

## SKAGIT LATINX ADVISORY COMMITTEE & COVID PREVENTION TEAM

by Community Action of Skagit County

Region 10 • Mount Vernon, Washington  
communityactionsskagit.org



### COVID • Immigrants

#### INITIATIVE OVERVIEW

In March 2020, Skagit County Public Health and The North Sound Accountable Communities of Health approached Community Action, asking that we help **convene community stakeholders to learn and strategize together around skyrocketing rates of COVID-19 transmission among Latinx, Spanish-speaking and Indigenous community members.** (Note: In this context, we use the word *Indigenous* to indicate those who self-identify with Indigenous groups from Mexico and Central America, especially Mixteco and Trique from Northern Mexico. Many of these Skagit County community members do not identify as Hispanic or Latino, which they feel represents European colonist heritage in the Americas.)

Community Action was asked to play this role because for many years we have facilitated the monthly Skagit Latinx Advisory Committee, which is charged with advising the agency on how to better serve and develop leadership among low-income Latinx, Spanish-speaking and Indigenous community members.

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The LAC network includes 150+ representatives of 30+ nonprofits, businesses, educational institutions, and individual community members. The LAC democratically elects a representative to the Community Action Board of Directors, who serves in a Client Sector position.



Community Action has supported the LAC with staffing and coordination as part of our larger Community Engagement & Equity Strategy. For inclusion and access to participation, the monthly meetings are bilingual English/Spanish with interpretation provided. In addition to sharing resources for cross referrals, the group has hosted public policy listening session with elected officials, developed a Migrant Student Leader internship program, and participants have joined our advocacy trips to Olympia.

Due to these long-standing relationships, and due to flexible funding such as Community Services Block Grant, the agency was able to prioritize organizing the community around the high and disproportionate COVID-19 transmission rates, severe illness and hospitalization in Skagit County among the Latinx, Spanish Speaking and Indigenous households.

The Mission of the Latinx Advisory Committee is:

- Networking: Authentic, reciprocal relationship building.

- Advising Decision-Makers: Community Action and beyond.
- Strengthening Community: Supporting leadership growth of people with lived experience.

## LOCAL NEED ADDRESSED BY INITIATIVE

In May 2020, 75% positive COVID-19 tests and 19% Skagit County population were Latino and Hispanic.

Why was the disease hitting these neighbors hardest?

- **Essential workers:** Farm workers, food processors, warehousing, and other essential workers were not able to work remotely, stay at home or otherwise isolate themselves to avoid the disease.
- **Housing unaffordability crisis:** Due to the high cost and low availability of housing, especially multifamily apartments, many low-wage workers live in overcrowded conditions. Many families double up to share expenses.
- **Healthcare access:** Especially at the beginning of the pandemic, testing was not available during the hours essential workers had off.
- **Lots of information,** sometimes too much: National, state and local public health agencies did a fantastic job of providing COVID prevention information and materials in English and Spanish. From LAC partners we heard the information was overwhelming. In our listening sessions, we heard that the people they serve get trusted information from friends, families and service providers with whom they have long-standing relationships. Fliers, websites and other sources of public information were not as accessible or used.

## ROLE OF CSBG FUNDS

CSBG funds initial planning, early implementation, staffing, needs assessment support, strategic planning support, data support, and evaluation.

## TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT

The team takes collective actions by sharing wisdom and experience, developing community organizing models and resources for services, and advocating strategies for systemic change.

Community Action provided two levels of support for the collaboration: Direct service community-based outreach and education, and Community Convening.

**Direct service:** COVID-19 prevention education and community-based outreach. This part of the project was led by our WIC (Women, Infant and Children) program staff, and funded through Skagit County Public Health, and included:

- **Outreach and education** were provided by WIC staff who are native Spanish speakers and have existing long-term relationships and trust in the community.
- **The outreach took place where people work and live:** At farms with farmworkers, and in neighborhoods. Staff would, for example, call all clients and contacts in a specific apartment complex to let them know the time they would be there.
- **Health and safety supplies:** Staff parked in the parking lot, and with safe social distance provided families with needed diapers, household cleaners, detergent, masks, and more.

**Community convening & coordination:** This part of the project was led by our Community Engagement Team, and included:

- **Documented community organizing model:** Research and story-gathering to document a successful local COVID prevention community organizing model. We did key stakeholder interviews with our own community outreach staff in the WIC program (Women, Infant and Children), staff at Catholic Community Services Farmworker Center, Mount Vernon School District Migrant Student Program staff,
- **Weekly meetings:** Participants of the LAC monthly meetings and other community stakeholders were invited to participate in weekly one-hour, remote, bilingual prevention

team meetings via Zoom. The purpose of the meetings

- For Public Health and other decision-makers to hear from partner agency staff, community volunteers and others who were doing COVID prevention education on the ground in the community: at farms, in farmworker housing, at food banks, home visits with COVID safety protocols, etc. What was working? What's needed?
- Meetings were weekly April-November, and then continued into 2021 with monthly meetings. These will be suspended when the partners agree that the need no longer requires it.
- Partners stepped up to support the project, including Northwest Agricultural Business Center providing staff to do interpretation for several months.
- **Coordination of PPE and other in-kind donations:** Our Food Distribution Center was the hub to receive and distribute tens of thousands of masks and other PPE. Our Skagit Volunteer Center staff connected donors to Community Action programs and partner agencies to distribute health and hygiene items.
- **Public policy listening sessions and leadership growth:** With 24 meetings in 2020, the Prevention Team essentially hosted 24 public policy listening sessions and focus groups. In addition to Skagit County Public Health, listening sessions happened with chambers of commerce and EDASC, the Low Income Housing Alliance Policy Team, Governor Inslee's Safe Start Leadership Group on Social Supports, state legislators and their staff, and members of Congress.
- **Latinx Business COVID Research & Outreach:** When participants raised the need for outreach to Latinx business owners, Community Action hired a native-spanish speaking entrepreneur to survey business owners around what COVID education and supplies they needed, and then direct outreach to over 40 businesses. Community Action, the LAC and the Mount Vernon Chamber co-hosted an education event viewed on Facebook over 1,000 times.

## EVIDENCE-BASED OUTCOMES

There are challenges with data collection due to the community-wide organizing model -- we cannot always get data being collected by partners and Public Health. Public policy listening sessions have been held with state legislators, members of congress, Gov. Inslee's Safe Start Leadership Group on Social Supports, WLIHA, and others.

- The community organizing model: Community Action and other agencies are learning from this collaboration and our other outreach projects, such as Opioid Street Outreach
- Skagit Latinx COVID Prevention Team Q&A: A compilation of the participants questions and answers from Public Health and other sources can be found here: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1aN9v2OVtRstWnlwFzW2ctopNzK9Gn6C53f-5og-6cUU/edit>
- Real-time policy shifts: From participants' suggestions, Skagit County Public Health gathered resources, pivoted strategies, and responded. Testing site hours were expanded so workers could access testing in the evening and weekends. A mobile testing clinic targeting farmworkers set up in a Burlington city park on the weekend.
- Leadership growth and community service: Through the Prevention Team, community volunteers connected with nonprofit partners to assist with outreach and donations. Videos were produced in Spanish and Indigenous languages. We connected members of Congress and state legislators to Spanish-speaking community members who experienced COVID and the associated family and housing issues.
- New collaborations, doing more together than we can alone: We cannot count the creative connections made. For example, in 2021 Skagit Gleaners and Skagit Transit partnered to provide vaccine sign-up assistance to seniors, Spanish-speakers and others with limited computer access.

## EQUITY LENS

The team's strategy is to reduce inequitable transmission of COVID via grassroots organizing model and sharing resources and strategies in Spanish with other providers serving Spanish-speaking, Indigenous and Latinx community members.

## CUSTOMER VOICE

The project itself is a source of customer voice as it provides a source of direct advice to the Skagit County Public Health and other decision-makers about on-the-ground community needs and questions.

## Contact

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