

MUTUAL AID

IN ACTION

The Role of Latinx- and Indigenous-Serving
Organizations in Pandemic Recovery

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**CENTER FOR URBAN
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**



**HISPANICS IN
PHILANTHROPY**

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This report is an approach to understanding the role that Latinx¹- and Indigenous-serving organizations played (and continue to play) on the path to recovering from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic aftershocks.

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With Appreciation,



¹ This report will use the terms Latinx and Latino interchangeably, acknowledging that not all people of Latin American descent agree on any single term to refer to our communities. HIP utilizes Latinx, Latino, Hispanic, and Latine—depending on staff and community member preferences—to refer to people of Latin American descent who chose to identify as such.

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INTRODUCTION

At the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, Latinx essential workers disproportionately suffered the economic and health impacts of COVID-19, reaffirming how socioeconomic factors contribute to increased population-specific vulnerabilities. According to the Center for Economic Progress, in 2020 Latinx and other BIPOC communities endured 23% of initial job losses², further widening the gap for communities of color facing systemic income and wealth disparities. Millions of workers found themselves unemployed, while millions of others were required to report for work in industries deemed “essential,” despite the risks of exposure to the coronavirus from jobs requiring frequent contact with others.

As the pandemic worsened, the nonprofit sector was moved into action to redirect resources aimed at the most-impacted communities. **Philanthropic giving in 2020 increased by 5% over the previous year**, for a total of \$471 billion awarded, the highest year on record, according to Giving USA.³ Nonetheless, Giving USA founder Laura MacDonald noted, “it is important to recognize that the picture for individual households and organizations may have looked quite different, with many facing hardship even though total giving posted strong growth.”⁴

Recognizing the need and call to action to strengthen the social safety net of Latinx and Indigenous communities and others over-represented in essential jobs,⁵ philanthropic partners, community leaders, and organizations resourced workers and communities of color with cash, food, rental assistance, personal protective equipment (PPE), and critical care information.

Examples of organizations responding quickly to distribute funding and mobilize resources included:

- **Justice for Migrant Women’s Farmworkers’ Pandemic Relief Fund**, which provided over \$4 million for farmworkers to meet basic needs and support their well-being;
- **The Immigrant Worker Safety Net Fund**, which distributed over \$2 million in direct assistance to migrants, refugees, and low-wage workers, especially day laborers;
- **One Fair Wage**, which provided cash assistance to restaurant and car service drivers and other professionals who rely on cash tips for income through a national service worker emergency fund;

² Zamarripa, Ryan. (2021 March 5) Latinos Face Disproportionate Health and Economic Impacts From Covid-19. Center for American Progress Retrieved on January 12, 2022 from

<https://www.americanprogress.org/article/latinos-face-disproportionate-health-economic-impacts-covid-19/>

³ Hrywna, Mark. (2021 June 15). Giving In 2020 Hit Record \$471 Billion, Up 5.1%. The Nonprofit Times. Retrieved on Jan 15, 2022 from

https://www.thenonprofittimes.com/npt_articles/giving-in-2020-hits-record-471-billion-up-5-1/

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ Unidos US. (July 2021). The Latino Community in the Time of COVID-19: Prospects for an Equitable Recovery One Year Later. Retrieved on May 23, 2022 from

<https://www.unidosus.org/publications/2178-the-latino-community-in-the-time-of-covid-19-prospects-for-an-equitable-recovery-one-year-later/>

- **Mano a Mano**, which provided PPE, food and cash assistance and served more than 5,000 families since May 2020;⁶ and
- At a global level, the **Center for Disaster Philanthropy** which distributed over \$32 million to nearly 150 organizations around the world through their Covid Response Fund.⁷

Hispanics in Philanthropy (HIP) launched The Essential Fund in mid-2020 to support Latinx-, Indigenous, and community of color-led and -serving organizations across the United States. Over the course of a year, **the Fund provided over \$2.2M in relief and resources** to impacted Latinx and communities of color, and **engaged with more than 100 grantee partners** to amplify their capacity to meet the basic needs of essential workers and their families, particularly undocumented workers and multi-generational and mixed-status families.

Insights from this experience, as shared by organizations directly working with Latinx and Indigenous communities, are documented in this report to continue shining a spotlight on the impact that flexible and timely philanthropic dollars can make for smaller Latinx- and Indigenous-led and -serving organizations, and to offer ideas for how philanthropy and policymakers can best support communities that are still working to address the ongoing racialized economic and health impacts of the pandemic, as well as enduring systemic inequalities.

The next section provides background on how the coronavirus pandemic has impacted Latinx and Indigenous workers, families, and communities. This is followed by profiles of eight organizations that responded to community needs in diverse and dynamic ways. The conclusion offers recommendations for policymakers and funders on ways to assist Latinx- and Indigenous serving organizations as they continue to increase their capacities, build power, and advance equity for impacted workers, families and communities.



⁶ National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON). Mano a Mano Campaign. Retrieved on January 15, 2022 from <https://ndlon.org/mano-a-mano/>

⁷ Center for Disaster Philanthropy. CDP Covid-19 Response Fund. Retrieved on January 15, 2022 from <https://disasterphilanthropy.org/funds/cdp-covid-19-response-fund/>

BACKGROUND: ESSENTIAL BUT EXCLUDED

Latinx workers, and Latinx immigrants in particular, were over-represented in occupations and industries where risks of on-the-job exposure to COVID-19 were greatest.⁸ Among immigrant workers in low-wage industries, high-risk occupations include home health aides, janitors and cleaners, housekeepers, grocery workers, and food preparation workers. These jobs require workers to perform tasks in close proximity to one another or to come into contact with clients and customers, including those infected with COVID-19. Furthermore, many Latinx immigrants continued to report for work throughout the pandemic, either because the jobs they perform have been designated “essential” or because they simply could not afford to miss work.⁹

The risks faced by immigrant workers during the height of the pandemic, however, were not solely due to their employment in “essential industries.” It is widely acknowledged that immigration status itself is a social determinant of health, with undocumented residents and members of mixed-status households especially susceptible to a range of negative health outcomes.¹⁰

Immigrants often refrain from accessing healthcare and other supportive services due to fear and mistrust of public institutions,¹¹ and recent federal policy changes have served to heighten this mistrust.

On February 24, 2020, just weeks before the coronavirus pandemic struck the US, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) implemented a rule stating that individuals applying for US immigration authorization would be inadmissible if they are deemed “likely at any time to become a public charge.”¹² The public benefits considered by DHS include any federal, state, local, or tribal cash benefit programs for income maintenance, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly known as food stamps), and Section 8 housing assistance. Individuals residing

“Immigrants aspiring to become U.S. citizens [do] not want to risk that they or their children might be considered inadmissible, deported, or unable to naturalize because they [are] considered ‘public charges.’”

⁸ Gelatt, Julia. Immigrant Workers: Vital to the U.S. COVID-19 Response, Disproportionately Vulnerable. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute (2020).

⁹ During the pandemic, there were changes in the essential and frontline workforce definitions by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), specifically adding the education sector shifting to virtual, while other “frontline” industries could not offer remote positions, including those most impacted by the pandemic. Blau, Francine D. (2022 March 22). Econofact. Essential and Frontline Workers in the COVID-19 Crisis Updated. Retrieved on May 23, 2022 from <https://econofact.org/essential-and-frontline-workers-in-the-covid-19-crisis>.

¹⁰ Castañeda, Heide, Seth M. Holmes, Daniel S. Madrigal, Maria-Elena DeTrinidad Young, Naomi Beyeler, and James Quesada. "Immigration as a social determinant of health." Annual Review of Public Health 36 (2015): 375-392; Gurrola, Maria A., and Cecilia Ayón. "Immigration policies and social determinants of health: Is immigrants' health at risk?" Race and Social Problems 10, no. 3 (2018): 209-220; Hill, Jessica, Darlene Xiomara Rodriguez, and Paul N. McDaniel. "Immigration Status as a Health Care Barrier in the USA during COVID-19." Journal of Migration and Health 4 (2021): 100036.

¹¹ Desai, Sarah, Jessica Houston Su, and Robert M. Adelman. "Legacies of marginalization: System avoidance among the adult children of unauthorized immigrants in the United States." International Migration Review 54, no. 3 (2020): 707-739.

¹² US Citizen and Immigration Services [USCIS] (2020) Public Charge Fact Sheet. Washington, DC: USCIS.

“inside or outside the U.S. who seek to either obtain Lawful Permanent Resident status (apply for immigrant visas and ‘green cards’) or to extend or change nonimmigrant status (temporary visas) must now demonstrate that they have not received public benefits, or have received limited public benefits, with [few] exceptions.”¹³ The deterrence effect of the Public Charge rule has been strong, as “Immigrants aspiring to become U.S. citizens [do] not want to risk that they or their children might be considered inadmissible, deported, or unable to naturalize because they [are] considered ‘public charges.’”¹⁴

It is within this context that Latinx- and Indigenous-serving organizations have come to play a vital role during the pandemic in providing emergency support to families and communities. The trust they have established with members and constituents, their ability to rapidly respond with culturally appropriate services, and their connections to government agencies have meant that Latinx- and Indigenous-serving organizations are uniquely positioned to intervene in the public health and economic crises that continue to unfold.

¹³ Khalid, Najia S. and Ashley Moore. "Immigration and compliance briefing: COVID-19 summary of government relief and potential “Public Charge Rule” impact on nonimmigrant and immigrant visa applications." *National Law Review* 10, no. 133 (2020): May 12.

¹⁴ Perreira, Krista M., Robert Crosnoe, Karina Fortuny, Juan Pedroza, Kjersti Ulvestad, Christina Weiland, Hirokazu Yoshikawa, and Ajay Chaudry. “Barriers to immigrants’ access to health and human services programs.” ASPE Issue Brief. Washington, DC: Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (2012).

CASE STUDIES OF MUTUAL AID IN ACTION

This section provides examples of some of the important work Latinx- and Indigenous-serving organizations have undertaken during the pandemic to ensure the needs of diverse communities are met.

Comunidades Indígenas en Liderazgo: Undocu-Indigenous Fund

Comunidades Indígenas en Liderazgo (Indigenous Communities in Leadership, or CIELO) is an Indigenous, women-led nonprofit organization that accompanies Indigenous communities in Los Angeles, while also supporting a network of Indigenous-language interpreters throughout the United States. With a focus on language justice and cultural preservation, CIELO seeks an end to gender-based violence and to promote reproductive justice.

Like other regions of the country that endured rapidly rising COVID-19 infection rates, the Los Angeles metropolitan area struggled to cope with the pandemic's twin public health and economic crises. The COVID-19 recession exacted a heavy toll on residents of southern California, especially low-income families.

The Los Angeles region has among the worst income inequality in the nation, and that divide is mirrored in the pandemic's effect on employment. Before the pandemic-related shutdowns, the average unemployment rate was 6.6% for lower-income families and 2.1% for higher income families. Although this is a substantial difference, both levels were fairly low.

Since the pandemic hit, however, the rates for both groups increased almost fivefold, profoundly magnifying that gap. From April through June [2020], the unemployment rate for workers in households earning above \$100,000 was only 11%. For those in lower-income families, it has hovered around 28%.¹⁵

In the City of Los Angeles, job losses in the early months of the pandemic were concentrated in the service sector, particularly the restaurant, hospitality, retail, and entertainment industries.¹⁶ Heavily affected industries include those that employ large numbers of Indigenous workers, such as the restaurant industry, the care sector, garment manufacturing, and dry cleaning and laundry services.¹⁷ To make matters worse, those who least could afford to be out of work, even for a short time, were the ones who suffered the

¹⁵ Ward, Jason M. "L.A. Has the Nation's Highest Unemployment. For Some Groups, It's Even Worse Than That," TheRandBlog (August 6, 2020), accessed at: <https://www.rand.org/blog/2020/08/la-has-the-nations-highest-unemployment-for-some-groups.html>.

¹⁶ Los Angeles Office of the Controller. "COVID-19 Job Losses in L.A." (2020), accessed at:

<https://lacontroller.org/data-stories-and-maps/job-losses/>.

¹⁷ CIELO. Undocu-Indigenous Fund (February 3, 2021), accessed at: <https://my.visme.co/view/epd0xody-undocufundreport>.

greatest impacts. In the case of domestic workers—childcare providers, house cleaners, and caregivers who work in their employers’ homes—many were told by their employers not to report to work, especially if they relied on public transportation. Janet Martinez, CIELO’s vice-executive director, described how many Indigenous domestic workers were suddenly without an income: “there was a fear of public transportation, and a lot of women lost their jobs ... [especially those who] took the bus to work.”¹⁸ Reliant on the low wages provided through the care economy,¹⁹ domestic workers’ primary means of accessing their employer’s homes is public transit. Despite suddenly being without work, 75% of domestic workers did not receive any compensation from their employers when their jobs were unexpectedly discontinued, and well after the onset of the pandemic, the number of domestic workers who remained completely out of work was four times higher than before the beginning of the public health crisis.²⁰

The restaurant industry provides another example, as Martinez explains. “The restaurant industry was not only the hardest hit economically because of the closures, but it is struggling even now, during the recovery. Hours [of operation] are limited because not everybody is indoor dining at full capacity, and a lot of workers are employed as bussers.”²¹ With greater reliance on food delivery and lower indoor capacity, many servers and bussers have lost their jobs. Meanwhile, outside of California’s urban centers, a large number of Indigenous workers are employed as agricultural workers.²² Farmworkers in California, and especially Indigenous farmworkers, have endured very high positivity rates for COVID-19.²³

*“There aren’t reliable statistics about any of the Indigenous peoples... And when there is a population that doesn’t ‘exist’ in statistics, they don’t exist to get resources, they don’t exist to receive help. So for us it was incredibly important to say, **‘this is a fund for indigenous people.’**”*

- Janet Martinez,

CIELO’s Vice-Executive Director

In response to soaring unemployment among Indigenous workers in Los Angeles County and in the agricultural region of Monterey County, “CIELO created the Undocu-Indigenous Fund to specifically address these challenges by allocating

¹⁸ Interview with Janet Martinez, vice-executive director of CIELO, April 28, 2021.

¹⁹ Theodore, Nik, Beth Gutelius, and Linda Burnham. Home Truths: Domestic Workers in California. New York, Oakland, and Chicago: National Domestic Workers Alliance, Data Center, and the Center for Urban Economic Development, University of Illinois Chicago (2013).

²⁰ López González, Paulina and Tracy Anderson. 6 Months in Crisis: The Impact of COVID-19 on Domestic Workers. Boston: NDWA Labs (2020).

²¹ Interview with Janet Martinez, vice-executive director of CIELO, April 28, 2021.

²² CIELO op cit.

²³ Lewnard, Joseph A., Ana M. Mora, Oguchi Nkwocha, Katherine Kogut, Stephen A. Rauch, Norma Morga, Samantha Hernandez et al.

"Prevalence and Clinical Profile of SARS-CoV-2 Infection among Farmworkers in Monterey County, California: June–November, 2020." medRxiv (2021): 2020-2012.

resources, and to be in solidarity with and support the wellbeing of Indigenous undocumented communities.”²⁴ Janet Martinez notes, “There aren’t reliable statistics about any of the Indigenous peoples.... And when there is a population that doesn't ‘exist’ in statistics, they don't exist to get resources, they don't exist to receive help. So for us it was incredibly important to say, ‘this is a fund for Indigenous people.’”²⁵

Through the Undocu-Indigenous Fund, CIELO has distributed nearly \$2 million in direct aid, mainly via cash assistance and gift cards. Funds were provided, without conditions, to be used on whatever expenses recipients decided were most pressing. CIELO also developed a food-pantry program, in partnership with World Harvest and its food-distribution network, to assist families coping with severe food insecurity. Managing the allocation of cash assistance poses significant challenges for small organizations like CIELO, but with the support of LAANE (Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy) who served as the fiscal sponsor for this initiative, lending its administrative and accounting infrastructure, was successful in providing relief to their local Indigenous communities.

A May 2021 analysis by the *Los Angeles Times* found that Latino and Black residents of California, and residents of areas in the state where socioeconomic disadvantages are greatest, have vaccination rates that were disproportionately low.²⁶ To address this problem, CIELO, along with Indigenous leaders throughout the region, played a vital role in conducting outreach to urban and rural communities that have been especially hard hit by the pandemic. **With funding from the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, CIELO conducted targeted outreach, worked to counteract misinformation about COVID-19 vaccinations, and registered community members for vaccination appointments. In April 2021 the organization expanded its efforts to include a mobile health clinic that vaccinated hundreds of Indigenous residents.**

Despite these wide-ranging efforts, community needs remain great. “Everybody is talking about recovery even though people are still really struggling,” laments Janet Martinez. “There are a lot of families that are facing food insecurity and housing insecurity.”²⁷

²⁴ CIELO op cit.

²⁵ Interview with Janet Martinez, vice-executive director of CIELO, April 28, 2021.

²⁶ Green, Sean and Rong-Gong Lin II. “Latino and Black Californians less likely to have received COVID-19 vaccine,” *Los Angeles Times* (May 12, 2021), accessed at:

<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-05-12/latino-and-black-californians-less-likely-to-have-received-covid-19-vaccine>.

²⁷ Interview with Janet Martinez, vice-executive director of CIELO, April 28, 2021.

Somos Un Pueblo Unido: Essential but Excluded

Somos un Pueblo Unido (Somos) is a community-based, immigrant-led statewide organization located in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The organization helps build worker power, foster the electoral and civic participation of Latinxs individuals and communities, and defend workers' rights. Its worker center, the United Workers Center of New Mexico, supports more than 50 worksite committees in low-wage industries and has assisted workers in recovering unpaid wages while advocating for stronger labor protections.

As the public health and economic impacts of the pandemic deepened, Somos and other immigrant-serving organizations in New Mexico sought to identify ways to support workers who were “falling between the COVID-relief cracks ... folks who are in mixed-status families and other low-income workers who, for different reasons, did not know that they could access their stimulus checks, even though they qualified,” explains Marcela Díaz, the organization’s executive director.²⁸ Problems were particularly acute in rural areas of the state with high percentages of immigrants because, with the economy slowing and Unemployment Insurance payments not flowing into these communities, consumer spending declined sharply, further undermining the jobs base of already-weakened local economies. Exclusions from relief programs, either formally mandated by law or in practice because of the detrimental impacts of the Public Charge rule, or simply because of misinformation about benefits eligibility, posed significant barriers for Latinx and immigrant families across the state.²⁹

Somos hoped to “figure out how to create changes that will outlast the pandemic.”

The ecosystem of immigrant-serving organizations in New Mexico is composed of small and medium-sized community groups that lack the organizational infrastructure necessary to deploy statewide emergency cash assistance to tens of thousands of residents. Therefore, with the effects of

the pandemic mounting, the focus shifted to devising ways for cities, counties, and the state to expand relief efforts. Moreover, along with their partners, Somos hoped to “figure out how to create changes that will outlast the pandemic.”³⁰

Because immigrant families often have informal relationships with landlords and employers, some of the most important pandemic-related assistance simply was not reaching these families. “A lot of our members were calling us saying, ‘the county is willing to pay three months of rent. But my landlord isn't willing to accept it and I still owe them

²⁸ Interview with Marcela Díaz, executive director of Somos un Pueblo Unido, May 17, 2021.

²⁹ New Mexico Voices for Children. Essential but Excluded: How COVID-19 Relief has Bypassed Immigrant Communities in New Mexico. Albuquerque, New Mexico: New Mexico Voices for Children (2020).

³⁰ Interview with Marcela Díaz, executive director of Somos un Pueblo Unido, May 17, 2021.

money' because everything is under the table. So **we saw that direct cash assistance is what really was needed ... [and this] helped us make the case for [government] cash assistance.**³¹ One of the first hurdles to be overcome was to navigate an anti-donation clause (Article IX, Section 14) of the New Mexico Constitution that bars local governments, except in rare cases, from providing direct cash relief to needy individuals and families. One key exception is if you can prove indigency, but there is no definition of what indigency is, so we ... worked with our local city attorney to ... [craft] a definition ... based on what the law says and the way it has been interpreted by cities and counties in the past. We used that definition for COVID relief, and the city of Santa Fe was the first [in New Mexico] to be able to give direct cash assistance.³² Other local governments in New Mexico soon followed this model.



Ultimately, however, the organizations recognized that “the only entity that can screen tens of thousands of people and then provide [cash relief] is the state.”³³ So the question became how to lift restrictions that prevent undocumented immigrants and mixed-status families from receiving government assistance. **Somos and its partners identified New Mexico’s General Assistance program as the programmatic mechanism through which relief could be distributed to undocumented immigrants.** Emergency provisions in New Mexico law provide scope for rule changes to be made in order to expand eligibility. Millions of dollars in state general fund revenues were then allocated to the program, making it “the first time that our state agency is giving cash assistance to undocumented workers—and the legislature approved it.”³⁴ A key argument, especially among state legislators representing conservative, rural parts of the state, centered on the importance of direct cash assistance recirculating within rural economies. Sharply rising levels of household debt during the pandemic threatened to stall the recovery because, rather than spending money locally, a substantial portion of workers' income would be devoted to paying off accumulated debt.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

With a disbursement mechanism in place for awarding direct cash assistance to households, when New Mexico received funding through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, additional aid could be disbursed to New Mexico families. Local organizations also were able to successfully advocate for both the inclusion of undocumented tax filers in the New Mexico Working Families Tax Credit, the state's Earned Income Tax Credit program (New Mexico is now the third state in the nation to include such a provision), and an increase in the tax credit, thereby meeting the goal of initiating programmatic reforms that would outlast the pandemic and the economic emergency it created. **As Somos and its partners look toward the future, additional programmatic experimentation is underway. The organization has established a pilot guaranteed income program through which one-time cash assistance is provided to mixed-status families and augmented by cash assistance from the state.** The purpose of this pilot program is to explore the feasibility of shifting social safety net funding to cash assistance, with the goal of encouraging policymakers to expand Unemployment Insurance to undocumented immigrants.

Comunidad Maya Pixan Ixim: COVID-19 Adaptive Capacity Support

Comunidad Maya Pixan Ixim (CMPI) is a Maya-led organization in Omaha, Nebraska. The community group promotes Maya self-determination and the rights of Indigenous peoples through programs focused on community development, health promotion, cultural enrichment, educational attainment, and the safeguarding of human rights. Maya living in Nebraska are mainly from Guatemala, and many are undocumented and may speak only Indigenous languages. Many (if not most) are political refugees, though rarely recognized as such under US immigration law, having fled discrimination and persecution.

Maya and other Indigenous peoples from Mexico and Central America began arriving in Omaha in large numbers in the 1990s, often through active recruitment by meatpacking plants whose labor brokers targeted areas of high unemployment in Guatemala, Belize, and other Mayan territories.³⁵ The chain migration that followed reunited families and led the Maya to establish a vibrant community in Eastern Nebraska. More recently, migration from Guatemala and other countries in Central America has increased following a series of natural disasters and declining economic opportunities across the region. “Entire communities are being displaced,” explains Luis Marcos, CMPI co-founder and co-executive director.³⁶

With government officials declaring that meatpacking and other food-processing facilities are part of “essential industries,” workers were not subject to mandatory stay-at-home orders and processing plants quickly emerged as COVID-19 hotspots. In meatpacking alone, more than 59,000 workers have contracted the virus and hundreds have died.³⁷ The U.S. House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis found that companies were slow to implement health protocols and safety upgrades, and as a result thousands of workers were exposed to COVID-19.

CMPI's pandemic response sits alongside the organization's efforts to provide legal assistance to undocumented immigrants and halt deportations, engage in transnational efforts to protect Indigenous communities in Latin America and the United States, and uphold Indigenous knowledge systems.

Luis Marcos describes the toll the early days of the pandemic took on the Indigenous

³⁵ Stanley, Kathleen. "Immigrant and Refugee Workers in the Midwestern Meatpacking Industry: Industrial Restructuring and the Transformation of Rural Labor Markets." *Review of Policy Research* 11, no. 2 (1992): 106-117.

³⁶ Interview with Luis Marcos, executive director of CMPI, May 10, 2021.

³⁷ De Sam Lazaro, Fred. "Meat-packing plants were the earliest COVID hotspots, but vaccinating workers isn't easy," *PBS NewsHour* (April 9, 2021); Funk, Josh. "Report: At least 59,000 meat workers caught COVID, 269 died," *Associated Press* (October 27, 2021).

community in the Omaha area: “the virus was spreading in workplaces and then it was coming home with workers. Those workers and their families were among the first [to contract COVID-19] even when we didn't really understand” the severity and lethality of the virus.³⁸ Given that many Indigenous families maintain multigenerational households and that many of those who contracted COVID-19 were asymptomatic, when workers became infected, the virus rapidly spread throughout the home.

Comunidad Maya Pixan Ixim launched the COVID-19 Adaptive Capacity Support program to enable the organization to effectively respond to the public health and economic crises that were impacting the Maya community in Eastern Nebraska. CMPI's response included providing direct cash assistance to families in need, translating guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other public health agencies into Indigenous languages, and using the organization's radio station to disseminate culturally and linguistically appropriate information about the pandemic. These efforts were centered on an area of the country that includes communities that were among those that suffered hugely disproportionate hardships. According to the U.S Department of Agriculture (USDA), during the pandemic's first wave, rural meatpacking counties had infection rates that were 10 times higher than those of other rural counties.³⁹ The USDA concluded that inadequate medical care in rural areas combined with the large distances that often must be traveled to access intensive-care hospitals, resulted in many residents being unable to receive timely medical care. **CMPI's COVID-19 Adaptive Capacity Support program was one of the key efforts by civil society to prevent coronavirus transmission and improve health outcomes in an area that suffered enormously during the early months of the pandemic.**

CMPI's activities are grounded in an Indigenous spirituality and worldview as well as in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which safeguards the rights of Maya and other Indigenous populations as a displaced people. CMPI's pandemic response sits alongside the organization's efforts to provide legal assistance to undocumented immigrants and halt deportations, engage in transnational efforts to protect Indigenous communities in Latin America and the United States, and uphold Indigenous knowledge systems.

³⁸ Interview with Luis Marcos, executive director of CMPI, May 10, 2021.

³⁹ Cromartie, John, Elizabeth A. Dobis, Thomas P. Krumel, Jr., David McGranahan, and John Pender. Rural America at a Glance: 2020 Edition. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture (2020).

Arriba Las Vegas Worker Center COVID-19 Immigrant Families Fund

Arriba Las Vegas Worker Center (Arriba) is a community-based, labor rights organization that organizes day laborers, domestic workers, and other workers in low-wage industries. Arriba complements its focus on workers' rights with efforts to defend immigrant rights, including advocating with Temporary Protected Status (TPS) visa holders.

“We even had people who applied for and were offered cash grants that didn't end up accepting them because, in certain cases, we weren't successful in assuaging fears”

The Las Vegas economy has been among the hardest hit during the coronavirus pandemic. Dependent on tourism as well as business conventions and other large events, the region's declining service sector-based economy suffered soaring unemployment rates that reached a staggering 34% in the early months of the pandemic.⁴⁰ Nevada is heavily reliant on immigrant workers,

who bore the brunt of the downturn. One in five residents is foreign born, and immigrants account for 30% or more of the workforces in accommodation and food services; construction; and arts, entertainment, and recreation. The state also is reliant on undocumented immigrants, who account for more than 1 in 10 workers, the largest share of any state, many of whom are employed in the leisure and hospitality industry.⁴¹

Despite making strides in recent years, government agencies continue to struggle to serve immigrant communities, while the capacity of immigrant-serving organizations in Las Vegas has not kept pace with population growth.⁴² **Newer organizations, including Arriba Las Vegas Worker Center, have emerged as vital resources that help safeguard immigrant workers' rights. During the pandemic, Arriba significantly expanded its operations to provide mutual aid and supportive services.**

In aiding immigrant workers during the pandemic, executive director Bliss Requa-Trautz explains, Arriba adopted a “triage” model of supportive services.⁴³ **The first stage was to determine whether a worker qualifies for Unemployment Insurance (UI), and if they do, Arriba provides advice, translation assistance, and other services to enable the worker to apply for UI. “We have helped resolve issues on more than 450 unemployment cases. Whenever there's somebody who is documented in the home, we try to get their application**

⁴⁰ Wallace, Alicia. “Las Vegas, the hardest-hit metro economy in America, just suffered another blow,” CNN (January 13, 2021), accessed at: <https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/13/business/las-vegas-economy-ces-2021/index.html>.

⁴¹ Pew Research Center. U.S. Unauthorized Immigrant Population Estimates by State, 2016 (February 5, 2019), accessed at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/interactives/u-s-unauthorized-immigrants-by-state/>. McTarnaghan, Sara, Eva H. Allen, Clara Alvarez

⁴² Caraveo, and Hamutal Bernstein. Supporting Immigrant Families in Las Vegas: Efforts to Reduce Chilling Effects around the Public Charge Rule at the Local Level. Washington, DC: Urban Institute (2020).

⁴³ Interview with Bliss Requa-Trautz, executive director of Arriba Las Vegas Worker Center, April 19, 2021.

resolved because that's the highest income that could come into the household.”⁴⁴ Many of those assisted were TPS visa holders whose applications were initially denied because their work authorization cards show an expired date even though they remain eligible following a court injunction that halted the termination of TPS for El Salvador, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Sudan. **The second stage was to pursue rental housing assistance through the CARES Housing Assistance Program operated by the State of Nevada Housing Division**, because this too would have the greatest impact on family economic security. However, the state and county agencies charged with processing applications have been beset with significant delays, likely due to overwhelming demand for assistance.⁴⁵

The third stage is direct cash assistance, the largest of the pandemic-related programs implemented by Arriba.

Arriba secured funding from the National Domestic Workers Alliance, the Hispanic Federation and Family Independence Initiative, the National Day Laborers Organizing Network’s Immigrant Worker Safety Net Fund, and Hispanics in Philanthropy. The organization was able to provide cash aid to families, which helped them stabilize their housing, cope with food insecurity, and cover other essential expenses. Direct cash assistance is crucial, both for those families that are unable to access other forms of support and for those that are awaiting UI or rental housing assistance.

“Unemployed workers are eligible for benefits, and even though these benefits would have the greatest impact on family economic security, there was considerable hesitancy about accessing government benefits because of the Public Charge rule.”

Finally, the fourth stage is emergency food assistance. Arriba partnered with the Culinary Academy of Las Vegas to distribute 600 food packages a month to food insecure families. These 40-pound packages, containing produce, protein and culturally



⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ KTNV, “Tenants, landlords still waiting for rental assistance as eviction moratorium looms,” (March 22, 2021), accessed at: <https://www.ktnv.com/news/coronavirus/tenants-landlords-still-waiting-for-rental-assistance-as-eviction-moratorium-looms>.

appropriate nutritious food, can provide meals for a family of four for a week. Together, this range of pandemic-related assistance has supported immigrant families coping with severe economic hardships.

Arriba has had to confront the reluctance of immigrant workers to accept the pandemic relief for which they are eligible for fear of running afoul of the federal government's Public Charge rule. In the case of UI, Bliss Requa-Trautz explains, even though unemployed workers are eligible for benefits, and even though these benefits would have the greatest impact on family economic security, there was considerable hesitancy about accessing government benefits because of the Public Charge rule.⁴⁶ “Attorneys in public information sessions would say, ‘we cannot advise you and there could be a public charged risk.’ So there was a deterrent, in addition to information barriers, technology barriers, and not having in-person services available. When the experts would offer advice on television they would say, ‘You're right, you shouldn't [apply for benefits].’” Requa-Trautz continued:

We even had people who applied for and were offered cash grants that didn't end up accepting them because, in certain cases, we weren't successful in assuaging fears. In many cases, we were able to address [those concerns] but with cash assistance this was the most significant, recurring hesitancy, including with our cash assistance ... which was provided with private funds, and your information does not leave the organization.

In short, experiences shared by Arriba indicate that the Public Charge rule has had a highly damaging effect across immigrant communities, even in cases where nongovernmental funding was made available to immigrants and their families to utilize the resources they need.

⁴⁶ Interview with Bliss Requa-Trautz, executive director of Arriba Las Vegas Worker Center, April 19, 2021.

Chicago Workers Collaborative: Brigada Laboral

Chicago Workers Collaborative (CWC) is a worker center that contests discrimination, low wages, and employment abuses in the temporary staffing industry and other low-wage sectors. The majority of CWC's members are employed in sectors—like meatpacking, food processing, beauty supply companies that produce hand sanitizer, and PPE production and recycling—that have been deemed “essential” industries.

“Three workers in a container with no mask, one of them sick with COVID, no ventilation, unloading a container together for an hour and a half. What do you do in that situation? They need to put a lift there, and they need to have one worker up the truck, they need to have another worker up in the truck, they need to have another in the middle, and another at the bottom, so they are spaced out. This is what has to happen.”

“As soon as the pandemic started, and the governor issued the stay-at-home order, literally that same week,” Tim Bell, CWC’s communications director, recalled, “we began receiving calls from workers complaining about conditions and saying how concerned they were that the [safety] protocols” issued by public health authorities were not being followed.⁴⁷ Workers in the Chicago area were among those nationally who staged walkouts because supervisors were not notifying employees about COVID-19 infections in the workplace.⁴⁸ Some employers retaliated against employees who protested or signed health and safety petitions calling for greater workplace precautions, triggering charges to be filed with the

National Labor Relations Board and other government agencies. In response to these actions and the dangers posed by the pandemic, CWC’s worker assembly convened to create a plan.

The worker assembly decided to seek a regulatory solution to unsafe working conditions. **CWC sought to create a new workplace enforcement regime, whereby workers monitored workplaces and instigated inspections, while also supporting members who were out of work because of the pandemic. The centerpiece of this effort was the Brigada Laboral (Labor Brigade),** an employment program designed to document unsafe conditions at area worksites. Using popular education materials designed by the Latino Worker Safety Center and the National Day Laborer Organizing Network, CWC trained more

⁴⁷ Interview with Tim Bell, executive director of CWC, April 15, 2021.

⁴⁸ Berzon, Alexandra, Jacob Bunge, and Alejandro Lazo, “U.S. Plant Workplaces Emerge as Coronavirus Battlegrounds,” Wall Street Journal (April 2, 2020), accessed at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-plant-workplaces-emerge-as-coronavirus-battlegrounds-11585775230>.

than 200 “COVID-19 navigators” who in turn were charged with investigating workplace compliance with COVID-19 health and safety mandates.

County health and safety inspectors also participated in CWC’s training program, given that they would be handling new responsibilities and challenges during the pandemic. As Tim Bell explained, the inspectors:

mainly inspect restaurants, to protect customers. They suddenly had to inspect industrial facilities ... but they didn't know how to walk into a factory and know where to [look for problems]. So we had to tell them where they ... would find unsafe conditions, like people working inside [shipping] containers.

Three workers in a container with no mask, one of them sick with COVID, no ventilation, unloading a container together for an hour and a half. What do you do in that situation? They need to put a lift there, and they need to have one worker up in the truck, they need to have another worker in the middle, and another at the bottom, so they are spaced out. This is what has to happen.⁴⁹

Once trained, each member of the Brigada Laboral was responsible for collaborating with at least 10 other workers to collect information on workplace conditions. Evidence, including photographs, video recordings, and worker testimonials was then given to the Office of the Illinois Attorney General and the county health department, agencies that are charged with enforcing the state’s public health orders. In cases where employers were required to make changes to protect employee health and safety, workers inside the facility would be able to report whether the changes had been implemented.

The decentralized structure of the Brigada Laboral, which was supported through online platforms that facilitated worker-to-worker networking, allowed the newly created enforcement regime to extend across the metropolitan area and into numerous workplaces. **The Essential Fund grant was key to this effort because it provided CWC worker committees with the resources needed to create employment opportunities for members who were out of work while also fostering worker leadership and building community among the membership base.**

⁴⁹ Interview with Tim Bell, executive director of CWC, April 15, 2021.

Inclusive Action for the City: Street Vendor Emergency Fund

Inclusive Action for the City is a community development finance institution (CDFI) that provides capital, infrastructure, and education to build wealth, invest in low-income communities, and build sustainable community-based economies. CDFIs emerged in the 1980s to provide financial capital to low-income neighborhoods, often communities of color, that were marginalized by banks and other financial institutions.⁵⁰ Through its programs that provide micro-loans, assist in commercial real estate acquisition, harness the purchasing power of small grocers, and make equity investments in small businesses, Inclusive Action increases opportunities for low-income entrepreneurs to establish and expand their enterprises. The organization buttresses its economic development efforts with advocacy campaigns that seek to change public policies that harm low-income communities and restrict the capital flows to small businesses and micro-entrepreneurs.

One of Inclusive Action’s primary initiatives is its financial lending to and policy advocacy on behalf of street vendors. A centerpiece of this work has been the Los Angeles Street Vendor Campaign, co-founded by Inclusive Action, a vendor-led effort to decriminalize vending on sidewalks and in public parks. The campaign has been successful and in January 2020 Los Angeles issued its first permits to vendors allowing them to legally sell goods in public spaces. However, the legalization of street vending has not been without its critics. Permitting and inspection fees are high, the permit requires vendors to also secure a county health permit, and the permitting process has been bureaucratic and confusing. Furthermore, the introduction of permits coincided with the deepening of the pandemic, which dramatically reduced the incomes of vendors, while at the same time the City of Los Angeles began issuing costly citations to vendors who were operating without a license. Fines begin at \$250 for the first infraction and rise to \$1,000 for subsequent infractions, a heavy burden for vendors. In addition, the City also issued fines on street vendors for various COVID-19-related infractions. “So all the work that we did and the success we had a year prior in legalizing vending basically went out the window because of the health crisis,” laments Rudy Espinoza, Inclusive Action’s executive director.⁵¹ With reports that enforcement activities were increasing during the pandemic,⁵² there was a danger that street vendors essentially would be “fined out of business.”⁵³

Even at the very beginning of the pandemic it was clear to Inclusive Action that vendors’ income would decline sharply as stay-at-home orders decreased pedestrian traffic on city streets. As a result, they would be unable to make their scheduled loan repayments. Informally employed workers, who disproportionately are undocumented immigrants and

⁵⁰ Espinoza, Rudy and John Broadview. CDFIs Must Advocate, Innovate, and Advance Justice in a Post-Pandemic World (May 12, 2021), accessed at <https://www.inclusiveaction.org/blog/the-role-of-the-cdfi-in-a-pandemic-advocate-innovate-and-advance-justice>.

⁵¹ Interview with Rudy Espinoza, executive director of Inclusive Action for the City, April 28, 2021.

⁵² Villafana, Janette and Jack Ross. “L.A. Street Vendors are Caught between COVID and the Law,” Capital & Main and L.A. Taco (November 30, 2020), accessed at: <https://www.lataco.com/street-vendors-covid/>.

⁵³ Interview with Rudy Espinoza, executive director of Inclusive Action for the City, April 28, 2021.

are ineligible for Unemployment Insurance, have suffered extremely high rates of joblessness during the pandemic.⁵⁴ Although California provided one-time, disaster-relief payments of \$500 to \$1,000 to undocumented adults who were ineligible for other forms of government assistance, this funding for approximately 150,000 residents was exhausted immediately. **With so many microentrepreneurs losing their incomes, and with few other sources of support, Inclusive Action suspended the loan repayments.**

“The big thing for us is lending again. The economy is coming back, and entrepreneurs are going to try to build their businesses again, so we need to make sure they have the capital to do it.”

Immigrant street vendors face numerous challenges when applying for emergency support. A “digital divide” has prevented some from completing online applications as well as from understanding which benefits they might be eligible to receive. The federal government’s Public Charge rule has been an even greater barrier. Rudy Espinoza shared a story of one vendor who was selected to receive a \$5,000 loan. “She won the lottery, because it was

a lottery system once you apply to get the grant.... But she declined it ... because she is undocumented. She asked, ‘is this going to impact me because I want to get my [immigration] papers in order.’” Inclusive Action consulted with legal counsel and concluded that the award would not put the vendor in jeopardy under the Public Charge rule. But, as Espinoza explains, “she said, ‘I’ve given it some thought, and I know you said it will be fine’” but I will decline the funding. “They’re hoping to get [their immigration status] regularized and it’s just ... not worth the risk.”⁵⁵

With few other avenues for support, and with incomes plummeting as the pandemic wore on, Inclusive Action launched the Street Vendor Emergency Fund to provide direct cash assistance to vendors. Using its loan infrastructure to distribute funds, the goal was to swiftly provide support to those in need, and to do so without the bureaucratic hurdles that often accompany aid to businesses and micro-entrepreneurs. **Inclusive Action distributed more than \$500,000 in emergency relief to hundreds of vendors.** With the economy slowly rebounding as vaccination rates increase, Inclusive Action is looking forward to resuming its core activities: “the big thing for us is lending again. The economy is coming back, and entrepreneurs are going to try to build their businesses again, so we need to make sure they have the capital to do it.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Ward op cit.

⁵⁵ Interview with Rudy Espinoza, executive director of Inclusive Action for the City, April 28, 2021.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Solo Por Hoy & Hogar Ruth para Mujeres Maltratadas Providing Essential Services in Puerto Rico

The COVID-19 pandemic spread to Puerto Rico at a time when the island economy was still recovering from the devastation caused by hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017 and earthquakes in early 2020. Recovery work abruptly ceased, and unemployment rose steadily as the tourism industry was shuttered along with other sectors. More than 300,000 residents filed Unemployment Insurance claims as a result of the pandemic. The unemployment rate, which approached 40%, quickly became the highest in the nation even though the full extent of the problem was masked by the large informal sector on the island.⁵⁷ Compounding these difficulties, Puerto Rico's understaffed government bureaucracy struggled to keep pace with the surge in unemployment, adding to the financial stresses on families.

To curb the spread of the coronavirus, Governor Wanda Vázquez was the first governor to issue stay-at-home orders and close businesses. Although needed to protect public health, these measures severely impacted the informally employed who do not qualify for Unemployment Insurance because they work “off the books,” compounding the strain on workers and their families. A recent International Labor Organization (ILO) policy brief describes the untenable dilemma faced by informally employed workers during the pandemic: contagion or hunger.⁵⁸

Community organizations, including Solo Por Hoy and Hogar Ruth para Mujeres Maltratadas have played a vital role in providing assistance to needy families. Solo Por Hoy is a community-based, women-led nonprofit organization headquartered in San Juan that provides assistance with substance abuse, mental health, homelessness, and disabilities. Solo Por Hoy also offers supportive services to families through comprehensive programs that promote housing stability. The organization works with 24 municipalities throughout northern Puerto Rico, and served over 6,000 individuals in 2020.

As Belinda Hill, Solo Por Hoy's executive director, explained: “When the funding from Hispanics in Philanthropy arrived,



⁵⁷ Rosa, Alejandra and Frances Robles “Pandemic Plunges Puerto Rico Into Yet Another Dire Emergency,” New York Times (April 8, 2021), access at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/08/us/coronavirus-puerto-rico-economy-unemployment.html>.

⁵⁸ ILO (2020) COVID-19 crisis and the informal economy: Immediate responses and policy challenges, accessed at: https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/employment-promotion/informal-economy/publications/WCMS_743623/lang--en/index.htm.

access to pandemic Unemployment Insurance was very hard to get.”⁵⁹ Families struggled to pay for basic necessities and many faced eviction, particularly among undocumented immigrants. **The organization was able to provide gift cards that could be used to purchase household necessities while workers awaited the processing of their Unemployment Insurance claims.** However, because U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development funds cannot be awarded to assist undocumented immigrants in making rent payments, **Solo Por Hoy also elected to use a portion of the HIP funding to cover rental housing costs in order to stave off evictions.** Nevertheless, in the wake of the pandemic, housing insecurity and homelessness has remained widespread in Solo Por Hoy’s service area.

Hogar Ruth para Mujeres Maltratadas (Hogar Ruth) is a community-based organization in Alta Vega that promotes human rights and offers safe and supportive living spaces for women and children. Hogar Ruth provides specialized programs to survivors of domestic violence, stalking, sexual abuse, and intimate partner violence. The organization's goal is to promote the empowerment and independence of women and children, which allows them to live safe and secure lives.

When stay-at-home restrictions were enacted across Puerto Rico, Hogar Ruth executive director Lisdell Flores explains, “women had to decide whether to continue working or to take care of children who were no longer going to school due to the lockdown. It had an immediate effect on their finances.... Because of delays in government aid, the first three months were a time of great tension, despair, and uncertainty.”⁶⁰ Moreover, “during the first months of lockdown there were no calls to the organization to report violence [against women]. Violence was not eliminated; the problem was that survivors could not call because the aggressor was at home. When lockdown restrictions started to ease, the calls for ... assault reappeared and increased,”⁶¹ a sign of what UN Women described as the “shadow pandemic” of domestic violence.⁶²

Essential Fund resources were used to cover the basic needs of women and children in Hogar Ruth’s emergency transitional shelter since women were unable to work either because they had to take care of their children or because they lost their jobs as the economy slowed. Once the lockdown restrictions were eased there were new opportunities to find work, though opportunities tended to be greatest in the informal economy. Schools, however, remained on a strict lockdown, and the confinement exacerbated the caregiving and employment challenges parents face.

⁵⁹ Interview with Belinda Hill, executive director of Solo Por Hoy, May 24, 2021.

⁶⁰ Interview with Lisdell Flores, executive director of Hogar Ruth, May 24, 2021.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² UN Women The Shadow Pandemic: Violence Against Women during COVID-19, accessed at:

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response/violence-against-women-during-covid-19#facts>

Adelante Alabama Worker Center Colwal Fund for Excluded Workers

Adelante Alabama Worker Center (Adelante) organizes day laborers, domestic workers, and other low-wage and immigrant workers and their families in the Birmingham area to defend their rights and fight for social justice. One of the leading worker centers to emerge across the South, Adelante has contested workplace abuses and defended immigrant rights in a region with few Latinx-serving organizations.

As in other parts of the country, widespread exclusions from federal pandemic-related assistance meant that many families faced severe housing and food insecurity. Adelante's Interim Executive Director, Victoria Siciliano, explained: "We decided to set out and create our own form of mutual aid relief for workers who were excluded from those benefits." The organization responded by establishing the Colwal Fund (which means "help" or "support" in Q'anjob'al) through a grassroots fundraising drive. Using community appeals requesting the donation of federal stimulus checks from those who had not been heavily impacted by the pandemic, donations poured in from across Alabama. "It was really just the community pulling together." Additional funding from Hispanics in Philanthropy, the National Domestic Workers Alliance, and the National Day Laborer Organizing Network, and other sources supplemented the grassroots fundraising efforts.

"This was such a huge crisis, so we suspended [much] of what we were currently doing" in order for the organization to deliver emergency aid on a large scale. An ad hoc committee composed of members and staff reviewed each of the applications for assistance and committee members screened potential recipients to verify eligibility. The scale of need was immense, explained Victoria Siciliano. "We realized that it wasn't just undocumented workers but people who qualified for a stimulus check but it had run out a long time ago and they were struggling to put food on the table. So we decided to just open it up to anyone in the Birmingham area who was in need. It's still been overwhelmingly undocumented Latinas but also a significant number of Black workers who had been laid off or had their hours drastically reduced or had to quit working because they themselves had contracted COVID."

Adelante added ancillary services as well, including establishing a food pantry and counteracting a lack of accurate public health information in Spanish, which



contributes to the problem of vaccine hesitancy. Alabama is one of the states with the lowest vaccination rates in the country, so Adelante partnered with medical professionals to set up a “pop up” vaccine clinic outside a popular supermarket.

“We’ve heard lots of amazing stories of people just saying, ‘you know, this [cash assistance] was the difference between making it and not making it.’ We had one worker who ended up getting a job. A few months after he had received [cash aid from us] he came back and donated his \$500 back into the Fund, which is such a beautiful, beautiful gesture.” Victoria Siciliano noted that Adelante staff informed the worker that this was not necessary but he was “adamant about wanting to contribute and being a part of this mutual aid network.”

KEY FINDINGS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Latinx- and Indigenous-led and -serving organizations have been especially resourceful and creative in responding to the unprecedented community needs brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. In most cases, organizations suspended all or part of their regular operations in order to pivot to providing emergency assistance. This civil society response was necessary, in large part, because government assistance too often failed to reach heavily impacted communities.

The experiences of Essential Fund grantees in meeting pandemic-related community needs offer important lessons for philanthropy and government, and suggest ways for improving the delivery of emergency resources.⁶³



The pandemic exacerbated pre-existing inequities, and ***the needs of Latinx and Indigenous communities still far exceed the resources available.***

As has been well documented, Latinx and Indigenous communities have suffered enormously from the economic and public health impacts of the pandemic. As the crisis deepened, Essential Fund grantees redirected organizational resources in order to deliver emergency assistance to affected communities. However, despite significant investments from Hispanics in Philanthropy, the National Domestic Workers Alliance's Coronavirus Care Fund, the National Day Laborer Organizing Network's Immigrant Workers Safety Net Fund, and other civil-society initiatives, community needs exceeded the resources available. Furthermore, as communities began the difficult process of recovering from the pandemic, philanthropic funding dwindled. Heavily impacted populations continue to cope with the pandemic's aftereffects, including housing insecurity, food insecurity, rising household debt, and various medical challenges. Simply put, it is too soon for philanthropy and the government to withdraw emergency assistance from these communities. Likewise, both sectors should consider how long-term economic growth and related racial equity projects and initiatives can best meet the needs of those communities hit hardest by the pandemic.

⁶³ This section builds on Avendaño, Ana "Hispanics in Philanthropy Essential Fund Report," Hispanics in Philanthropy internal report (2020).



Latinx-led and Indigenous-led organizations have established bonds of trust and understanding with the communities they serve and therefore can be effective partners with philanthropy and government during times of crisis.

Essential Fund grantees are woven into the social fabric of their communities, and their success in reaching underserved populations is rooted in their long-term engagement with community members. In the process of delivering emergency relief, the work of these organizations has revealed major shortcomings in government responses to the pandemic. Various public policies and administrative rules have created harmful barriers that restrict access to emergency assistance for millions of residents, sometimes by design. These measures are counterproductive, both from the perspective of safeguarding public health and meeting goals of social equity.

There is much that government officials can learn from the pandemic response of Essential Fund grantees, especially considering the various emergencies the nation confronts each year in terms of health, climate, and the economy.

· First, their activities demonstrate the importance of proactive, targeted assistance to hard-to-reach populations.

Undocumented immigrants, in particular, have endured the pandemic without the necessary supports, often because of the risks they face when seeking assistance. Essential Fund grantees have been sensitive to such challenges, and they have been careful to deliver aid in ways that do not heighten these risks. For example, organizations have favored the disbursement of aid in cash (or through gift cards), thereby avoiding digital platforms that bar access by undocumented immigrants or requiring addresses for checks to be mailed, which can dissuade participation and cause the receipt of aid to be delayed.

· Second, public health departments and other emergency service entities must broaden their outreach to include Indigenous languages. To this end, Indigenous-led organizations provide vital resources, including outreach, language interpretation, and trust-building.

· ***Third, collaboration (and support of it) across sectors is critical.***

Several organizations noted that COVID-19 response work provided an opportunity to work together, pool resources and offer support and expertise to one another. Nonprofits often note that they rarely collaborate because the ecosystems in which they operate do not encourage joint work or sharing of resources. The need to respond to COVID-19 offered an opportunity for

organizations to break out of that mold, significantly increasing the reach of otherwise siloed work. This collaboration continues to see gains in partnerships among NGOs and local and state governments, but requires continued financial support for NGOs to be able to engage in additional work.



Greater investments in organizational infrastructure are needed to enable community groups to more effectively respond to changing conditions. ***Parallel investments in organization leadership also are needed to enable growth and facilitate the building of organizational capacities.***

Essential Fund grantees performed admirably as they devised mission-driven responses to the pandemic, and they exhibited remarkable adaptability and creativity as they designed systems of emergency support, in a nimble and responsive approach. This said, the administrative infrastructures of these organizations were stretched, to say the least. Greater philanthropic investment in organizational capacities—including community organizing and outreach, financial management, and administrative leadership—is needed for Latinx-led and Indigenous-led organizations to further enhance their abilities to meet community needs now and in the future.



Essential Fund grantees provided various forms of assistance throughout the pandemic, but unconditional cash assistance has been the preferred means of delivering support and building power in communities. Many nonprofit organizations favor the disbursement of cash aid because it acknowledges that recipients are the ones who are best placed to determine their own priorities. Furthermore, gift cards and in-kind aid,

while important, cannot be used, for example, to cover rent payments or medical bills. The agency strengthened through cash assistance reinforces the idea that philanthropic dollars should be delivered in ways that are non-paternalistic and provide the greatest individual autonomy over household decisions.



The domestic violence and gendered impacts of the pandemic, particularly for undocumented Latina essential workers, requires greater analysis of gender across funding streams, regardless of program area or focus. Through the Essential Fund, we learned how the pandemic exacerbated the gendered impacts of poverty and discrimination. For decades, Latina essential workers have experienced one of the highest poverty rates in the nation. The situation is worse for undocumented Latina workers. In addition, more than one-third (37.1%) of Latinas in the U.S. report that they have been a victim of domestic violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime.⁶⁴ Still, existing systems are not adequately prepared to address these vulnerabilities, especially for undocumented women. Higher rates of domestic violence were noted throughout the pandemic, with NGOs having to find creative alternatives to service provision for women at home with their abusers during quarantines. Undocumented women have been vulnerable to abuse by landlords who threaten deportation, and also faced increased incidences of domestic violence.⁶⁵ Special attention is warranted to address the impacts of emergency situations on women and women-identified members of the Latinx community, and to offer flexible services and supports to ***victims of domestic abuse and gender violence in Latinx and other impacted communities.***

⁶⁴ Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA), 2012, *Trabajadoras: Challenges and Conditions of Latina Workers*, available at https://lclaa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Trabajadoras_Report.pdf

⁶⁵ This section builds on Avendaño, Ana "Hispanics in Philanthropy Essential Fund Report," Hispanics in Philanthropy internal report (2020).

CONCLUSION

In the absence of adequate government support, Essential Fund grantees have provided crucial assistance to Latinx and Indigenous workers and families during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although resource levels have been modest in comparison to the scale of need, Latinx- and Indigenous-led and -serving organizations nevertheless have helped countless heavily impacted families stave off hunger, eviction, and other hardships.

As we have learned, grantee partners pivoted their approaches to serving their communities, and as a result of these efforts, new opportunities emerged in which to rethink strategy and collaboration across sectors to build collective power during these challenging and uncertain times.

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Since 1978, the Center for Urban Economic Development (CUED) has conducted research on a broad range of issues shaping the trajectories of local and regional economies. CUED's mission is to improve development outcomes and expand economic opportunity, and we strive to achieve our mission in three principal ways. First, CUED conducts original research on employment, economic restructuring, community development, and public policy. Second, CUED works in partnership with community-based organizations, labor unions, advocacy coalitions, state and local governments, and policy think tanks to devise development strategies. Such strategies require research on job access, job quality, business strategies and outcomes, the role of public policy, and the impacts of development on neighborhoods. Third, through specially constructed models of technical assistance to project partners, CUED enters into long-term relationships with organizations to conduct strategic research, to evaluate community and workforce development programs and strategies, and to translate lessons from practice into public policy.

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Hispanics in Philanthropy

Hispanics in Philanthropy (HIP) is a transnational network of grantmakers committed to strengthening Latino communities across the Americas. HIP connects and convenes funders, nonprofits, researchers, and other leaders to identify emerging needs among Latinos as well as best practices for responsive and effective funding of social change. HIP pioneers new philanthropic models by leading collaborative initiatives and has provided grants and training to help build the capacity of more than 800 organizations and leaders.

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