



ENGAGING LATINOS IN MINNESOTA INSIGHTS AND **BEST PRACTICES** FROM HACER'S COVID-19 RESPONSE

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PURPOSE OF THE GUIDE

This guide was developed for public health organizations, community organizations (both formal and informal), and other organizations that have interest in and funding for effectively reaching Latinos during a public health emergency. This guide can also be used by organizations seeking funding to work with Latino community as strategies to build on how to best work with Latinos.

HOW GUIDE WAS DEVELOPED

To develop this guide, HACER's current and previous COVID-19 Team staff members were interviewed to offer their perspective based on the different phases of the pandemic they experienced with the organization. In addition, previous narrative grant reports submitted to funders were also reviewed for context, successes, and challenges. The themes that emerged from those conversations lay the groundwork for this guide.



ENGAGING LATINOS IN MINNESOTA – **INSIGHTS AND BEST PRACTICES** FROM HACER'S COVID-19 RESPONSE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON THE LATINO POPULATION

In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to a national lockdown in the United States that significantly disrupted social and economic activities for over a year. In Minnesota, the pandemic resulted in the loss of 207,000 jobs in its first year, increased housing insecurity, and forced parents to juggle work with homeschooling. Frontline service workers and health professionals faced heightened risks by continuing to work. The pandemic also exacerbated systemic inequities, affecting the well-being and quality of life for many, particularly the Latino population. Latinos faced unique challenges due to:

- Lack of timely information in Spanish.
- Employment in high-risk jobs, such as the food service industry.
- Lack of health insurance.
- Living in multi-family homes with limited quarantine options.
- Fear of interacting with health and government systems due to legal status.

According to Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) data, Latino Minnesotans had higher COVID-19 positivity rates, hospitalization rates, and age-adjusted death incidences than other racial/ethnic groups in the state.

HACER AS A COVID-19 COMMUNITY COORDINATOR

Hispanic Advocacy and Community Empowerment through Research (HACER), a Minnesota-based nonprofit, was funded as a COVID-19 Community Coordinator (CCC) through MDH to connect Black, Indigenous, and Communities of Color (BIPOC) to testing, vaccinations, and additional resources. HACER hired hotline specialists to connect Latino Minnesotans to essential services and public health coordinators for outreach activities. These efforts included bilingual social media campaigns and collaboration with community partners to reach Latino communities, especially in Greater Minnesota. HACER also hired a vaccine coordinator to organize and host vaccine events in partnership with other community organizations.

HACER played a crucial role in disseminating information about COVID-19 services and translating key information from the Minnesota Governor, MDH, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

BEST PRACTICES FOR ENGAGING WITH LATINOS

- Building Team Capacity
- Considering Specific Contexts
- Establishing Strong Partnerships
- Using Diverse Communication Tools
- Using Data to Inform Work

HACER's comprehensive approach during the COVID-19 pandemic offers valuable insights and best practices for engaging with Latino communities in Minnesota, emphasizing the importance of culturally tailored strategies, strong partnerships, and data-driven decision-making.



BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON THE LATINO POPULATION

In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 pandemic,¹ which led to a global lockdown that paused various social and economic activities for over a year. In Minnesota, the COVID-19 pandemic led to a loss of 207,000 jobs during its first year.² In addition, it increased housing insecurity as some people were no longer able to afford their rent or mortgage due to loss of income, parents had to balance working while homeschooling their children, and frontline service workers and health professionals put their safety at risk by continuing to work during the pandemic. Importantly, the COVID-19 exacerbated the existing systemic inequities that privilege some while reducing the well-being and quality of life of others.

The Latino population was especially impacted due to various reasons, including but not limited to:

- lack of timely information in Spanish;
- many people in the Latino community are employed in jobs with a high risk of exposure, such as the food service industry;
- lack of health insurance;
- some Latinos live in multi-family homes with limited opportunities to quarantine if a person in the home is exposed;
- fear of interaction with health and government systems due to legal status.

According to data from the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) public data dashboards, Latino and Indigenous Minnesotans were testing positive for COVID-19 at a much higher rate than other racial/ethnic demographic groups in the state.³ This remained true when data was broken down by age. Latinos also had the highest rate of hospitalizations from COVID-19 and the highest age-adjusted death incident for COVID-19 deaths.

As the COVID-19 pandemic impacted many lives, governments and nonprofits were tasked with determining how to best distribute a limited amount of resources to the people that needed them.

1. Listings of WHO's response to COVID-19. 2020: [who.int/news/item/29-06-2020-covidtimeline](https://www.who.int/news/item/29-06-2020-covidtimeline)

2. Minnesota and the COVID-19 pandemic: the data: mncompass.org/covid-19

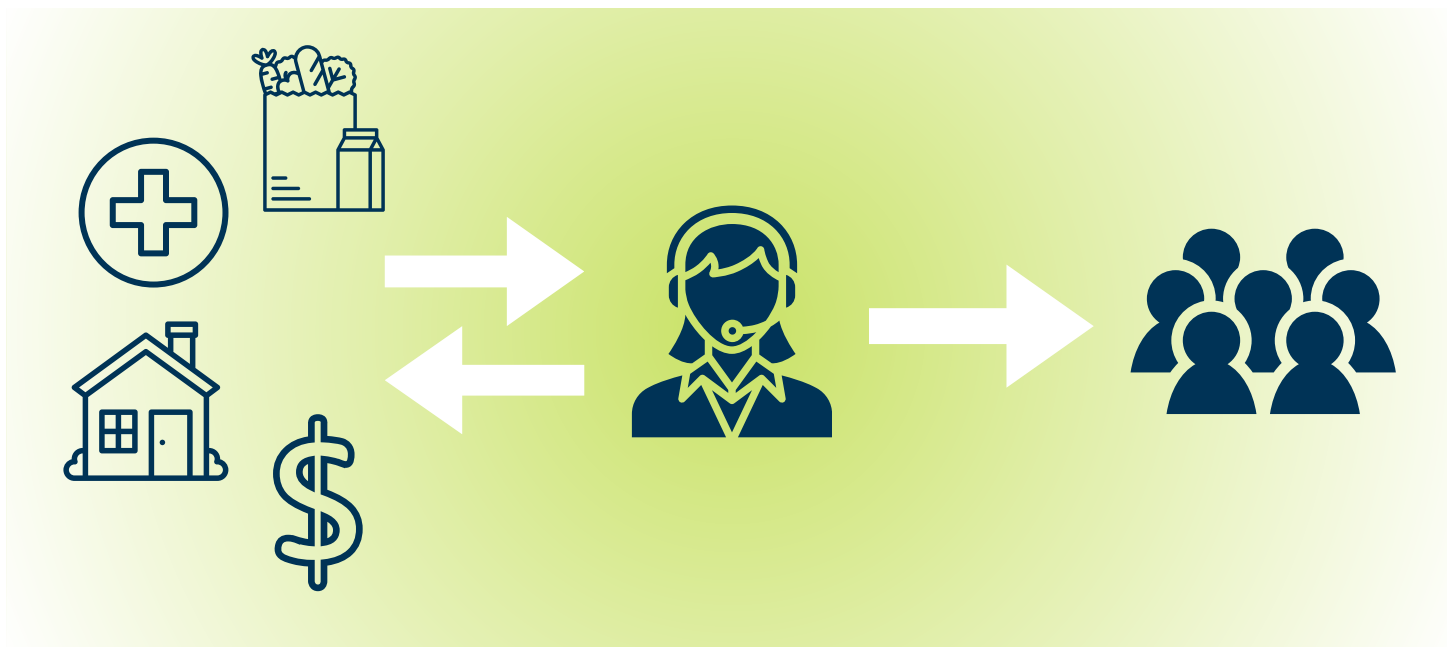
3. COVID-19 Data by Race/Ethnicity: mn.gov/covid19/data/data-by-race-ethnicity/index.js

To meet this need, MDH provided funding to community organizations in the state through the COVID-19 Community Coordinators Program, to bring critical health services to the communities with most need across the state of Minnesota, serving as trusted health messenger for those with the highest risk of contracting COVID-19.

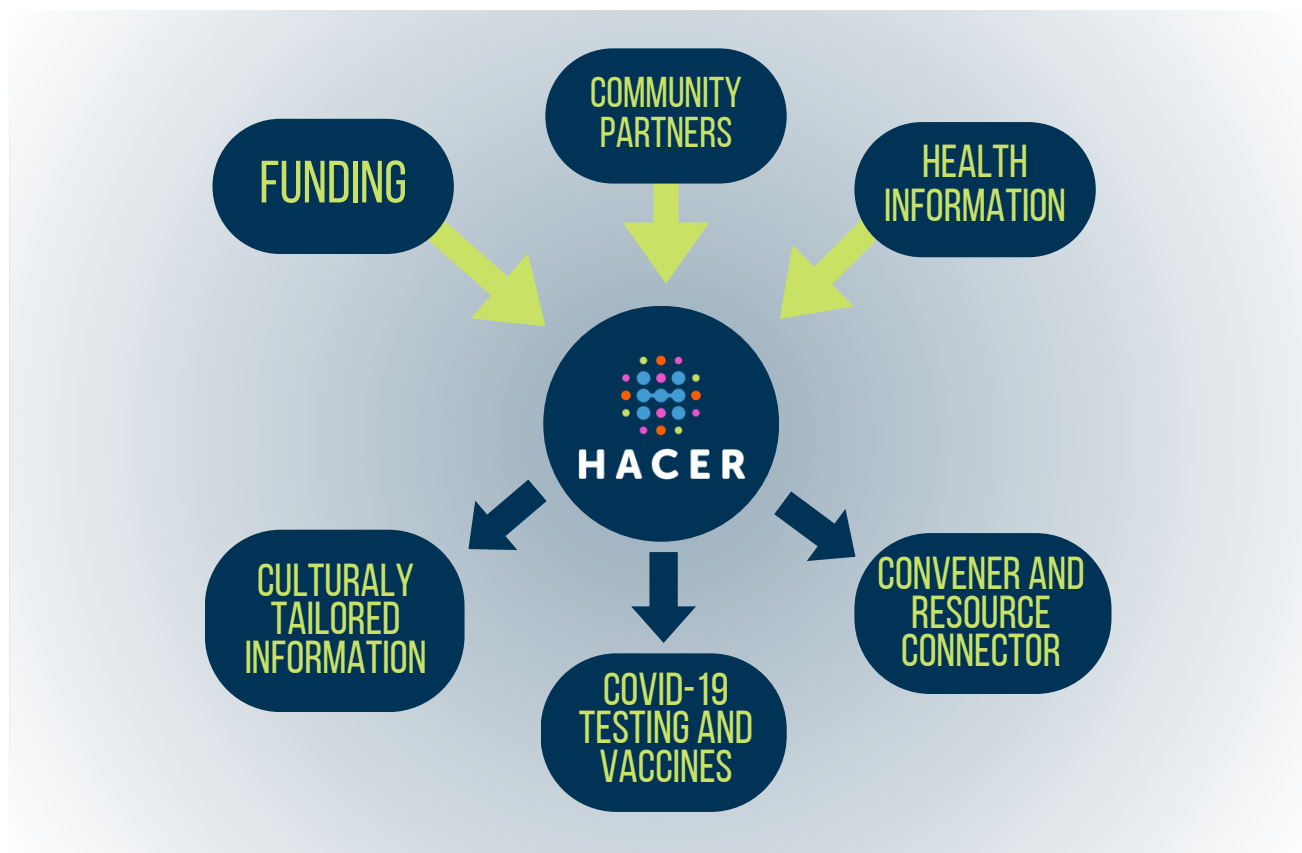
HACER AS A COVID-19 COMMUNITY COORDINATOR

Hispanic Advocacy and Community Empowerment through Research (HACER) is a research and evaluation nonprofit organization based in Minnesota.

In March 2020, HACER was invited by MDH to partner as a trusted messenger, to disseminate information about COVID-19 to Latinos in Minnesota. The goal was to learn about these communities and their needs. Importantly, trusted sources of information were in need as many people were being misguided with false information about COVID-19 and how to respond to the crisis. Furthermore, by the end of 2020, MDH, under the guidance of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), funded HACER and 31 other Minnesota organizations as a COVID-19 Community Coordinator (CCC), a program intended to connect Black, Indigenous, and Communities of Color (BIPOC) to testing, vaccinations, and additional resources as these groups have been the most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.



Through this funding, HACER hired four hotline specialists to connect Latino Minnesotans to a variety of services, including basic needs such as food and shelter, information on COVID-19 testing sites, isolation and quarantine, unemployment benefits, and more. In addition to the hotline specialists, HACER hired three public health coordinators to conduct outreach activities with the aim of reaching Latino Minnesotans and draw them to HACER's hotline, in which the callers could speak with bilingual and bicultural specialists to get connected to the resources they needed. These outreach efforts included bilingual social media campaigns and contacting community partners to share information about the hotline. HACER focused its outreach efforts in Greater Minnesota to offer these services to Latino people living in parts of the state with fewer resources. Once a vaccine for COVID-19 was developed, HACER also used this funding to hire a vaccine coordinator to coordinate the planning and execution of vaccine events. HACER began to host its own vaccine events in partnership with other community organizations in both the Twin Cities Metro Area and Greater Minnesota.



HACER played an important role in sharing information with the Latino community about the services available related to COVID-19 and to translate and disseminate important information from the Governor, MDH, and CDC.

BEST PRACTICE FOR REACHING LATINOS

BEST PRACTICE #1

BUILDING CAPACITY OF YOUR TEAM TO DO THE WORK

TEAM MAKE UP

- Hotline specialists
- Coordinators
 - Vaccine coordinators
 - Public health coordinators
 - General coordinator
- Digital communications
- Evaluator / Research Associate
- Director of Operations
- Administrative Director
- Executive Director



Having a well-equipped team to lead the work and engage with Latinos is one of the critical first steps and sets the tone for how the team approaches the work. Creating cohesion and alignment within the team about purpose, goals, and objectives will ensure that the work remains focused, which is important given the array of competing priorities and needs in the community. Importantly, consider the following as you develop your team:

<p>TRAINING AND COMPETENCY</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a good understanding of Latino culture, both generally and the understanding that nuances, traditions, customs, and beliefs vary across different nationalities. Having staff that speak Spanish is key. • Receive training in public health concepts so that they have foundational knowledge on how public health initiatives work. Training can look many forms, including taking courses and webinars offered by public health institutions, studying online resources such as those provided by the CDC, or university courses.
<p>CLEAR DEFINITION OF ROLES AND COMMUNICATION</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having clear definition of roles is critical, though it is important to recognize that roles may need to change and adapt as the situation changes. • Clear communication among frontline staff and the administrative team is also important to ensure the team is being fiscally responsible and have adequate funds to complete the work.
<p>DEVELOP AND ADAPT TEAM PROCESSES</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop clear processes for activities, including coordination of events, reporting, inventory of materials, distribution of financial incentives, establish who is going to serve as interpreters at events, and more.

It is also important to consider the specific contexts and experiences many Latinos are going through. For example, immigrants that have recently arrived to the U.S. are adapting to a new setting, language, and culture, and therefore may need a lot of support navigating a system that they are not accustomed to, including finding employment. In addition, there is a lot of mistrust among some Latinos with government and health systems from negative and harmful experiences with those systems in and outside of the U.S., which often means some Latinos do not feel comfortable sharing their personal identifiable information with government or community organizations. On top of that, some Latinos do not have legal immigration status in the U.S., have limited literacy, and few years of formal education, all of which require organizations and systems to adapt to meet the varying needs individuals may have. Finally, it's important to note that many Latinos do not want to consider themselves a "burden" and therefore may be less likely to seek out or accept social services for fear of being judged or being looked at negatively, in addition to fear over being stigmatized for testing positive for COVID-19.

BEST PRACTICE #2

ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING STRONG PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships with a variety of agencies played an essential role in HACER's ability to reach Latinos across the state. HACER pursued relationships with both organizations that were highly focused on serving Latinos, and those who were not explicitly focusing on this population. Through this approach, HACER was able to reach thousands of Latinos with unique experiences and perspectives. Working with local community centers offered the highest reach.



TYPES OF PARTNERS

- **Arts centers**
- **Churches**
- **Government**
 - Capitol
 - Consulates
 - County governments
 - Fire departments
 - Libraries
 - Parks
- **Businesses**
 - Coffee shops
 - Hotels
 - Shopping centers
 - Supermarkets
 - Convention centers
- **Media**
 - Radios
 - TV stations
- **Offices**
- **Schools**
- **Social services**
 - Community centers
 - Community clinics
 - Community groups
 - Educational centers
 - Food shelves
 - Healthcare organizations



KEY STRATEGIES: CONSIDERATIONS FOR ENGAGING WITH PARTNERS



Work with partners with established audiences. This allows you to have a general idea of how many people you can reach or service with a given activity or event.



Share flyers and content with partners to expand the reach of your outreach materials.



Work with community leaders—both formal and informal—as an opportunity to leverage existing trusted relationships in the community.



Make sure that the relationship with partners is reciprocal. In a true partnership, both sides contribute to maximize success. This can be as simple as promoting your partner's events and services on your own social media sites. This could also mean providing funding.



Practice patience when working with partners. Relationship building and mobilizing resources takes time. Knowing when to be patient and when to push is an important skill.



Pursue multicultural partnerships. Partnering with other multicultural organizations offers the opportunity to strengthen relationships with other BIPOC communities and learn from each other and it can be an opportunity to combine resources to reach more people.



Establish good relationships with consulates. Consulates are trusted institutions for many Latinos with various legal statuses and needs, so collaborating with consulates offers an opportunity to connect with people with high need.

BEST PRACTICE #3

USING A DIVERSE RANGE OF COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Using an array of strategies, both in person and online, is critical to reaching Latinos; no one single strategy will work for all. The strategies HACER used evolved during the pandemic based on information available and safety precautions needed at any given time.

The following activities worked for HACER to promote the hotline and share important COVID-19 guidelines and information with Minnesota Latinos:

#INFOMARTES / #INFOHACER AND VIDEO SERIES

Invite speakers to speak over Facebook live and share important wellness information with followers in Spanish. Giving the series its own name helps with branding and helps the audience know what to expect; HACER initially called this series infoMartes (TalkTuesday in English). Examples of presenters can include representatives from departments of health that share important information on how to stay safe and prevent the spread of viruses, as well as nonprofit organizations that can speak about wellness topics, such as mental health and domestic violence. You can also create videos; for example, HACER also produced with MLatino Media a series of six short videos where representatives from Latino organizations posed questions to experts from MDH.

InfoMartes eventually evolved into infoHACER, which allowed HACER to touch on other relevant topics more broadly, including long-COVID, nutrition, and more.



COVID-19 TESTING SITES AND VACCINE OUTREACH

Be present at health events, such as testing sites. HACER staff attended MDH-sponsored community testing and vaccine sites in the Twin Cities and Southern Minnesota to help and offer interpretation services for Spanish speakers that visited the testing site. The hotline was promoted during testing events so that testing site attendees could call if they were interested in learning more. In addition, testing site attendees could call the hotline if there were no Spanish speakers present and one of HACER's hotline specialists would provide real-time interpretation between the person and the provider. HACER also hosted its own vaccination events in collaboration with MDH and other community partners.

Once vaccines became more widely available and HACER began hosting its own regularly, HACER hired a vaccine coordinator to specifically oversee working with MDH to coordinate these events. The public health coordinators were more dedicated to outreach to bring Latinos to HACER's vaccine events, encourage testing, and share timely information to the community, including debunking myths and informing against fake news related to vaccines, testing, and whether the pandemic was truly over.



KEY STRATEGY: CONSIDER WEATHER AND SPACE WHEN PLANNING EVENTS

Consider your geographic context and how that might inform your ability to host events during specific times of the year. For example, in Minnesota, it was near impossible to host outdoor events between November and April, given the likelihood of freezing and subzero temperatures, which discourage people from going outside.



PRESENTATIONS AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Offer presentations to local partners and organizations to share information about available resources. In HACER's case, the organizations that were presented to worked with Latino communities across the state of Minnesota and had various missions and focuses. HACER also spent time in various community settings, such as resource fairs to share information with the community about the hotline and answer any questions. This community outreach also evolved over time; HACER created its own flyers and educational materials based on what was being released by MDH and CDC. These materials were compilations of dense scientific information into more digestible information that was also translated into Spanish.



FLYERS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Prepare an array of promotional flyers to share with various organizations, including grocery stores, clinics, consulates, and other locations frequented by Latinos. In addition, post on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter extensively to reach more people through engaging posts, photos, and videos in English and Spanish.

MASK AND THERMOMETER DISTRIBUTION

Take advantage of resources and materials available (such as thermometers and mask in the case of COVID-19). During the first year of funding, HACER staff distributed masks at outreach events and thermometers to Latino owned businesses that wanted or needed a thermometer to use at their workplace. As time went on, HACER no longer distributed thermometers but did offer masks and hand sanitizers at COVID-19 testing and vaccine events, in addition to offering home testing kits for families to take.





KEY STRATEGIES: MESSAGING MATTERS

Consider how the information is presented:

- Use statistics and information from trusted sources of information – be specific and intentional about the information shared
- Make sure the information is available in Spanish
- Use succinct and high impact materials, like infographics and flyers
- Offer tailored information to adapt to different education levels
- Compile and summarize technical information

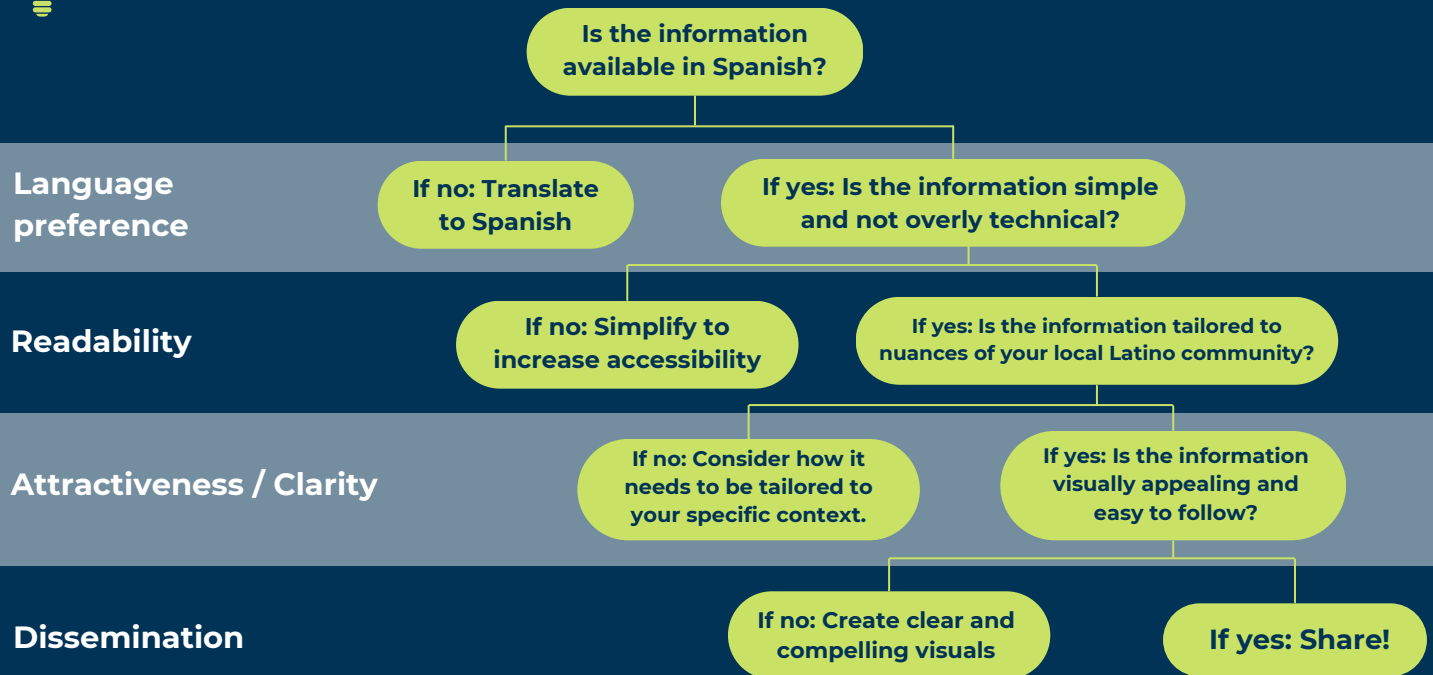
Tie in the importance and role of family:

- Messaging that emphasizing the importance of taking care of the family can work really well
- Youth can also play an important role in being advocates to convince their parents but also serve as systems navigators if the youth speaks English and the parents do not

Offering information in Spanish is critical and necessary to ensure that Latinos that prefer Spanish can receive the information they need to make important choices about their lives and their health. The decision tree below offers some considerations to keep in mind when deciding to engage or deliver information to Latinos.



RESOURCE: DECISION TREE FOR CREATING MATERIALS FOR SPANISH SPEAKERS



BEST PRACTICE #4

USING DATA TO INFORM THE WORK

DATA COLLECTION

Collecting data in a systematic, useful, and ethical way allows you to make informed decisions about how to best allocate time and resources to reach Latinos.

To conduct the evaluation of the CCC program, various strategies were used; these approaches can be used by organizations small and large to better track their data:

- **Outreach.** HACER's outreach activities were tracked by the public health coordinators in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to understand which activities were being implemented and how many people were engaged through those activities.
- **Communications and social media.** HACER's social media activities were also tracked in an Excel spreadsheet using the values generated on social sites (Facebook and Instagram) on reach and impressions.
- **Hotline.** HACER's hotline calls were tracked using a participant tracking form and was entered into Microsoft Forms. This tracking form included:
 - Demographic questions, including county lived in and language the call was conducted in.
 - Questions about COVID-19 testing and vaccinations
 - Wrap around support such as food, housing, healthcare, employment/finances, and other supports
 - Outcome of the call
 - How caller heard about the hotline



KEY STRATEGY

This bird's-eye view of our activities helped HACER plan for which events and partners to engage with.



KEY STRATEGY

Excel and Pivot tables go a long way to analyze this type of information. No advanced software needed!



KEY STRATEGY

Knowing which county callers were calling from helped HACER in two ways:

- Identify which county resources the HACER team should research to best service people from those counties.
- Identify which counties HACER was receiving the fewest calls from to conduct more outreach in those counties.

- Whether it was the first time the caller used the hotline.
- Reason for calling.
- Callers identifying as being born outside the United States.
- Whether caller was calling for interpretation services at a clinic site.
- Whether the caller was calling to ask for information to disseminate at their organization.



KEY STRATEGY

Using a free website called **datawrapper**, HACER generated maps it used internally to visualize the reach it had had across the state.

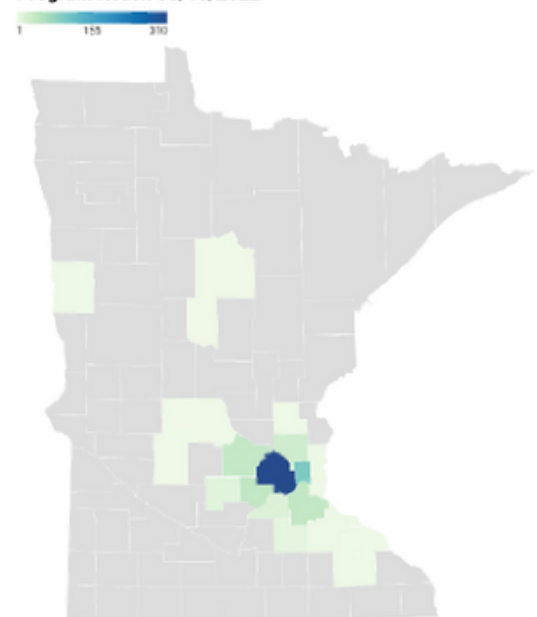
DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Clean and analyze the data using Excel or a statistical package like Stata, if appropriate. For hotline calls, assign a unique ID to each caller to deidentify the information and for analysis in the future. HACER generated descriptive charts to show reach of the hotline and any relevant outcomes. HACER analyzed service types by different demographics and generated graphs to show these how demographics looked across different service types. This tracking also allowed HACER to follow up with hotline callers that had consented to be called back in the future with additional resources.

LIMITATIONS

These approaches must be viewed in light of their limitations. First, to determine unique IDs, phone numbers were used—some callers used the same phone number across multiple individuals, so this could lead to underestimating the number of actual people that contacted HACER’s COVID-19 hotline. In addition, there was a high percentage of missing data because callers could decline to answer some questions. For HACER, all the tracking form questions were voluntary to the caller, so if they did not feel comfortable responding, the hotline specialists were instructed to leave the question blank. For its vaccine events, HACER instructed specialists to complete a separate registration form for callers, which was different from the tracking form used for all other callers. The registration form used for signing callers up for HACER’s vaccine events was through Microsoft Bookings and only included key demographic questions, which also contributed to high percentage of missing data.

Program Reach 06/13/2022



Map: HACER - Source: HACER COVID-19 Hotline - Created with Datawrapper

Sample map created with datawrapper

CONCLUSION

MOVING FORWARD

The experience of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted critical areas for improvement and presented opportunities for future growth in serving Latino communities. The following recommendations offer a hopeful path forward:

- **Combatting myths:** It is important to have strong efforts to dispel misinformation and myths circulating within the community. The rapid spread of information, both positive and negative, within the Latino community underscored the necessity of accurate and beneficial messaging.
- **Building relationships:** Strengthen ties with churches and other organizations to leverage their influence and reach within the community is very important
- **Expanding contact lists:** Get connected with organizations with large audiences to enhance outreach and communication.
- **Seek and incorporate community input:** Continue to listen to community to tailor messaging effectively to community needs, and actively incorporate community feedback into programming to ensure that it aligns with community needs.
- **Resource database:** Develop and maintain a comprehensive resource database for easy access to necessary information.
- **Compensation and funding:** This type of work requires significant time and effort; it is important to give organizations adequate funding and adequate time to do the work well.

The resilience, strength, and solidarity within the Latino community during the COVID-19 pandemic were remarkable, with people coming together to offer assistance to each other in a way that they had never done before. This desire to help and support each other, which is a key aspect of Latino culture, was an important component that cannot be forgotten.



The hotline area is just helping people, finding the resources that people need... we often had people call back or email back like thanking us, and I don't know, people were just really thankful that they were able to get the resources that they needed at that time.

- HACER hotline specialist

In addition, the significant volunteer support from other communities and a strong commitment from health institutions to work closely with the Latino community, regardless of immigration status or language barriers allowed HACER and other organizations to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and ultimately save lives.

HACER learned that in times of crisis, we must remain open to learning from the communities we serve. Adapting to their needs and acquiring the best tools to respond promptly and appropriately is crucial. Emergencies magnify existing issues, especially for BIPOC communities. By listening, learning, and being flexible, we can better address the immediate needs and work towards long-term improvements in service and support.

The future holds promise as we implement these recommendations, continue to learn from our experiences, and strengthen our community partnerships. Through collaboration and dedication, we can build a more resilient and supportive environment for all.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all funders that trusted in HACER to implement this critical COVID-19 work and for working towards making Minnesota a safer and healthier place for.

Thank you to the National Network of Public Health Institutes (NNPHI) for this funding opportunity, which has allowed HACER to document and disseminate these best practices.

We regret the lives lost during COVID-19 due to our health systems not being prepared to meet the needs of the communities that have been the most systemically and historically excluded from health and other systems. To prevent this in the future, it is critical that we work in partnership with other organizations but above all else, ensure that the work we do is grounded in reality and driven by and for communities of color.

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