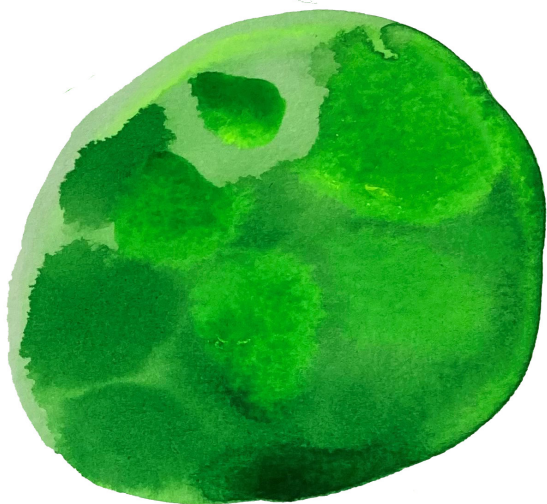




# HISTORIAS:

# STORYTELLING IN EAST BOSTON



Welcome! Come along with us as we explore different approaches to storytelling, and highlight some examples where East Bostonians have flipped the story and inspired people to share their stories.

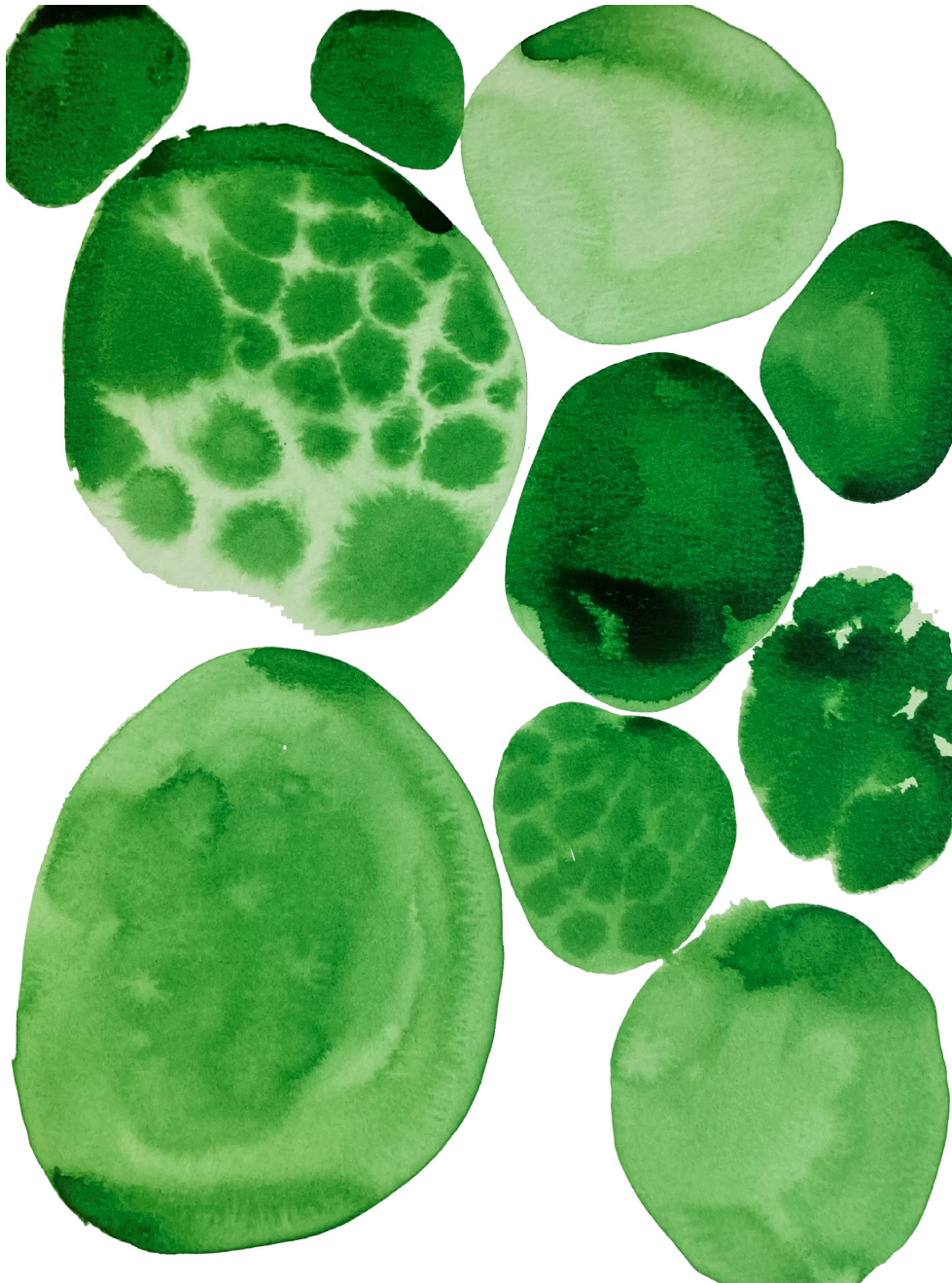
This pamphlet is one of four documents created by graduate students in the East Boston Site and Environmental Systems Practicum - Department of Urban Studies and Planning, MIT Spring 2021. These pamphlets can be read alone or together. They discuss East Boston's power and decision making processes, offer storytelling as a way to understand East Boston's past and future and propose new visions for Condor Street in Eagle Hill and Harbor View in the Belle Isle Marsh.

# WHAT IS STORY TELLING?

Storytelling can be a way for people to know and look at their environment in different ways. Through sharing our stories, we explain our relationship to a place and become more connected to it. It can help shift our routine ways of living and change what we know about a place by presenting other points of view. Sharing and visualizing stories can help us think about and document changes in our urban landscapes and neighborhoods. Storytelling can also be used to resist hurtful actions that have harmed communities.

East Boston today was built by stories. The most common story of Eastie has been told by architects, city planners, developers, and government officials who influence how Eastie was built. Because it is so close to downtown Boston, East Boston has long been used as a place for people, money and goods flow through, but rarely stay. For over a century, it has been a place for people to exploit and pollute. In most of East Boston's history, the beauty of the landscape was not as important as what could be built on the land.

But what about the stories of East Boston neighbors or visitors? East Boston is also a gateway for newcomers to make a home out of the urban landscape. They are the Irish, Italian, Latino and Arab people who have transformed East Boston into a place for community. Here, neighbors have made long and difficult journeys to find new and safe opportunities to grow. It is a neighborhood of drivers and decision-makers eager to continue their stories by making alternative futures. Storytelling is being used by Eastie communities, advocacy groups and individuals to highlight local views and experiences which have not historically been part of the community planning process. They have demonstrated their power and resolve against outside development, like the airport and recently opposed Eversource substation, which detract from the character of East Boston.

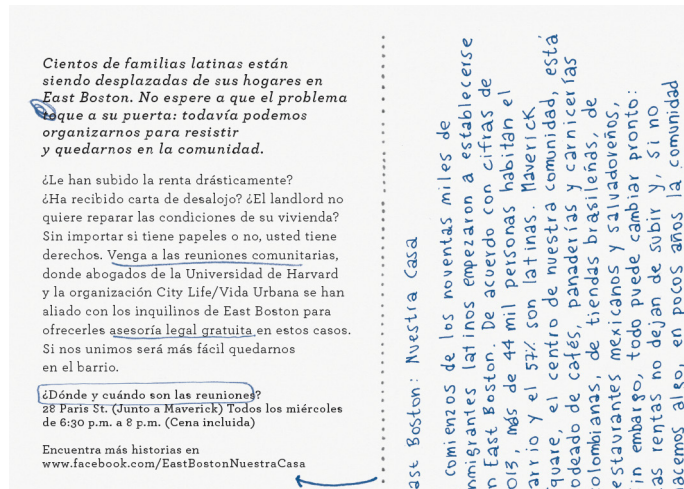




# WAYS OF STORYTELLING: RECOUNTING HISTORIES, RITUALS, ART, MAPS, AND ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES

There are many ways to practice storytelling. We can look to how people have told stories in the past to guide us. You may like one of the ways of storytelling in this toolkit, or you may do something completely different. You may be inspired by previous forms of storytelling, or respond with your own perspectives to narratives from the past you may not feel are representative. While looking at these examples, think about how you would tell your story or the story of your neighborhood.

For example, Jorge Carballo Cordovez tells stories of East Boston through postcards! His social journalism project uses postcards to tell the Latino community about the current housing crisis and where to get resources to face it. He mails postcards with stories to neighbors.

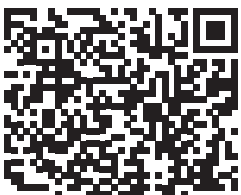


Find out more about East Bostonians have practiced storytelling as resistance in the companion toolkit, **LATINO FUTURES FOR CONDOR STREET**



## GET CREATIVE:

**HOW WOULD YOU TELL YOUR STORY?  
WHO ARE PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE THAT HAVE TOLD YOU STORIES?  
(WRITE OR DRAW PICTURES TO THE RIGHT)**



Learn more about Jorge Carballo Cordovez's project



# RECOUNTING HISTORY

Sometimes, “history” feels like memorizing timelines and dates in history class at school. But history is a form of storytelling. It’s a way that we can connect with those who came before us. Every history that’s told is a story, representing a certain view of the world. We all have personal histories, family histories, and community histories. Landscapes have histories, too! What makes these stories histories is that they’re told through observing “primary sources.” These are artifacts that speak and tell you about the past. Primary sources can be anything from diaries, newspaper articles, photographs, or just talking to people about the past! There’s so much to learn from the past. With many histories about a place, we can envision many futures.

In East Boston, lots of people are telling stories through **podcast, blogs, writing, archives, public speaking.**

ZUMIX Radio is a community radio station in East Boston powered by youth. ZUMIX broadcasts the voices and culture of Boston youth through music, stories, and bilingual conversation.



*What’s up Eastie?*

This is a ZUMIX radio show about topics of interest to residents of East Boston, a changing, dynamic, exciting, and historic neighborhood.

You can tune in to *What’s up Eastie?*

On the dial: 94.9FM

Online: [zumix.org/listenlive.html](http://zumix.org/listenlive.html)  
@whatsupeastie



Find out more about how East Bostonians can find funds to support community organizing and planning in the companion toolkit, **PODER.**



Winthrop & East Boston. Noddle Island in foreground. 1925. Looking west.



Orient Heights, c. 1939. Looking east, toward Revere, along Route 1A.



# RITUALS, HONOR & MEDITATION

Rituals are our day-to-day practices and our moments of celebrations.

Prayer is a ritual. We might think of prayers in a traditional sense as a conversation with God. But, prayers can also be a conversation with the Landscape. These are the moments where we say good morning to the birds outside our windows, take a stroll across the land and feel the earth under our feet and the wind on our faces. They are moments of reflection and gratitude for the Earth that gives us life. They take time, attention, and being present. We also share these moments with our neighbors when we garden together, share food, and care for each other.

In East Boston, Eastie Farm provides nourishment for the community and provides a space for plants to thrive. People give to Earth and Earth gives back.

For more information on Eastie Farm, visit



Eastie Farm food, produce, mutual aid, co-op market and composting. Photos courtesy of Kannan Thiruvengadam

# EAST BOSTON ART



“Rise” Mural by Silvia López Chavez @silvialopezchavez 218 Marginal St. in East Boston (Photo by Sea Walls)



“The Heart of the Ocean” Mural by Felipe Ortiz @felipeortizartat 260 Bremen St. in East Boston (Photograph by David Lank)

HarborArts is an East Boston-based initiative that creates public art as a platform for dialogue. Through the installation of monumental public artworks on the waterfront and beyond, they are building community at the intersection of environmentalism and artistic expression.



Art can be a way of disrupting the way we think and giving us new ways of knowing. For example, drawing what we see in nature doesn't need to be scientific, and doesn't need to accurately represent nature. Nature is everywhere. It's in the roads, in our front yards, and even maybe parking lots. Art can be abstract. It may show the emotions that being in nature produces. Making music is a celebration of life. It is both a sound of resistance and a window into how people live.

**ART**

## WANT TO MAKE YOUR OWN ART AS AN ACT OF STORYTELLING?



### Come color with us!

The Sea Walls Boston team has collaborated with Bow Seat Ocean Awareness Programs to create a coloring book for local youth to engage in Sea Walls Boston and build a sense of ownership and pride for the artworks painted during 2020.



**To download the coloring book, visit:**

**Or find it on the shelves of the East Boston Branch of the Boston Public Library!**

## MAPS

They can't show the sounds of trees and birds, the smell of the air, the long histories of the landscape or the names of the people who live and have lived in these places. Maps are wonderful storytelling tools, but we can make them more than top-down views. Can we re-imagine maps and how they're used? How could we show a neighborhood and actually tell its stories?

Maps tell stories, too. They often show a place from above, but there's no depth to a map—it's flat. Maps are useful objects; they tell us how to get from point A to point B.

But maps don't tell us what it means to be somewhere.



# MAPS OF EAST BOSTON TODAY



Past maps of East Boston have shown how land was created across the former marshland. Today's maps often show the neighborhood is vulnerable to flooding and sea level rise. While these mappings are useful, they hide other things that happen on the land. They hide human stories and histories — treasures and memories held by people now and people of the past. Maps of East Boston, for example, don't often show the Belle Isle Marsh teeming with life, a vast and intricate ecosystem in less than 200 hundred acres. Maps don't show how people engage with each other and with the ecosystem. Instead, you'll just see a green area, flat and monotone. What's lost in these traditional mappings?



## COUNTER MAPS

Counter maps are another way of representing the things that may be unseen. This counter map of East Boston offers another way of seeing the Eastie community, as a place where bridges are built across culture.

Follow this link to learn about other kinds of mapping:



“East Boston Counter Map” by César Giovanni García López

# TELLING DIFFERENT STORIES

## ORGANIZATIONS TELLING THEIR OWN

### STORIES OF EAST BOSTON



#### NEIGHBORS UNITED FOR A BETTER EAST BOSTON (NUBE)

NUBE is an organization that develops abundant leaders who support social transformation and shifting political power. Their leaders organize and advocate for inclusive democratic processes and just public policies to create a vibrant economy and environment for all East Boston. NUBE's work is guided by the deep commitment to developing a more just, understanding, and sustainable neighborhood. [tinyurl.com/zpk332b7](https://tinyurl.com/zpk332b7)

#### PUEBLO Coalition

#### PEOPLE UNITED IN EAST BOSTON FOR LIBERATION AND ORGANIZING (PUEBLO)

PUEBLO is a coalition of stakeholder organizations that preserve and enhance East Boston's neighborhoods so that they are accessible and affordable. PUEBLO seeks to protect the natural environment by building the collective power and strength of East Boston residents who are most impacted by displacement. They seek to strengthen community unity and solidarity, through shared prosperity and mutual benefit while stewarding the environment for the benefit of current and future generations. [tinyurl.com/9tbf2s3](https://tinyurl.com/9tbf2s3)

#### CENTER FOR COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT AND SOLIDARITY (CCDS)



CCDS provides technical, educational and organizational support to current and potential members of cooperatives in East Boston. CCDS helps develop worker-owned cooperative opportunities for decent work with decent pay for minority, immigrants and low-income residents of East Boston thus advancing a sustainable and permanent social and economic justice neighborhood. CCDS is part of the Solidarity Economy Initiative, a Massachusetts-based project that creates space for grassroots organizers working in working class communities of color to lead a just transition to a solidarity economy.

[tinyurl.com/yjxd84ad](https://tinyurl.com/yjxd84ad)



Massachusetts Coalition  
For Occupational Safety And Health



#### MASS COSH IMMIGRANT WORKER CENTER (MASSCOSH)

The Immigrant Worker Center is a safe place for immigrants to speak up about workplace abuse and join with a powerful network of workers demanding safe and healthy working conditions. The Worker Center builds the power of immigrants and workers of color to mobilize for safe and healthy work conditions. Massachusetts Coalition For Occupational Safety And Health (MassCOSH) unites workers, unions and community groups with environmental and health activists, to end dangerous work conditions, to organize for safe, secure jobs, and to advocate for healthy communities. <https://tinyurl.com/y2ybb8uw>





## MUTUAL AID EASTIE COALITION

Mutual aid is a form of solidarity-based support system where communities unite against a common struggle, rather than leaving individuals to fend for themselves. Eastie Farm in collaboration with NUBE, COSECHA and Empower East Boston provides direct financial support to immigrants and their families across Massachusetts, including East Boston, New Bedford, Lawrence, and Worcester—specifically undocumented individuals and families, who have been excluded from receiving stimulus checks and other government resources. [tinyurl.com/kz2839hk](https://tinyurl.com/kz2839hk)

## IGLESIA NUEVO AMANECER

Iglesia Nuevo Amanecer is a faith-based group deeply engaged in the communal and individual pursuits of liberation and love. In light of the crises of COVID-19, gentrification and displacement, Nuevo Amanecer is involved in organizing and working on direct response initiatives with the East Mutual Aid network, and PUEBLO and Stand for Democracy, a faith-based organizing group. [tinyurl.com/5bva2x5h](https://tinyurl.com/5bva2x5h)

## CENTRO PRESENTE



Centro Presente is a member-driven, statewide Latin American immigrant organization dedicated to the self-determination and self-sufficiency of the Latin American immigrant community of Massachusetts. Operated and led primarily by Central American immigrants, Centro Presente struggles for immigrant rights and for economic and social justice. Through the integration of community organizing, leadership development and basic services, Centro Presente strives to give our members a voice and build community power. [tinyurl.com/stw5wbyk](https://tinyurl.com/stw5wbyk)

## EAST BOSTON COMMUNITY SOUP KITCHEN



The East Boston Community Soup Kitchen opens every Tuesday to provide free meals for all those who enter our doors. This organization strives to provide a sense of community to those affected by hunger, homelessness, and difficult life circumstances, while offering the humane treatment and compassion many struggle to receive in their everyday lives. [tinyurl.com/472udhvh](https://tinyurl.com/472udhvh)



**CITY LIFE  
VIDA URBANA**

**Stand Up, Fight Back.**

## CITY LIFE VIDA URBANA

City Life/Vida Urbana is a grassroots community organization committed to fighting for racial, social and economic justice and gender equality by building working class power. This organization promotes individual empowerment, develops community leaders and builds collective power to effect systemic change and transform society. [bit.ly/3h1ZGQh](https://bit.ly/3h1ZGQh)



## GREENROOTS

GreenRoots is a community-based organization dedicated to improving and enhancing the urban environment and public health in Chelsea and surrounding communities. GreenRoots works to achieve environmental justice and greater quality of life through collective action, unity, education and youth leadership across neighborhoods and communities. They do so through deep community engagement and empowerment, youth leadership and implementation of innovative projects and campaigns. [tinyurl.com/3x22u2kz](https://tinyurl.com/3x22u2kz)

# WHAT TREASURES DO YOU SEE IN EAST BOSTON?

## SKETCH MAPPING

Sketch maps help us create a story of an experience. They help us see how we experience everyday places. To start, we begin drawing a space or route, like a neighborhood or path to work. Then we point out key things that are important to us. Because everyone experiences a place differently, a sketch map helps us see our neighborhood from another point of view and understand what matters in the places around us.

### EXAMPLE: SKETCH MAPPING





## SKETCH MAPPING EXERCISE



Use this space to draw a sketch map of your route home. What important people, structures or plants do you see?

# FINDING COMMUNITY TREASURES

## What is Treasure Mapping?

Treasure mapping is a way to highlight what you value most in your neighborhood. Treasure can be physical (for example, certain buildings, water or parks), economic (such as the stores or restaurants we like), or cultural (for example, schools, libraries, local organizations or neighbors themselves). You can compare your treasure map with your friends and family to create a powerful story that explains why your neighborhood matters!

COVID-19 has been a challenging time for so many reasons. Let's reflect on the memories, skills, resources and knowledge that you have about East Boston and create your own map that tells this story!

### Basic Needs and Community Services

Parks  
Soccer Field  
Fishing Spot...

### Security and Safety

Community Center  
Library

### Recreation and Relaxation

Grocery Store  
Favorite Bodega  
Health Clinic

### People

Family members  
Neighbors  
Friends

### Neighbors

Place of Worship  
Community Center

### Stories and Memories

To learn more about treasure mapping, follow this code



Color in a place or spot of the map where you feel like you feel a sense of **NEIGHBORHOOD** or a place where you feel like you can **RELAX** and have fun with **FRIENDS AND FAMILY**.

Maybe color in where you and your family go for your **BASIC NEEDS** or where you might go to feel **SAFE**. Finally, color in any place where your favorite **STORIES AND MEMORIES** happened!







**THE PEOPLE IN EAST BOSTON**



# Write about why you colored in those places! What do the colors mean to you? Which parts of your neighborhood are you thinking about?

Where do you go to relax and have fun?

Where do you feel the safest in your community?  
Where would you go in an emergency?

Who do you know in your community? Who do you feel like you can count on?

Where do you go to fulfill your daily needs?

What is one of your favorite memories in East Boston?  
Where did it happen?

Where do you go to partake in community events?



Find out more about the critters on these pages and the vibrant life of the Belle Isle marsh in the companion toolkit, **CRITTERS AND MAPS ALONG THE EDGE**





If you'd like to learn more about any of the storytelling methods explored in this toolkit, follow the links below!

#### RECOUNTING HISTORY RESOURCES



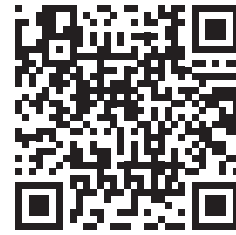
#### RITUALS AND HONOR RESOURCES



#### ART MAKING RESOURCES



#### COUNTER MAPPING RESOURCES



#### SKETCH MAPPING



#### TREASURE AND ASSET MAPPING RESOURCES



#### ALTERNATIVE STORYTELLING RESOURCES

NEIGHBORS UNITED FOR A BETTER EAST BOSTON (NUBE) [tinyurl.com/zpk332b7](https://tinyurl.com/zpk332b7)

CENTRO PRESENTE [tinyurl.com/stw5wbyk](https://tinyurl.com/stw5wbyk)

PEOPLE UNITED IN EAST BOSTON FOR LIBERATION AND ORGANIZING (PUEBLO) [tinyurl.com/9tbf2s3](https://tinyurl.com/9tbf2s3)

CITY LIFE VIDA URBANA [bit.ly/3h1ZGQh](https://bit.ly/3h1ZGQh)

CENTER FOR COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT AND SOLIDARITY (CCDS) [tinyurl.com/yjxd84ad](https://tinyurl.com/yjxd84ad)

IGLESIA NUEVO AMANECER [tinyurl.com/5bva2x5h](https://tinyurl.com/5bva2x5h)

MASS COSH IMMIGRANT WORKER CENTER (MASSCOSH) [tinyurl.com/y2ybb8uw](https://tinyurl.com/y2ybb8uw)

EAST BOSTON COMMUNITY SOUP KITCHEN [tinyurl.com/472udhhv](https://tinyurl.com/472udhhv)

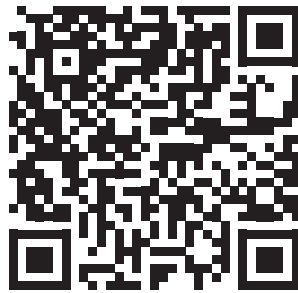
MUTUAL AID EASTIE COALITION [tinyurl.com/kz2839hk](https://tinyurl.com/kz2839hk)

GREENROOTS [tinyurl.com/3x22u2kz](https://tinyurl.com/3x22u2kz)

*We acknowledge Indigenous Peoples as the traditional stewards of the land, and the enduring relationship that exists between them and their traditional territories. The land of East Boston and the land on which this project was produced is the traditional unceded territory of the Wampanoag Nation and Massachusetts Peoples. We acknowledge the painful history of genocide and forced occupation of these territories, as well as the ongoing processes of colonialism and dispossession in which we and our institution are implicated.*

*Beyond the stolen territory which we physically occupy, MIT has long profited from the sale of federal lands granted by the Morrill Act, territories stolen from 82 Tribes including the Greater and Little Osage, Chippewa, and Omaha Peoples. As we honor and respect the many diverse Indigenous peoples connected to this land from time immemorial, we attempt to deconstruct Western knowledge and ways of doing urban planning by drawing from Indigenous and Black planners.*

*- Adapted from MIT 11.S938 Indigenous Environmental Planning course.*



**To access this PDF online or download and print, follow the QR code above or visit:**

**[eastbostonpracticum.mit.edu/historias-toolkit](https://eastbostonpracticum.mit.edu/historias-toolkit)**

This Toolkit was created by Alex Gant, César García López, Michelle Mueller Gámez, and Christian Turner - Masters Students in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at MIT.

We'd like to thank our wonderful teaching team:

Eran Ben-Joseph, Mary Anne Ocampo and Tanvi Sharma and many EB community partners who helped advise on this project, including: Kannan Thiruvengadam, Latifa Ziyad, Frank O'Brien, Chris Marchi, Heather O'Brien, John Walkey, Kairos Shen, Ted Schwartzberg, Meera Deean, Kristina Ricco and Brittany Thomas.

