

CORO SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

FELLOWS PROGRAM IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS

S O U T H G A T E L O G I C S T U D Y

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

By the Class of 2004 – 2005

While the many fields of the natural sciences define the logic of all things organic, there is no established discipline that defines the logic of an organism as complex as a modern day city. Yet, for our study of South Gate, an appropriate definition had to be identified. We defined this logic as the relationship between a city's people, institutions and situations and the outcomes of their interactions. Through this lens, the city of South Gate came into focus. An understanding of its recent history, coupled with its future goals, allowed our group to distinguish certain patterns, or themes, that saturated the city and impacted a significant portion of its internal interactions. The facts and suppositions made in this study are based upon research conducted between September 7 and September 14, 2004.

South Gate is a honeycomb of communities that coexist, but have limited avenues to share information and coordinate group action. Once an industrial, white community, South Gate is now over 90 percent Latino and heavily dependent on sales tax revenue from local retail services. The community is not only divided by race, language, class and employment, but also by differing levels of city involvement. These divisions contribute to a troubling South Gate phenomenon—the need for increased and sustainable leadership. In 2003, many South Gate residents were forced to commit significant time, energy and resources to a recall campaign against corrupt city officials. The current civic and community leaders that came to power during and after the recall campaign are held in high regard, yet many of them exhausted too many resources in the campaign and others are nearing retirement. South Gate is in dire need of future leaders. This campaign for future leadership coincides well with the development of South Gate's General Plan, a strategic agenda to synchronize the city's development with community desires and available resources. Keeping in mind the three major themes of division, leadership, and reconstruction, our team conducted numerous interviews and considerable research that uncovered a series of complex findings.

South Gate has been home to a number of bridging organizations and issues that have unified many of the subgroups that coexist within its borders. The need for safer and less crowded schools brought much of the community together, and galvanized such groups as *Padres Unidos* to inform the community and put political pressure on local government that has resulted in the construction of two new schools with six more in development. Other groups, such as the South Gate Police Department (SGPD), have been instrumental in sealing the disconnect between local government and city residents. The SGPD engages in outreach programs like Communities in Action, an institution that structures monthly neighborhood meetings conducted to better understand community concerns about quality of life issues. The police also organize ComStat meetings, forums meant to increase the transparency of South Gate law enforcement. It is because of these programs, as well as their quality of civic service, that the SGPD holds such a prominent place as a bridging institution within the community. South Gate requires more such institutions, particularly those that engage young or unengaged city residents with civic leadership—such groups function to both unite various communities and prepare residents for roles as future leaders.

The political corruption and the grassroots recall election of 2003 has left the city in a state of financial crisis and the community in a state of exhaustion. A three to five million dollar budget deficit has forced the City Council and other government agencies to cut salaries and funding to various vital programs. Legal action to recoup lost funds, as well as constant financial vigilance, has diverted the focus of much government attention away from seeking community input and toward crucial damage control. In an effort to complete the upcoming General Plan the city needs to utilize its available resources. The SGPD, and local community groups like the CIA, *Padres Unidos*, the Tweedy Mile Businessowners Association, the Rotary Club and the Multi-women's Culture Club, among others, are well positioned to build community input and resources toward creating a comprehensive plan to attract new retail businesses and make the city more attractive to potential young residents and their families.

Our lasting impression of South Gate is that it has the optimism, resilience, and human resources to complete a comprehensive General Plan that will address the needs of its population and their desires for the future of their city. Such a plan must not only focus on financial growth, but also outline plans to foster a unified community identity while cultivating leaders from under-represented demographics, particularly youth. While existing community groups require support and organizational assistance to achieve their full potential, such an effort can and must be conducted to achieve the goals of ever-increasing quality of life, financial growth and safety that are so important to South Gate and its residents.

Coro™ is a nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening communities and the democratic process by preparing individuals for effective and ethical civic leadership and participation. *The Logic Study™ of South Gate*, a report of the South Gate Community, was the first experience of the Coro Southern California Fellows Class of 2005. It was their indoctrination to Coro™ occurring the first week of a nine-month experiential program in Public Affairs.

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