

History and Legacy of the Sol Price Center for Social Innovation

Celebrating
10
Years

USC Price
Sol Price Center for
Social Innovation



In November 2011, a transformative \$50 million naming gift from Price Philanthropies named the USC Sol Price School of Public Policy in honor of Sol Price, an entrepreneur and the founder of the Price Club who worked tirelessly to provide opportunities for families in low-income urban areas. He was a man of great integrity, guided by a strong moral compass to improve the quality of life for the less fortunate.

This gift also established the Sol Price Center for Social Innovation. Since its founding, the mission of the Center has been to develop ideas and illuminate strategies to improve the quality of life for people in low-income urban communities. Although the Price Center supports a wide range of Southern California communities, the Center developed its model of community engagement through its early work in the City Heights neighborhood of San Diego.

CITY HEIGHTS AS A MODEL FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

City Heights is a vibrant urban community east of downtown San Diego consisting of 16 defined neighborhoods. Approximately 74,000 people, including 21,000 youth under 18, live in a 4 square mile area, the highest population density in the San Diego region. The region is a designated refugee entry point, creating a rich tapestry of diversity and a community full of strong cultures.

For over twenty years, Price Philanthropies, established by Sol Price and his son Robert, has helped transform the low-income neighborhood of City Heights in San Diego through a holistic, place-based approach to urban revitalization. One of the first components was a redevelopment project known as the “Urban Village,” which resulted in the construction of a library, an outdoor theatre, park, playground, recreation center, preschool, and continuing adult center.

Decades later, Price Philanthropies remains dedicated to improving life opportunities for youth and families in City Heights. Their investments have evolved in response to community need, and include affordable housing developments, commercial real estate, and a strong network of non-profit partners that provide social services, educational enrichment, community engagement, and a healthcare safety net for children and families.

Since the Price Center’s inception, the Center has conducted research in collaboration with Price Philanthropies to improve life opportunities for youth and families in City Heights. Our work in City Heights became the foundation for the Price Center’s current model of community partnership, in which we work directly with the community to undertake an iterative, inclusive social innovation process of co-designing and piloting new approaches to solve systemic social challenges.

Honoring Sol Price’s legacy and his desire to help the community, City Heights remains a core component of the Price Center’s research and educational activities.



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Recent Work

The Pervasive Impacts of Rent Burden in City Heights

Authors: Jovanna Rosen, Victoria Ciudad-Real, Sean Angst, and Gary Painter

City Heights, like many other neighborhoods in Southern California, faces a critical moment to address this important issue. To understand the impacts of increasing unaffordability, and to inform intervention to support residents, the USC Sol Price Center for Social Innovation partnered with Price Philanthropies to conduct focus groups with low-income City Heights renters. The report examined the increasing rent prices in City Heights that left many families fearing homelessness or displacement.

Key Findings

- Rent-burdened families are forced to make trade-offs, cutting back on other necessities such as food, utilities, and sometimes even health care costs.
- Residents cope with rising rents in impactful ways: moving, increasing household sizes to the point of overcrowding, and sacrificing housing quality and their quality of life.
- Rising rents exacerbate household poverty, which leads to increasing stress, uncertainty, and reduced housing stability.
- In the long term, rent burden causes family dynamics to shift, producing and exacerbating impactful disconnects between parents and children.
- Differences exist across ethnic groups in their access to support networks, with some groups facing additional vulnerability from discrimination and social isolation

