STREET VENDOR SUMMIT LOOK-BACK AND RECOMMENDATIONS

March 22, 2019
Los Angeles Trade Technical College

On Friday, March 22, the Los Angeles Street Vendor Campaign (LASVC) hosted a Street Vendor Summit (Summit) at Los Angeles Trade Technical College with the goal of connecting vendors to resources and knowledge about new rules in the City of LA and to gather feedback on new rules that are being formulated for Unincorporated LA County. The Summit was an enormous success, but we still have a long road ahead to create an inclusive and equitable community. The Summit highlighted some of the remaining needs of vendors post-legalization. So where do we go from here? What will it take to support the formalization of the estimated 50,000 vendors? And what can we as a city do to build their capacity? In this piece, we outline some of the needs, as well as bold recommendations for next steps.

LASVC

For over 10 years, the LASVC, with vendors themselves as its driving force, has advocated for policies that support these low-income entrepreneurs. The LASVC is made up of a coalition of over 65 organizations and 400 brick-and-mortar businesses. Leading this work is East Los Angeles Community Corporation (ELACC), Leadership for Urban Renewal Network (LURN), Los Angeles Food Policy Council (LAFPC), and Public Counsel.

SB 946

SB 946, known as The Safe Sidewalk Vending Act, is a new state law that ended the criminalization of sidewalk vending and opened the doors for the formalization of thousands of entrepreneurs across California. Following its passage, LASVC began mobilizing around what implementation would look like and disseminating information on the new laws. This was the impetus for the Street Vendor Summit we hosted last Friday.

THE SUMMIT

Quick Facts

An emotional highlight of the Street Vendor Summit came during the lunch session when three vendor-leaders gave rousing speeches and announced their intent to form their own organization called Vendedores en Acción (VEA)/Vendors in Action (VIA) that will take on the mission of supporting street vendors. The announcement was followed by the crowd of vendors chanting in unison “VEA! VEA! VEA!”

250
Vendors in attendance

5
Workshops
• Know Your Rights Under SB 946
• Sidewalk Vending Rules in City of LA
• County Health Regulations
• Financial Capacity Building
• County Regulations Listening Session

2
Government Agencies
• City of LA Bureau of Street Services
• LA County Department of Public Health

6
Organizations
• ELACC
• LURN
• LA Food Policy Council
• Public Counsel
• National Lawyers Guild
• VEA
ANALYSIS
The Needs of the Street Vendors

The Summit provided much-needed information to vendors from all over Los Angeles County, for many of whom this was their first exposure to the new rules. We saw vendors who were thinking-out-loud about how the new rules would impact their businesses and what they needed to do to adapt. The Summit also acted as a forum for vendors to network, share ideas, express their needs, and support each other as they navigate the new rules.

For us, the biggest takeaway from the Summit was the highlighted need to continue monitoring and informing the development of the process and implementation, while giving us some clarity on what needs to be done to address those needs.

The Summit was at capacity for the duration of the event. Up to 40 vendors were turned away because of lack of space. This level of attendance highlighted the interest from the street vendor community in the new rules and how they can comply. It is estimated that 50,000 street vendors operate in the City of Los Angeles with a significant percentage of those selling food. To reach all the vendors that need information, it is clear that there exists a need for organizations and City/County departments to disseminate knowledge so that these vendors are brought into the formal economy in a responsible way that maximizes their opportunity to thrive and honors the intent to provide a safe space for those with the highest economic need to vend.

Another need we saw highlighted during the event was the need for an increase in City/County Departments’ capacity to serve the volume of street vendors that will need to be processed. By understanding the capacity needed to create information and educate vendors on the new regulations around permitting, food safety, and other requirements, the vendor community will be better served with the resources needed to comply with the rules the City has put together.

RECOMMENDATIONS
Given the tremendous need that still exists among street vendors, there are a number of recommendations we urge funders, policy-makers, and LA City/County Departments to consider so that street vendors are responsibly and inclusively brought into the formal economy.

1. Close the Income Gap
To ensure that street vendors can comply with all necessary regulations, we urge funders to consider expanding micro-loan programs and explore establishing a mini-grant program available to micro-entrepreneurs looking to improve their business that complements the loan programs. The costs associated with upgrading equipment to meet city/county regulations or obtaining necessary permits can (and do) become a barrier to success for micro-entrepreneurs.

2. Regular Street Vendor Summits
Of the estimated 50,000 street vendors in Los Angeles, about 250, or 0.005% of the street vending population, attended the Summit. The day proved to be an important educational tool to support street vendors for years to come. Hosting a regular event would open the possibility for providing a variety of workshops on topics relevant to street vendors as well as give the opportunity to give updates on any changing rules.

3. Build Capacity of Ally Organizations
A vital part of the LASVC is the advocacy of ally organizations. These organizations provide direction, knowledge, resources, and funds that make the LASVC possible, and they need support to continue positively impacting their communities and expanding their capacity to serve vendors. We recommend that funders and donors consider financially supporting their future advocacy.

4. Capacity Assessments of Public Agencies
The full implementation of a street vending system will be coordinated through a number of City/County departments, as well as through those designated to lead the process. It is imperative that these entities develop the capacity to work with street vendors effectively and responsibly. We urge city/county officials and department directors to conduct full capacity assessments and focus on eliminating language barriers, developing tools for education, and training staff.

5. Standardizing Policies Across Agencies
At the Summit, there were occasional conflicts in how agencies were interpreting new rules regulations. Agencies that govern a shared territory should ensure that their policies are not contradicting, and instead build off one another. To ensure that this does not happen, a work-group should be created that includes policymakers at each agency along with vendor leaders, with the focus of helping entrepreneurs understand and comply with regulations with minimal confusion.