

UNHOUSED COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES WITH LA FIRES: HEALTH SURVEY

MUTUAL AID RESEARCH
COLLECTIVE (MARC)



Photo taken at the Compound in Van Nuys,
January 10th, 2025

OVERVIEW OF PROJECT

PROBLEM:

During the January 2025 wildfires, people living outside in tents, vehicles, and Inside Safe/city shelters were especially vulnerable to health risks and did not receive adequate resources from the city or the county;

What people were experiencing in terms of harms and criminalization, as well as what they were doing to survive and care for each other, was also changing rapidly





mutual aid & direct community action were essential during the fires



MUTUAL AID

After the immediate emergency of the fires waned, mutual aid organizers with training in social science and community action methodologies formed a research collective to design and field a survey that would help affected communities and organizers collect and learn from their experiences

PROJECT GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Gathering Community Knowledge: Collecting data & experiences of the Eaton Fires

a) share public reports + zines about unhoused communities' experiences with the fires and their aftermath

Organize LA community for Emergency Preparedness

a) host a public convening to discuss the emergency response needs & visions of unhoused communities & strategize responses

Practice Mutual Aid-Community Action Research

a) Develop and document a process for mutual aid or other grassroots collectives to conduct similar community research projects

b) Conduct teach ins/skillshares with mutual aid orgs & community on how to conduct similar research.

JULY 3, 2024

COMMUNITY AUDIT OF THE MAYOR'S



Modeled off of previous community based surveys, such as the July 2024 **Inside Safe Community Audit**

SURVEY PROCESS

DEVELOPING THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

- **Reviewed literature** on health impacts of wildfire smoke and consulted environmental health researchers
- **Compared our own experiences** as mutual aid groups across the county
- Used Google Forms to **collaboratively add and edit** questions, response categories, and field survey to respondents
- Sent Google Form to mutual aid organizations for **feedback**

a) Primary critique: **length** of the survey (30 mins to complete)

b) We made some cuts, but primarily addressed this concern by offering our own volunteers to field the survey.

Unhoused Community Experiences with LA Fires

This survey arose from a shared desire among housed and unhoused mutual aid organizers to better understand how unhoused and precariously sheltered community members have been experiencing these last couple weeks of winds, fires, and all of their impacts on Los Angeles. The goal of collecting this information is to identify the primary health impacts that folks living outside and in vehicles and motels are noticing in the wake of the fires; recognize how response and support efforts have been carried out (or not); and document demands and proposals that unhoused communities have for disaster preparedness now and in the future. We recognize that folks outside often live in a state of chronic crisis and are constantly having to creatively respond to environmental and city-made disasters - for this reason, your insights are so important and deserve to be uplifted.

All of this data will be collected anonymously and ultimately compiled into a report prepared by mutual aid organizations that will be shared with unhoused communities, press, and the city to center the needs and visions emerging from the ground and build collective power through community knowledge production.

If you would like to participate, someone from a mutual aid collective will conduct a brief 20-25 minute survey with you consisting of questions that have to do with your experiences before, during, and in the wake of the windstorm and fires that have affected Los Angeles in the last few weeks, as well as some brief demographic questions. All of this is optional and you have the power at any moment to skip a question or decline to

SURVEY PROCESS

CREATING A SURVEY PROTOCOL



Interviewers were given set of criteria for identifying potential respondents

CRITERIA:

- Unhoused, or living in a car, motel, or other temporary shelter
- Were in LA during the fires
- Directly impacted (however someone chooses to define this)
- Interested in City/County response and disaster planning for unhoused communities

PROCESS:

- Survey was written for an interviewer who would be reading it aloud to a respondent and structuring it more as a conversation
- Informed consent language was included in the beginning of the Google Form for interviewer to formally introduce the project to the respondent

FIELDING THE SURVEY

DEVELOPED RESEARCH
PARTNERSHIPS WITH MUTUAL
AID AND COMMUNITY
ORGANIZATIONS

Aetna Street Solidarity
All Power Free Clinic
Grow Together Glendale
LA Street Care
Palms Unhoused Mutual Aid
Pasadena For All
Sidewalk Project

57 GIFT CARDS WERE
DISTRIBUTED IN THE
AMOUNT OF
\$25

Secured funding for gift cards through Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy at UCLA.

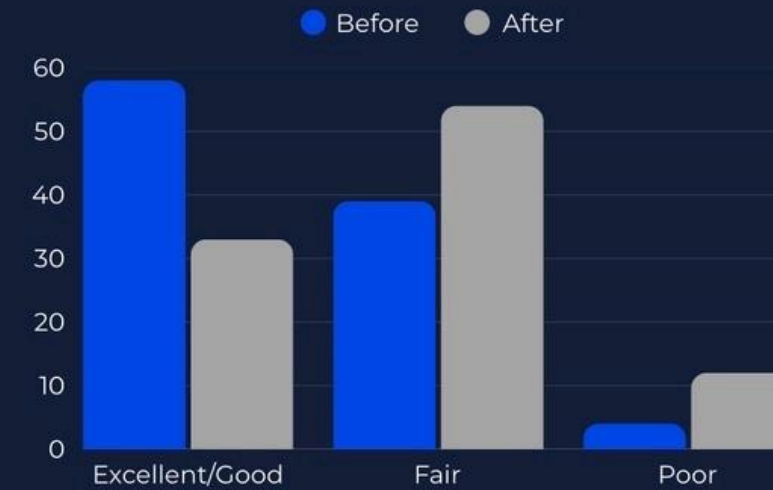
Distributed a set number of gift cards (or funding for organizations to purchase their own gift cards) to a variety of organizations to ensure that not all respondents were from the same region or organizational connections

SURVEY OVERVIEW

57 PARTICIPANTS

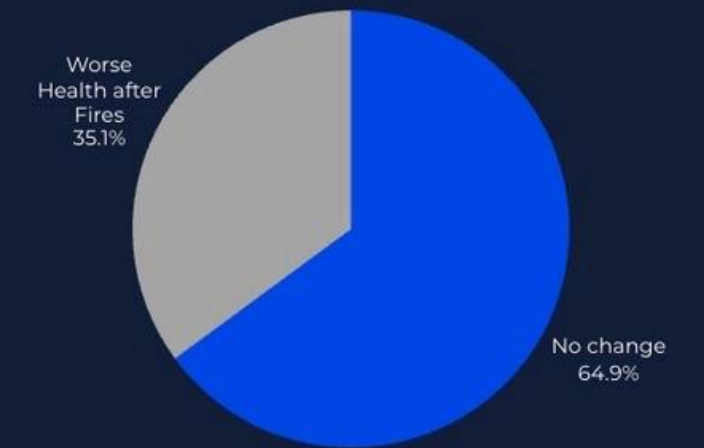
HEALTH

WE ASKED: IN GENERAL, BEFORE THE FIRES, HOW WOULD YOU HAVE RATED YOUR HEALTH?



Self-reported health outcomes were worse after the fires, with a clear decrease in the number of people who reported having Excellent or Good health before (58%) and after the fire (33%), and an increase in respondents reporting Fair health (from 39% to 54%) or Poor health (from 3.5% to 12%).

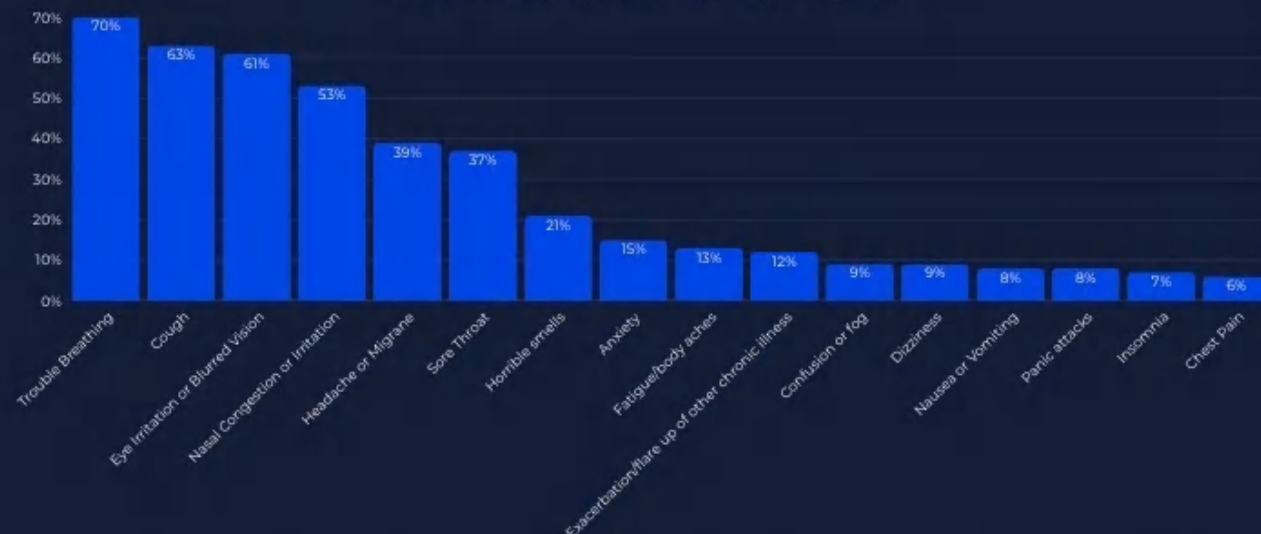
WE ASKED: IN GENERAL, NOW AFTER THE FIRES, HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR HEALTH?



Over one-third of respondents (35.1%) rated their health worse after the fires.

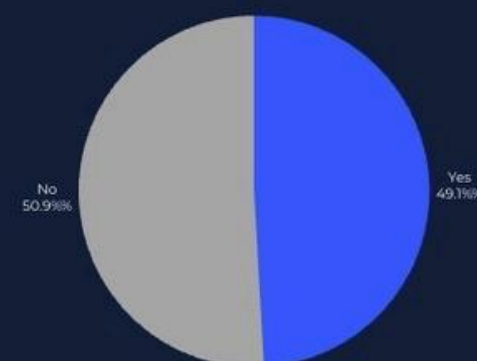
WE ASKED: WHAT SYMPTOMS OR HEALTH CONDITIONS DID YOU EXPERIENCE DURING THE FIRES?

Most Prevalent Symptoms Amongst Respondents

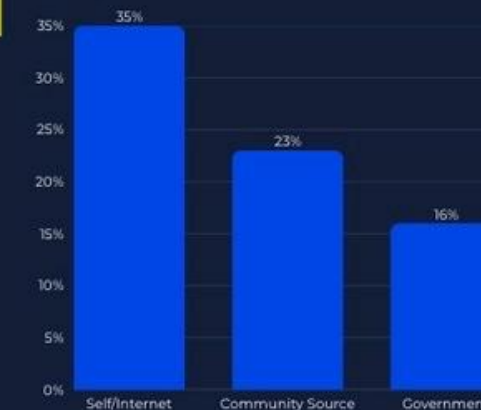


EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

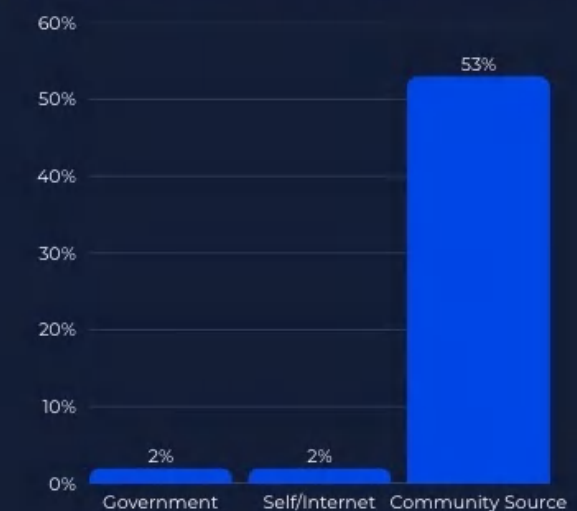
WE ASKED: DID YOU RECEIVE ANY WARNINGS ABOUT IMPENDING HIGH WINDS AND POTENTIAL FIRE HAZARDS IN THE DAYS BEFORE THE FIRES STARTED?



WE ASKED: IF YES, FROM WHERE ?



WE ASKED: DID ANY PERSON/GROUP PROVIDE YOU WITH ASSISTANCE OR RESOURCES DURING THE FIRES?



The community (mutual aid groups, neighbors, friends, and family) was the primary source of material support and information, once the fires were in full effect and displacing Angelenos. 53% of respondents received their support from the community, with only 1 person receiving support from the government, or on their own.

SURVEY OVERVIEW

57 PARTICIPANTS

WE ASKED: IF YOU USE SUBSTANCES REGULARLY, HOW HAVE THE FIRES AFFECTED YOUR ABILITY TO USE AND/OR YOUR EXPERIENCES USING THE SUBSTANCES THAT YOU TYPICALLY USE?

- I couldn't smoke crystal while having asthma attacks so I began injecting which I'm not used to/haven't done in a long time.
- I couldn't smoke well because of my throat
- so much stress makes me want to drink

WE ASKED: WHAT OTHER EFFECTS OR IMPACTS HAVE YOU NOTICED IN YOUR LIFE SINCE THE FIRES?

- Huge depression, hard to shake it, brain fog
- People look at you more if you need to make a fire for warmth
- public transportation was really bad after the fires, it was hard to get around
- I've lost work. I am a gardener
- People who normally help me were busy working on the fires. Like mutual aid workers and nonprofit workers

TESTIMONY

WE ASKED: WHAT TYPES OF ASSISTANCE/RESOURCES WERE MOST USEFUL TO YOU?

* EMERGENCY SUPPLIES

- Tarps - the most requested item!
- Blankets
- Zip ties
- Ropes
- Bungee cords
- Lanterns
- Batteries
- Access to electricity to charge electronics

* SHELTER

- Motel/hotel rooms
- Friends who offered shelter indoors
- Temporary shelter
- Housing

* MEDICAL SUPPLIES

- Masks
- Oxygen canister
- Nebulizer



* MONETARY ASSISTANCE

- Cash-based aid
- Gift cards

* SUPPLIES TO STAY WARM

- Hand warmers

* HYGIENE

- Wipes
- Trash Bags

* CLOTHING

- Rain gear
- Severe weather gear
- Shoes

* FOOD



TAKEAWAYS

For Future Mutual Aid Research Projects

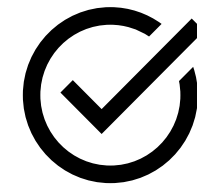
Design survey instruments with the
respondent in mind



Ensure that survey questions are accessible, clear, relevant, and include spaces where people can provide information that the question does not cover



Compensate respondents fairly for the time that they devote to the survey



Be mindful of the impact that sensitive questions may have on the respondent and prepare interviewers to practice active listening



Create spaces for interviewers to debrief about their fielding experiences to determine if any major changes need to be made to the survey

TAKEAWAYS

For Future Mutual Aid Research Projects

Design survey instruments with
community partners in mind



Fielding surveys takes time and resources – ensure that research projects do not pose an additional burden or take resources away from organizations’ regular obligations and commitments



Ensure that survey is aligned with community partners’ mission and values by regularly sharing your progress with them for feedback



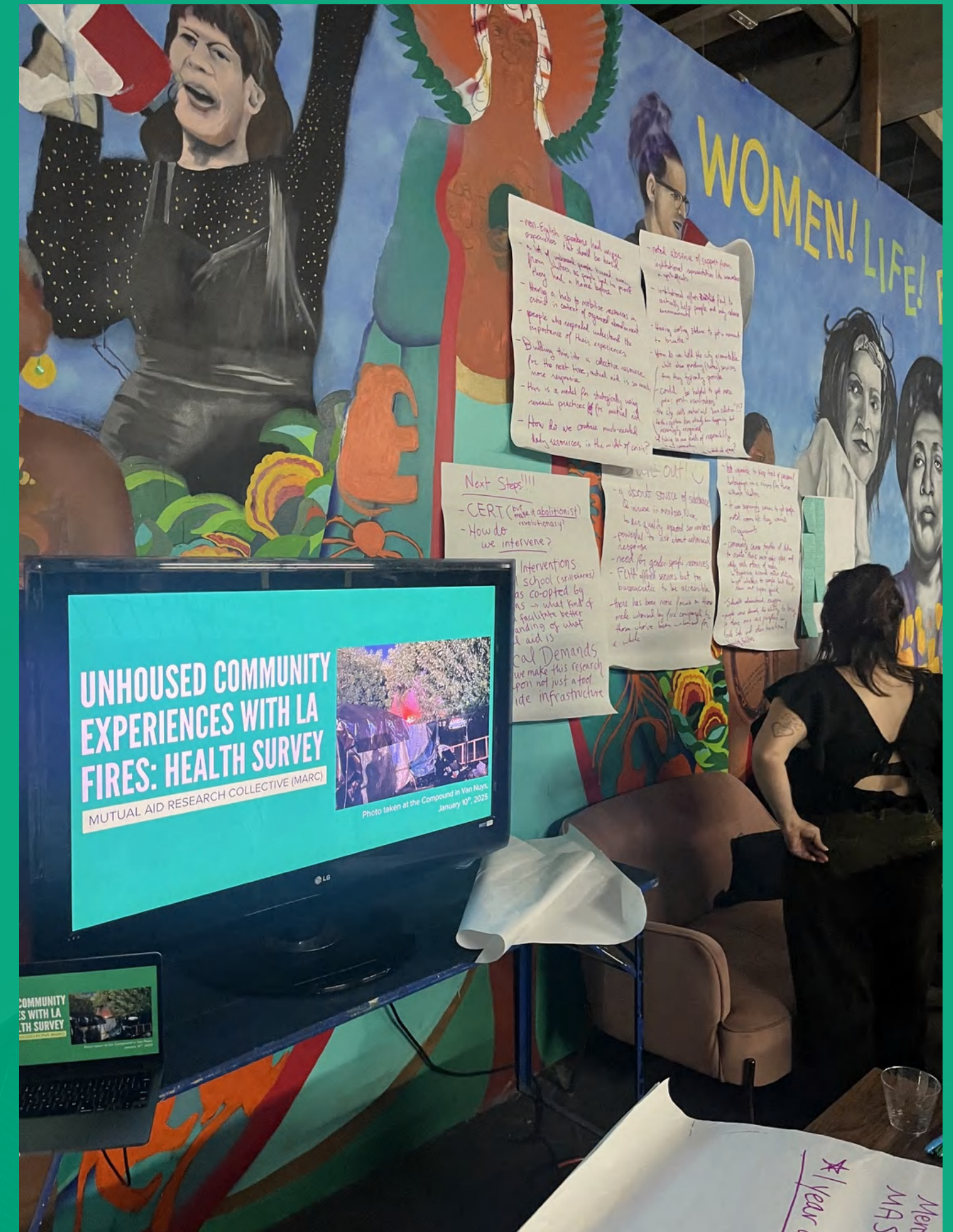
TAKEAWAYS

For Future Mutual Aid Research Projects

Spectrum of participation, from data collection, to analysis and writing

Create opportunities for community members to be involved in discussing the findings and next steps with the research

Use the research to support existing advocacy efforts and devote time into publicizing your hard work!



MUTUAL AID RESEARCH COLLECTIVE (MARC)

