

FIRST PLACE

Team Members:

Karla Paola Ruiz Huerta (Architecture), Rafae Ahmed (MBA), Dennis Fichman (Architecture), and Tomas Benjamin Soriano Jimenez (Geoinformatics)

Project Title:

Landscape Architecture and Urban Housing Façade Remodeling as Community Organizing

Abstract:

The economic and social havoc created by the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected Hispanics, Blacks, and other minorities, which were already laden with historical disadvantages stemming from systemic and de facto racism that has never been fully uprooted in the United States. San Antonio has not been exempt of such structural injustices. Visualizations of geospatial data can readily show neighborhoods historically occupied by Hispanic majorities or pluralities and those with lower socioeconomic indicators overlap in an eerily strong correlation.

Traditional redevelopment programs and zone revitalizing strategies tend to exacerbate disparities when anchored on large redeveloping projects (building shopping/ entertainment centers or luxury housing). Due to their capital-intensive nature, these projects favor large real estate investors with little to no ties to the areas in which they are implemented. As a result, the communities that have historically occupied these neighborhoods are priced-out due to inflationary pressure, landowner speculation, and property tax hikes. While the financial goals of this type of economic boom may be reached, a holistic assessment would reveal profound societal losses: security and economic issues are simply exported to other areas, families and individuals are displaced further disintegrating community bonds, and the sense of disenfranchisement is exacerbated. These outcomes have the pernicious effect of debilitating democratic society.

In this report we propose a labor-intensive, holistic approach to revitalizing economically-depressed, historically Hispanic neighborhoods through a grass-roots coalition of community members, activist-organizers, students, and young professionals. The goal and focus of these working groups will be to landscape common areas, remodel home gardens, and beautify building façades based on public art philosophy. We believe and expect these activities can lead to stronger community bonds and civic engagement which will then lead to vibrant democratic participation.

Our proposal is a phased project with feedback loops to inform and enhance our work in each phase. Using geospatial data available from the City of San Antonio, we will map out neighborhoods to canvas and invite communities to participate. We will begin with a pilot in a single neighborhood subsequently expanding to multiple synchronous projects once we have the process streamlined.

In the next phase, community members and architect-activists in a series of town halls will vote and decide on the initial project to undertake. Our architecture scholars will provide project blueprints and renders for the community to vote on. We will integrate recent developments in environmental-friendly construction management and eclectic green architecture into our designs. Finally, a project charter and schedule will be agreed upon and the construction will initiate.

Research in organizational behavior strategy will inform our project management practices to improve teamwork, collaboration, and documentation in order to streamline the process from neighborhood canvassing to designing to construction. Further, management theory will inform the way these projects can be implemented at the most cost-efficient way possible given a set of parameters: environmental friendliness, prioritizing the needs of local community members, and maximizing community participation.

SECOND PLACE

Team Members:

Sarah Estrada (MBA), Caden Povolish (Data Analytics), John Lopez (Business), Jacob Anderson (Business), and Iyare Oseghae (Geoinformatics)

Project Title:

The Runner REACH program

Abstract:

As a collective, our group has discussed how social injustices and racial discrimination transpires and affects our education system. Furthermore, our group constructed a thorough analysis of how San Antonio currently distributes educational attention throughout the school district(s) and devised an alternative plan that we hope to propose in order to mitigate the lack of representation for those considered socially disadvantaged. Our research explored the relationship between school districts with students from primarily low-income households, graduation rates, and The University of Texas at San Antonio's involvement in those districts.

It is no secret that UTSA has ambitions to increase its student enrollment in the next decade. The university hopes to attract students from all over the world to San Antonio to obtain an esteemed education which will aid them in fulfilling their career field aspirations. However, we believe there is a strong group of students, here in our own city, who have yet to realize their true potential. With this demographic in mind, we are thrilled to introduce the Runner Rise in Education of Arts, Culture, and History (REACH) program, which aims to support students who come from underserved communities in San Antonio. The Runner REACH program prioritizes development in high school students with college aspirations, specifically in the Liberal and Fine Arts, and gives them the opportunity to be leaders and mentors in the communities they may come from once they are students at UTSA. The funding provided to students in this program will allow these recipients to achieve their dreams of higher education in the Liberal and Fine Arts.

In order to attract future Runner REACH students, the program would offer academic scholarships to its members, ranging from \$500 to full tuition, as well as the unique opportunity to work directly in underserved communities in San Antonio. This program will offer different levels of scholarship aid including: five full tuition scholarships, ten \$2000, and twenty \$500 scholarships to eligible UTSA student members. The scholarship application process would include a scholarship essay or creative arts project which would give insight on how they plan to serve UTSA and the school communities affected by social injustices. Scholarship recipients must present financial need and major in a Liberal or Fine Arts degree. Following the application process, candidates will be selected by the Runner REACH organization for a formal interview. Selected students are expected to act as role models who encourage students in underserved public schools in San Antonio to attend UTSA. It is of the utmost importance that they are reliable and possess high moral character. Members of the Runner REACH Program will organize events including, but not limited to, poetry contests, art shows, and music competitions. These events will bring attention to our cause while also rewarding students with academic scholarships for exemplary performances.

THIRD PLACE

Team Members:

Alexandra Flores (MBA), Jessica Gonzales (Education), Michael Turnini (Communication), Alpha Martinez-Suarez (Culture, Literacy, & Language), and Kristel Orta-Puente (History)

Project Title:

Activate Artists S.A.

Abstract:

In order to create an authentic connection between underrepresented artists, musicians, and creatives with members of the business, academic, and local community, we seek to develop an online digital application that amplifies the voices of the unheard, showcases artists' works, provides educational and communication resources, and fosters collaboration across disciplines in an easily to access platform designed to bridge artists and their work with the community first at the local level and in a second phase to the regional level with the possibility to extend exponentially to the state, national and international level given the reach and border-less nature of the online world.

The online digital application (app) Activate Artists S.A. will consist of a directory of artists, a project feed of proposed exhibits and commissions, educational resources mapping music and art to their rich cultural history, a calendar of local events, and resources to access artist grants and funding. All of these facets within a single platform serve to assist and promote underrepresented artists in San Antonio, while also connecting them with the community. The application would be promoted and shared with business, educational, and local leaders, to build a bridge between the arts and members of these disciplines. Individuals from any field would be able to utilize the application as a resource to collaborate, participate, or fund special projects that align with their own efforts of social justice. Members of the community would also be able to invest in the underrepresented creatives of the arts community by viewing a collection of works in a single project feed and contacting these artists directly.

A resource such as this application does not exist within our community. Rarely do the arts cross paths with outside disciplines. Yet a connecting link is needed for the advancement of local underrepresented artists. The thoughts, ideas, and voices of minority communities must be heard to take steps forward on a path towards social justice. All the while, businesses and leaders with missions committed to social responsibility are actively seeking ways to combat injustices within our society. In connecting the two areas of our community, this app would be a tremendous step towards advancement.

As a team, we are a collective of artists, musicians from diverse communities, intergenerational intercultural, and pandisciplinary. We all have a history of promoting art, music, and social justice.