



# Alcance comunitario: Community leaders' shared experiences and learnings

## Introduction

Latin@ leaders across the country helped their communities mitigate the effects of COVID-19 through innovative approaches. On December 7, 2022, Esperanza United had the honor of hearing from three such leaders: **Rosa Guerra** of [Campesinos Sin Fronteras](#) in Arizona, **Elsabel Rincón** of [The Welcome Immigrant Network](#) in Massachusetts, and **Luz Zagal** of [St. Alphonsus Catholic Church](#) in Minnesota.

They shared replicable strategies to reach Latin@ individuals, families, and communities and provide resources to increase health and well-being across the country and in Puerto Rico. In this document, you will find the main themes and successful strategies to reach Latin@ communities effectively during emergency situations.



*Esperanza United has chosen to use “@” in place of the masculine “o” when referring to people or groups that are gender neutral or both masculine and feminine. This decision reflects our commitment to gender inclusion and recognizes the important contributions that women, men, and gender-nonconforming people make to our communities.*



## Emerging themes and best practices to reach Latin@ communities during COVID-19

**Solidarity:** It is important to communicate to constituents that you are there for them. At the beginning of COVID-19, many organizations had to close their doors, however briefly. During that time, these organizations figured out how to their services so as to maintain their commitment to their communities, despite the changing facts on the ground. For example, although their doors were closed, these organizations generally still answered phone calls, answering what questions they could.

**Reflection:** It is important that we reflect together on the work we do every day and recognize the strengths of the communities we serve, how they are experts in their realities, and the resources that are already available. For example, what are community centers, mayors, municipal councils, neighborhood groups, and churches offering in your community? Let us start with realistic expectations about any given organization's capacity (yours or partner organization's) to serve the needs of the community.

**Leadership:** Identify those leaders in the community who are already recognized by their members and invite them to be part of your community outreach. Ask them what resources they recommend and combine their list with yours, bringing information and materials needed to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 to your community.

**Support and education:** Validate and normalize feelings of fear and loneliness in relation to the issue of the pandemic and feelings related to immigration status. Promote reliable resources to inform the community about COVID-19 testing and vaccinations.

**Collaboration:** Identify external resources available to the community and approach them to collaborate. Working together can increase access to and trust in services that promote health and wellness.

## Strategies used by community leaders to reach Latin@ communities during COVID-19

### 1. Identify the community's strengths, resources, and needs.

- Ensure prevention programs and health and wellness education addresses issues relevant to the community you are serving such as immigration and immigrant rights.
- Facilitate COVID-19 testing and vaccination clinics in workplaces during non-traditional hours to accommodate working people's responsibilities. Provide personal protective equipment, face masks, rapid tests, disposable gloves, antibacterial liquid, and disinfectant.



- Make wellness resources available such as financial assistance, food, and mental health services. Have representatives of these services available as part of your community outreach.

## **2. Correct misinformation**

- Use reliable sources of information and disseminate information through known and trusted channels such as newspapers, radio, newsletters, and social networks such as WhatsApp and Facebook.
- Work with health centers and hospitals to bring information to the community.
- Make “wellness calls” directly to members of your community.
- Bring pamphlets to places where community members meet and talk to them about the information in the pamphlet. For example, conduct outreach at bakeries, laundry mats, markets, restaurants, and churches.

## **3. Remove barriers to health**

- Talk to individuals about their health status, health needs, and experiences, promoting relevant wellness resources as applicable.
- Locate health clinics that have experience serving immigrant Latin@s, such as mobile COVID-19 testing and vaccination clinics with bilingual employees and physicians.
- Do not rely solely on referrals community health services. Instead, when possible, bring these services directly into the community.

Community leaders Elsabel, Luz, and Rosa taught us that our voice is powerful and that we can use it to share our stories and experiences to mobilize resources in our communities. Too much of the fear of COVID-19 comes from misinformation and that is why it is necessary to develop trust with the communities we serve and accompany them in solidarity. In addition, let us lean upon promotoras who have earned the respect and trust of the community with their hard work during the COVID-19 pandemic. And finally, let us know that **we are not alone doing this work.**