



Community Connections

Basics for Working with Community-Based Organizations

“Thank you for coming out to simply sit down and listen to us. The simple act of listening and learning whether it’s with our community or with organizers makes all the difference. Power and change come from the simple act of reaching out, learning and listening. Thank you.”

Monserat Gomez, TODEC Youth Leader

Community Connections

Since June 2022, OCPSC has held over 25 Community Connections meetings with staff representing CBOs across the State. Community members and CBOs throughout the state passionately shared about the region where they work and play, their unrelenting challenges, and their experiences with priority issues and community resilience. Attendance at each Community Connections meeting was organized by region or around a specific population, such as veterans, farmworkers, immigrants and refugees, and youth. As CBO staff shared experiences, OCPSC staff listened and learned.

The Office of Community Partnerships and Strategic Communications (OCPSC)

is powered by partnership, driven by equity and inclusion, and coordinates resources for an ecosystem of community-based organizations that serve as trusted messengers to diverse California communities.

OCPSC, housed within the Governor’s Office of Planning and Research, executes campaigns related to the state’s highest priority public awareness and community outreach efforts. As the single state entity coordinating California’s most important community engagement efforts, the Office allows the state to realize more inclusive and effective outcomes while preventing equity gaps in statewide outreach.

The purpose of Community Connections is to engage directly with community-based organizations and other civil society organizations partnered with Vaccinate ALL 58 to:

- Gain a deeper understanding of priority communities and CBOs
- Strengthen relationships between OCPSC and CBOs
- Create continuous feedback loops of information to shape strategies and plans



Community-Based Organizations are Trusted Messengers

Community Connections is a platform that OCPSC has built to increase a deeper understanding of CBOs – who they serve, where they work, and how they conduct their outreach. CBOs represent communities and serve as a bridge between the State and communities -- to youth and elders, parents and students, friends, families, and neighbors. They serve the community by being ambassadors, linking to resources, and providing access to information through language and cultural interpretation or transportation. With first-hand knowledge of the communities' values and issues of concern – CBOs are credible, trusted messengers of the State's highest-priority public awareness efforts.

Powered by Partnerships

Partnerships with these trusted messengers enable engagement with populations disproportionately impacted by priority issues and mistrust of government from legacies of marginalization. These partnerships reach communities where disparities impacting well-being are most pronounced.

Driven by Equity

A deep commitment to equity and inclusion for all Californians unites CBOs and OCPSC in partnership. Conducting culturally customized, targeted outreach efforts in hard-to-reach communities requires acknowledging the circumstances which create significant social, environmental, and health inequities. While the State provides messaging and operational support, CBOs adapt messaging with sensitivity to the lived experiences of those served. CBOs reported the following barriers to accessing resources in their communities:

- 1. Barriers to access including information, language, transportation, technology and cultural norms.** Barriers to accessing resources are boundless when accounting for the unique experiences of each community across California. Access to facilities may be hindered by distance, lack of transportation, lack of identification or lack of knowledge. A lack of knowledge may be a result of language barriers or limited access to technology, among others.
- 2. Mistrust of government institutions due to historical legacies.** CBOs approach interactions with their communities with empathy, acknowledging that mistrust results from a complex mix of sociopolitical variables and historic community experiences of government policies.
- 3. Mis/disinformation shared on widely used social media platforms and personal networks.** Often, the same social media platforms that are the de facto internet for some communities (Facebook, WeChat, and WhatsApp, etc.) were also driving forces for mis/disinformation related to priority issues such as health and climate.

CBOs persist while knowing all too well of seemingly insurmountable barriers. They are trusted messengers because they have the cultural competency to deliver the thoughtful and respectful messaging communities are more likely to receive. Nonjudgmentally and compassionately, CBOs meet people where they are.



Coordinating Resources

OCPSC builds upon the regional and statewide communications infrastructure laid by previous state efforts, ensuring that statewide messages are updated, accurate, and culturally appropriate. Coordinated resources, including funding, research, data, communications assets, multi-channel messaging, relationship-building, and networking, were factors in the success of the Census 2020, the VA58 campaign, and CBOs associated with the effort.

With support from OCPSC and their community expertise, CBOs reported successes in expanding their capacity and relaying highly effective vaccine outreach messengers trusted by target populations. In Community Connections meetings, three themes of successful outreach emerged:

- 1. Collaboration and coalition-building with local schools, businesses, and CBOs create a greater capacity to reach more community members.** The San Diego Refugee Communities Coalition (SDRCC) comprises local ethnic CBOs and coordinates action to address structural inequities immigrant and refugee communities face. Together, they translate information into over 10 languages. Along with campaign messaging, SDRCC connects their communities to resources and information on housing, healthcare, education, and food.
- 2. Strategic and consistent placement of outreach events.** Vision y Compromiso conducts outreach activities at laundromats, ethnic markets, and food distribution sites during evenings and weekends when they know community members are likely to be available. The Mixteco Indigena Community Organizing Project reaches agricultural workers by visiting local Mexican bakeries early, catching them before they start their day's work.
- 3. Culturally relevant communications from trusted messengers.** Asian Health Services conducted a survey that found that family, friends, and neighbors were the second most trusted sources of information on priority issues. Other CBOs conduct successful social media outreach in several languages, leading some community members to seek vital resources. Communities trust those who are closest to them.

Results

As a result of the Community Connections meetings, OCPSC developed products designed to meet CBO needs. Three four-page laminated folders with simple, illustrated climate and COVID-19 information in English and Spanish were created to be used by promotoras and outreach workers as a prop for conversation going door-to-door or at events with limited English-speaking populations. Several videos highlighting the lived experiences of farmworker, older adults, and people with disabilities was produced following the Community Connections meetings.