

# FERN TIGER ASSOCIATES





From the beginning, Fern Tiger Associates has defied categorization. For more than 30 years, the firm has provided creative solutions, strategic counsel, and well-designed outreach tools for more than 150 client groups – enabling them to impact families, children, and individuals in communities across the nation.

All of this has been guided by two core philosophies: working solely with organizations whose goals are consistent with the firm's purpose of forwarding positive social change; and working within a transdisciplinary model that allows for a foundation of deep knowledge, a dedication to community engagement, and a comprehensive approach to communications.

What follows is a brief history of the firm and highlights of just a few projects to illustrate the firm's capacity and commitment.

**1980s** AC Transit, Baptist Medical Center, Bay Area Black United Fund, Bay Area Catholic Homes, Bay Area Partnership, California Department of Forestry, California Association of Services for Children, California Child Care Resource & Referral Network, California Children's Council, Catholic Charities, City of Berkeley, City of Oakland, Civic Center Barrio Housing Corporation, Cogswell College, Contra Costa County Health Department, Dovelling Jig, EAH, Eden Housing, Florence Crittenton Services, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, ISLA, Los Niños, Napa County Community



**A Camera and a Commitment.** In 1977, soon after moving to the Bay Area, Fern Tiger happened upon a group called the 415 Society – a collection of men and a few women, many ex-offenders, mostly African-American – laboring to prepare for an Arbor Day tree planting to be held at Oakland's City Hall. They had been given the impression that they would get the chance to meet then-Governor Jerry Brown who would be attending the ceremony the next day. Fern photographed and talked with them and decided to return at 5 a.m. when they would finish setting up, but later when dignitaries were thanked and the group was not, they were noticeably disappointed (and the Governor, who was probably unaware of promises made, never came to meet them). Fully engaged, Fern began to document their lives in photos and interviews over a year-long period (a project she shared with the organization).

Armed with undergraduate and graduate degrees in fine arts from Pratt Institute, and post-graduate work and university teaching experience, Fern was determined to pull together her writing, design, and photography skills to create comprehensive and meaningful work focused on issues and organizations about which she was passionate. Using her work with the 415 Society and a few other unpaid "projects," Fern assembled a package of samples and mailed it to 100 local public and nonprofit agencies.



Several responded, but none had the capacity to pay for such work, until Eldridge Gonaway, head of Oakland's Office of Community Development, called to ask Fern what she could do for his department. She offered to "tell the story" of the agency as seen through the eyes of residents of Oakland's Community Development Districts, where more than 80% of Oaklanders lived. Gonaway became both mentor and client.

The project, a 24/7 endeavor, included hundreds of City Council and neighborhood meetings, interviews with more than 150 Oaklanders – from residents of the flatland neighborhoods to the mayor and council members – and taking thousands of photos. Tragically, the day that Gonaway signed off on the publication, he was killed in a car accident. Completely devastated, Fern moved forward, dedicating the book to the memory of Eldridge Gonaway. Thousands of copies of *Oakland 1979* were printed but without Gonaway's leadership, City staff balked at distributing a "non-authorized" and "non-conforming" publication that told both the successes and failures of city efforts. So, Fern loaded the books into her car and delivered them across the city. FTA still gets calls for copies, but only a few remain.

# 1979

**Art to Action  
Fern to FTA**



Services Department, National Podiatry Association, Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation, Oakland Chamber of Commerce, Oakland Convention Center, Oakland YouthWorks, Orchids & Onions, Partners for Livable Places, Peoples' Self-Help Housing Corporation, Queen of the Valley Hospital, Queen of the Valley Hospital Foundation, San Francisco Friends of the Urban Forest, Santa Catalina Villas, Spanish Speaking Unity Council, Saint Patrick's Park, Saint Vincent's Day Home, The Datacenter, Therapeutic Nursery School, TreePeople, Trust for Public Land, United Way of the Bay

Through *Oakland 1979*, relationships and friendships developed throughout the city, establishing what some call creative credibility.

**Diverse Talents and a Different Philosophy.** Committed to Oakland (the first client), FTA began in a 700 sq. ft. space on Park Blvd., and though it moved and expanded three times, it has never left Oakland. Over time, a staff of ten professionals have undertaken a wide array of projects – each building the firm's knowledge, experience, and skills. FTA has maintained a full-time, long-term professional team, combining expertise in communications, photography, design, planning, education, finance, and journalism.

To best understand its clients, their issues, their constituents, and their communities, extensive research is at the heart of each project. This research relies heavily on qualitative as well as quantitative data and one-on-one, in-person interviews with those connected to the issue – ranging from novices to experts, and including residents, activists, academics, policy specialists, civic leaders, and elected officials. Never considered in isolation, each interview is analyzed as part of the entire series of interviews, as well as other research. Taken together this data allows for a comprehensive understanding of the underlying narrative as well as the social landscape and community context.



**Collecting Stories, Gathering Support.** After working on a variety of projects in the early and mid-80s, the City of Berkeley approached FTA with a messy problem. A small city, with politics sometimes larger-than-life, it hoped to change its backyard refuse collection process. Residents balked at paying the same fee for “less service.”

FTA took on the task of determining the best strategy for informing and engaging residents in the new system. In addition to interviews, FTA spent countless hours studying the system to understand its staffing, routing, logistics, and cost structure. They rode on garbage trucks, interviewing and photographing collectors on their routes to understand the demands of the work and how it impacted neighborhoods. It is often the small, seemingly mundane, pieces of information that contribute to the totality of a project’s context, revealing new opportunities for creative solutions.

The outcome of the project carried high stakes for the City – and for FTA. If fewer than 75% of residents signed on, the economics would not work – likely forcing a recall election. FTA created *Curbside Collection: The Responsible Solution*, a campaign which included an outreach strategy, timeline, messages, and printed materials. Participation ultimately topped 90%. A key element of the Curbside campaign was a dramatic series of photographs showing refuse collectors at work.

Area, US National Park Service, World College West, YMCA of Alameda County 1990s Alliance for Technology Access, Alliance Healthcare Foundation, Alta Bates Medical Center, Athenian School, Bayer BioTech, Bayshore Child Care Services, Berkeley Biotechnology Education Inc., Berkeley Housing Authority, Berkeley Unified School District, BOSS, California Child Care Resource & Referral Network, California Wellness Foundation, Child Haven, Children’s Services Center, Children’s Services International, City of Oakland, Coleman Advocates, Communities for a Better Environment,



Philosophy to Strategy  
Photography to Advocacy

1985



The integration of documentary photography is a fundamental element of most projects. FTA frequently uses the expression “advocacy documentation” to define its style of photography – seeing it as a critical part of the social change efforts of communities. The act of photographing often draws in stakeholders, giving them a vested interest in the outcome. And while technology offers many options for graphic illustration and depiction, documentary photography most compellingly captures the daily lives of ordinary people in ways that prose cannot.

**Adopting an Expanded Approach.** In 1989, FTA was approached by a major California foundation to work on a “marketing plan” for several grantees who focused on adoption and foster care for

difficult-to-place children. While the original scope lacked the creation of print and outreach materials so critical to all FTA projects until this time, the issue was compelling. Research

indicated that while 10 million families nationwide had considered adoption, only 5% followed through with their intention. So, FTA sought a new approach to outreach, rejecting the broad-based approach of previous (and unsuccessful) campaigns.





Through interviews with adoption agency staff; families considering adoption; successful adoptive families; and young adults whose lives were impacted by the foster care system, FTA used its understanding of the “landscape” of adoption to develop profiles of potential or likely adoptive families. Funding was subsequently made available for FTA to develop a nationally-distributed publication, *Marketing Strategies for Child Placement*; a policy brochure, *Adoption in California*; and a 30-minute video, *Stories of Adoption*, which depicted successful adoptions. The documentary was made available through local video stores (free of charge), after FTA learned adoptive families liked to rent movies for home viewing.

**Elevating an Issue, Expanding Expertise.** FTA is known for its understanding of child care issues, particularly through years of work with the California Child Care Resource & Referral Network, which began when the Network received a federal grant to disseminate information about child abuse and the role of child care as a preventive measure. FTA recommended a comprehensive, magazine-style publication, that would simultaneously raise awareness of the issue while elevating the credibility of the child care profession.



## 1990 Research to Impact Documentation to Analysis



Continuing Development Inc., Destiny Arts, East Bay Community Foundation, Family Builders by Adoption, Family Health Education Center, Family Violence Law Center, First Unitarian Church Oakland, Galleria Woods, Girls Inc., Gokids, Graduate Theological Union, Hanlynn Association, Illinois Department of Public Aid, IHSD, James Irvine Foundation, Kinship Center, LBNI, Lead Solutions, Main Education Fund, Maui Economic Development Board, Miles Inc., Monterey Child Care Planning Council, MPC Children's Center, MOCHA, NACCRA, Oakland Child Health & Safety Initiative,

The project culminated with the production of 60,000 copies of *Making a Difference* – published later in Spanish and Chinese. This led to myriad projects on local and national child care policy, advocacy for child care funding, and other family issues and organizations. These projects ranged from strategic planning to social marketing, to capital campaigns, comprehensive communications, brand development, and policy documents – such as the Network's signature biennial *California Child Care Portfolio*, which offers robust quantitative data, along with engaging stories and photographs of real families, bringing the data to life.

**Finding Common Ground, Building Uncommon Alliances.** After more than a decade of projects – mostly for progressive nonprofits – FTA received a surprising phone call in late 1990 from one of the largest biotech companies in the Bay Area that would lead the firm into far riskier territory than it had previously ventured. The initial response was “*We don't work for corporations*” and it all nearly ended right then. But, FTA was persuaded by a community-based challenge. Miles/Cutter (originally Cutter Labs) had been located in Berkeley for 90 years, but had been virtually invisible to the community. Bayer AG, a multi-national Fortune 500 company, had purchased Cutter in the 1970s.



Bayer wanted to transform its Berkeley site into the company's worldwide biotech headquarters. This required zoning changes and a new form of entitlement never before used in Berkeley. To make this investment, it needed a long-term commitment from the city and fast turnaround on project approvals. Intrigued by the complexity of the project, the potential for how a large corporation could benefit a community, and the opportunity to preserve more than 600 union jobs, FTA took on the project – insisting on honesty, transparency, and immediate, ongoing access to the company's top-level decisionmakers.

The path to the Development Agreement required FTA to learn quickly and deeply about complex topics related to land use, genetic engineering, design of laboratories, biotech production, and decisionmaking at large corporations. FTA faced two giant and challenging tasks: 1) to develop a process that would inform a skeptical public that lacked knowledge about biotechnology, and 2) to change the thinking of a company that had little knowledge of the community. Through countless public hearings, site tours, briefings, strategy sessions, an architectural competition, and more than 100 community meetings, FTA worked tirelessly to lay the groundwork for an ongoing relationship between a global corporation and a progressive community.

**Oakland Domestic Violence Prevention Collaborative, Oakland Public Library, Prevention Institute, Prevention Research Center, Public Health Trust, Saint Vincent's Day Home, San Mateo Child Care Coordinating Council, Shelter Network, Sierra Health Foundation, Sonoma County Child Care Planning Council, The Athenian School, Volunteers in Parole 2000s, 18th Street Arts Center, Arizona Quest for Kids, Arizona State University, Berkeley Biotechnology Education, Inc., California Center for Land Recycling, California Child Care Resource & Referral Network, California**



## Informing to Engaging Conflict to Agreement

# 1996



Without ever inking a contract, FTA forged a partnership with Bayer that lasted through the late 90s, in a role sometimes described as “the conscience of the company.”

On December 9, 1991, FTA staff and Bayer personnel walked into Berkeley's city council chambers with hundreds of community supporters, where a unanimous vote supported the Agreement. This marked the beginning of a unique partnership, including the creation of a biotech education and training program which FTA helped to design and then guided for 10 years. It was a victory, not only for Bayer and FTA, but for the Berkeley community.

**Empowering with Information.** On the heels of the Bayer/Berkeley success, Berkeley Unified School District sought out FTA to work on multiple projects in the mid-1990s. In 1993, FTA crafted a carefully designed community engagement approach to develop a school assignment plan that needed to consider a range of factors including choice, diversity, and grade configuration. A year later, the District returned for a crisis communication strategy related to the PBS airing of *School Colors*, a documentary that portrayed Berkeley High School in a negative light.



A few years later, following many projects for youth development organizations, Girls Inc. of Alameda County approached FTA when a pro-bono planning process led by a large management consulting firm failed to give the organization the guidance they needed to move forward. FTA's planning process identified, among other things, the lack of comprehensive data about girls, and suggested that the organization tackle this gap head on – bringing girls into the process of collecting and understanding data that could be used to advocate on behalf of issues important to them.

Thus began the *Girls Research Project*. In a somewhat unusual role, FTA designed the pilot, facilitated a large-scale survey of more than 4,000 teens, and trained young women to see how data can impact policy development and how to make public presentations.

**Engaging to Create Community.** In the mid-90s, FTA began working with Maui Economic Development Board (MEDB). Over the past 15 years, FTA has helped MEDB complete a strategic plan, an economic literacy initiative, and plan an economic summit. In 2003, FTA embarked on a mission with MEDB to articulate a collective vision for the islands that comprise Maui County.



# 2001

**Insight to Vision  
Individual to Community**

Legislative Women's Caucus, The California Wellness Foundation, Child and Family Services, City of Albany, Community Network for Youth Development, **Delano Regional Medical Center**, SF Department of Children, Youth and Their Families, **Family Builders by Adoption**, Family Finders, Fresno Housing Authority, **Girls Inc.**, Go Kids, Human Resources Council, Illinois Network of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, Institute for Human and Social Development, Labor Project for Working Families, Marguerite Casey Foundation, Martin Community Foundation, County of Maui, **Maui**

The countywide process sought to engage residents from the three inhabited islands – Maui, Lana'i, and Moloka'i – with a particular emphasis on engaging those who felt their voice had not been heard during previous community discussions.

Working closely with MEDB, FTA created *Focus Maui Nui*, an engagement process designed to seek community input through sessions led by MEDB facilitators in a variety of settings, including libraries, homes, fire houses, community centers, and even the beach. FTA worked with MEDB to promote the sessions, through traditional media and neighborhood canvassing by local elected officials.

MEDB ran 165+ sessions with more than 1,700 participants. Data from the sessions informed the development of a vision for the county which later informed the framework for Maui's General Plan.

**Bringing the FTA Philosophy to Philanthropy.** Over the years, FTA has enjoyed professional relationships with many foundations. In 1998, to cope with the exploding demand for child care, in the wake of welfare reform, one Bay Area foundation decided to pursue an innovative approach to grantmaking by convening a group of seven local child care agencies. FTA conducted an organizational assessment for each, and facilitated a series of roundtable meetings to share successes, challenges, and best practices.



Here, agency leaders found support and inspiration in a professional “cluster” setting. Following participation in the cluster, the organizations reported a 25% capacity growth, a 50% reduction in staff turnover, and a 200% increase in community fundraising.

In 2002, following a decade of targeted grantmaking to spur a reduction in youth violence, The California Wellness Foundation engaged FTA to develop a qualitative evaluation of its \$70 million *Violence Prevention Initiative*. The resulting narrative analyzed the VPI through a range of lenses in ways that traditional evaluation could not capture. In 2003, in Marguerite Casey Foundation’s earliest years, FTA was asked to chronicle the organization’s thinking as it focused on amplifying the voice of low-income families working to bring about change in their communities. In 2011, the Foundation returned to FTA to reflect back on its first decade of grantmaking, and develop in-depth narratives of eight grantees.

**Defining a New University.** The success of FTA’s work on *Focus Maui Nui* earned accolades beyond Hawaii. In 2003, the new president of Arizona State University took notice. He had ambitions to transform ASU into the “New American University,” which included revolutionizing the relationship between the community and the university, through a concept he called “social embeddedness.”

**Economic Development Board (MEDB).** Monterey Peninsula College, Children’s Center, Monterey Planning Council, Museum of Children’s Art Oakland (MOCHA), NACCRRA, Nevada City, Oakland Unified School District, David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Prevention Institute, Pyatak Architects, Richmond Children’s Foundation, Rural Communities Assistance Corp, Saint Vincent’s Day Home, San Francisco Ed Fund, **San Leandro Unified School District**, **San Mateo County Office of Education**, San Rafael Schools, Warm School-Linked Services, Solano Children’s Network, Sports4Kids,



Story to Evaluation  
Teaching to Learning

2006



ASU’s president had an innovative concept, but he needed a workable plan. Fascinated once again with a complex problem, and in conjunction with a decision to take a faculty position at ASU, Fern agreed that FTA would tackle the design of a social embeddedness plan. Based on extensive research including visits to more than 15 universities, FTA’s plan framed recommendations around teaching and learning; research and discovery; community capacity building; economic development and investment; and social development.

**From Divided Voices to a Unified Vision.** In 2006, the Albany CA city

council was committed to the creation of a community-driven plan for a 105-acre waterfront site. Located between Berkeley and Richmond, Albany is a small, highly-educated community of 18,000. Residents had been locked in a fractious, ongoing battle between those who supported development to maximize tax revenue and those who favored maximizing open space. While the land was privately owned, uses for the property required voter approval. When FTA was brought in to help facilitate the public dialogue, the firm quickly realized it was essential to provide neutral, fact-based information to all residents, prior to the start of a highly participatory process.





This process was branded *Voices to Vision* and would ultimately engage about 10% of Albany adults. FTA facilitated 47 sessions with more than 1,200 residents. The highlight of each session was an interactive “game” that allowed small teams of community members to envision a future for the site.

In 2012, as Fern transitioned her teaching from ASU to University of Washington Tacoma, FTA facilitated a process to engage a large advisory team to guide the future of UW Tacoma.

**Energizing Through Articulation.** Fresno County, though rich in agricultural history and home to California’s fifth largest city, is fraught with a host of challenges – including affordable housing, an issue Fresno Housing Authority has worked to address for more than 70 years. In 2010, with a new and energetic executive team in place, the agency was poised to bring new strategies to the table. FTA was selected to spearhead a comprehensive planning process to reframe the vision, mission, and goals of the agency, resulting in a bold, transformative direction. After adoption of the plan in 2011, FTA developed communication strategies, messages, and materials that emphasize the key role of housing in creating vibrant communities.

# 2012

## Working for Social Change



**The Resource Connection.** Urban Girls, Washington State Child Care Resource & Referral Network, Women in Tech (WIT), Wu Yee Children's Services 2010s ASU Stardust Center for Affordable Homes and the Family, Better Opportunities Builder, California Child Care R&R Network, Children's Hospital and Research Center Oakland, Children's Network of Solano County, City of Albany, **Fresno Housing Authority**, Fresno Housing Education Corps, Japan/U.S. Island Grid Project, **Marguerite Casey Foundation**, MEDS, OUSD, Salesforce.com Foundation, University of Washington Tacoma

**T**imes have changed dramatically since the social upheaval that galvanized a young woman to use her wits and talent to create a firm that would help communities bring about social change. Though tangible progress has been made on many fronts, there is still much to be done to ensure an equitable and just society. In the meantime, the world has become increasingly complex and interconnected by immigration, trade, and terrorism alike. In a world economy, American institutions of higher learning will be pressed to educate their students to compete with populations across the globe for jobs that have yet to be created. Climate change and the demands on the energy sector will require new, creative thinking to help communities develop, grow, and prosper. As the American population ages, healthcare providers will need to offer increasingly efficient yet compassionate care. And almost invisibly, yet importantly, technology will continue to revolutionize how the world communicates.

The potential for change and progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is enormous. FTA looks forward to embracing opportunities and confronting challenges with committed clients and partners. Through comprehensive analysis, creative design, strategic communication, and civic engagement, positive social change is not only possible, but inevitable. The future awaits.

