategist to identify leaders from across the city, prepare them to crowdfund, and connect them to experts in their fields. Using the blended on-the-ground and digital model successfully implemented in New York, Memphis, Detroit, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Cincinnati, the El Paso Action Strategist will use the findings of this Phase 0 Report as a guide and begin to identify local leaders who have ideas and funding needs.

35 Brent.

**Strategy #2: Training Partners**

To build ioby's presence in cities and towns across the Border Region, ioby will train a cohort of civic leaders, including community-facing members of staff from highly-regarded community-based organizations from cities and rural areas across the region to:

- Learn about community development models and frameworks that can help them more creatively address challenges in their towns and cities, including:
  - Asset-based community development (ABCD)
  - Tactical urbanism
  - Creative placemaking
- Preparing to lead a grassroots fundraising campaigns by:
  - Deciding whether crowdfunding with ioby is right for them
  - Building a strong and diverse fundraising team
  - Crafting and telling a compelling story about their work and its significance
  - Assessing their team's fundraising capacity using a prospect chart
  - Creating an online communications strategy to support their fundraising campaign

The ideal participant in this cohort is a member of staff who spends at least 50% of their time working directly with community residents, and frequently organizes meetings, convenings, workshops, or trainings with residents who are focused on local project-based work. Each participating organization would be compensated for their staff time. Through this approach to building ioby's presence across the region, we hope to:

- Equip residents and community-based organizations with the tools and skills that they need in order to access citizen philanthropy for projects that make their towns stronger, more connected, more vibrant, and more sustainable;
- Build strong and authentic relationships with leaders of nonprofit organizations that are highly regarded by leaders who might benefit from ioby's services and platform;
- Cultivate a robust culture of leading and giving to grassroots projects in cities, towns, and neighborhoods with histories of disinvestment.

**Strategy #3: Pursue match fund partnerships in the Border Region**

ioby has found that an effective way to prove our worth to civic leaders in a place is by accruing several examples of projects that are successfully funded and created very quickly.

To accelerate grassroots fundraising efforts in the region, ioby will pursue match fund partnerships. A time-limited, match opportunity with broad eligibility criteria would serve as a strong incentive for organizations to begin connecting residents and community-based organizations in their networks to ioby's crowdfunding platform and services.

ioby expects that this strategy would be most impactful when paired with Strategies #1 and #2. Place-based matching funds are most successful when the local leaders and organizations who are promoting the opportunity are equipped to explain the advantages of crowdfunding and prepare people in their networks to run their fundraising campaigns.

**Outputs**

In the medium term, ioby expects that an on-the-ground organizer in El Paso and a training program for leaders in rural areas will have the following results:

1. More people in the Border Region will lead projects at the town and neighborhood scale that are concerned with making their communities stronger, safer, and more sustainable. These projects will be designed by residents, funded by neighbors, and implemented by the community. Public spaces will have more stewards invested in positive change.
2. Civic leaders across the region will become better equipped to fundraise, use digital communications, and organize their communities.
3. Leaders will have a network of like-minded people doing similar work around the region and country, to whom they can turn for peer support.
4. New, previously untapped sources of citizen philanthropy will become available to civic groups working to make their communities stronger.

**Outcomes**

In the long term, we expect that:

1. Previously disengaged residents will contribute to existing community development and city and regional planning initiatives. As a result, engagement with local community-based organizations will expand and diversify, and the regional civic sector will grow to be more connected.
2. Municipal and county agencies will be better positioned to make smart decisions and policies for residents based on authentic input from community leaders, the ingenuity of residents who live closest to the problems in the community, and small-scale demonstrations that build community buy-in.
3. Residents will feel more ownership over initiatives that affect their towns and blocks, and understand the larger scale impact of their own projects in their communities.

# Appendix A — Survey Questions

1. In which of the following regions do you live?
2. Are people generally proud to be from your town or city?
3. Are people generally proud to be from your region?
4. Have you ever worked on (e.g. volunteered for, donated to, or led) a project to make your community better in some way?
5. Who initiated the project?
6. If you had an idea for a project that would improve your town (or neighborhood, if you live in a city) in some way, who do you think would be very likely to fund it? (Check all that apply)
7. If you had an idea for a project that would benefit your community in some way, do you know of anyone in local or county government who would be willing to help you get the necessary approvals, permits, or resources to make it happen?
8. If you had an idea for a project that would benefit your community in some way, how likely would you be to crowdfund for that project?
9. If you answered that you are unlikely to crowdfund for a project, what are some reasons that you might not pursue this option?
10. How comfortable are people in your community with fundraising from their neighbors, friends, family, and colleagues?
11. Are people in your community likely to donate to projects that they think are positively impacting the community?
12. Would people in your community feel comfortable donating to a project that has a risk of failing?
13. Have you ever crowdfunded for a project before?
14. Was your crowdfunding campaign successful?
15. If you answered "no," what do you think could have made your campaign more successful?
16. Which of the following barriers prevent people in your community from becoming civically engaged (i.e. volunteering, donating to a civic project, voting, meeting with a decision-maker)?
17. Do people in your town (or neighborhood, if you live in a city) trust each other?
18. Do long-term residents in your town or neighborhood tend to trust new transplants to the community?
19. Do new transplants to your town or neighborhood tend to trust long-term residents?
20. To what extent do you know what nonprofit organizations are doing to support your community?
21. Do you trust government to keep its promises to your community?
22. Do you trust philanthropists to keep their promises to your community? Why or why not?
23. What is your full name?
24. Email address
25. Occupation (if applicable)
26. What is your zip code?
27. In what town or city do you live?
28. What is the name of the neighborhood where you live? (If applicable)
29. How would you describe your race and/or ethnicity?
30. For how long have you lived in your town or city?
31. Who sent you this survey, or how did you discover it?

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