



# Trusted Messenger Success Factors



## Action Brief

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**Photo:** Orange County Coastkeeper conducting outreach on water conservation at a community event in Midway City.

## How to be an effective trusted messenger

- 1. Trust and credibility.** Trusted messengers often serve communities with a historic mistrust of government. To build trust, CBOs and ethnic media work together to provide accurate and credible information to communities they serve.
- 2. Communication multiplier effect.** People are more likely to trust information received from friends, family members, or faith leaders. Trusted messengers create chains of information in which sharing a message with one person can lead to the person sharing the message to their social network.
- 3. Storytelling and culturally tailored personal interactions.** In one-on-one interactions with community members, trusted messengers listen with intention and with empathy. Authentic conversations humanize complex issues, raise awareness, and can mobilize public support.
- 4. Deep knowledge of communities.** CBOs and ethnic media work intentionally to adapt to their community's distinctive characteristics and are embedded in civic life. They recognize diversity within communities and know messages resonate differently across age groups, genders, or occupations.

This **Action Brief** is a product of the series "**Trusted Messenger Learning Labs: From Discovery to Action.**" It is based on the fifth session, held on October 26, 2023, and features excerpts from a discussion with Hatzune Aguilar (Director of Strategic Engagement, Communities for a New California Education Fund), Marianne Hugo, (Community Outreach Program Manager, Orange County Coastkeeper), and Regina Brown Wilson (Executive Director, California Black Media).

## What Partners are Saying and Doing

### *Why are trusted messengers so impactful?*

**Hatzune Aguilar:** In our civic engagement work, the latest polling and recent research have confirmed people are less trusting of established entities. Who they trust even more is themselves or their family members or their neighbors – somebody who they interact with and talk to daily. We talk to one resident with the idea of not only integrating messaging into their own lives, but also getting them excited to share it with somebody else. Maybe their parents or an uncle or aunt, or somebody else who needs this information.

**Marianne Hugo:** We try to make a difference by not only offering accurate information but also offering experiences for youth because experiences can really make an impression, especially regarding environmental protection. Then the children and the young people go back to their families and to their circles and talk all about the environment and actions that people can take to improve their lifestyles. It's a contagious thing when kids get excited about something. Adding an experience along with the information makes a big difference.

**Regina Brown Wilson:** Our ethnic media organization works with community-based news outlets throughout the state. From a state level, we're working so that we have fact-based information is checked, checked, and probably rechecked before it's sent out to ensure people can trust us. What happens I think a lot of times is you build that level of trust over time. The work that we do is complementary to what CBOs do. We uplift and magnify the work that they are doing.

### *How do trusted messengers advance equity?*

**Regina Brown Wilson:** As journalists, we paint an accurate picture in an honest way. I believe that creates that opportunity to change narrative by magnifying stories so people can see issues differently. Communities knowing these stories ultimately helps them advocate for policy changes, which then leads to structural changes in the way people behave.

**Hatzune Aguilar:** We engage residents with information and resources to enable them to advocate for their neighborhood. We see in a lot of our neighborhoods, the tale of two cities, where one side has paved sidewalks, gutters and proximity to grocery stores, and the other side that does not. We work hard to interrupt this systemic imbalance in infrastructure and access to resources. We listen for what is missing and how we can fill in gaps.

**Marianne Hugo:** We make sure that we hit all the demographics. We go to multiple places. We have to reach young people. We need to reach working parents and seniors. We find someplace in the community where all those people go, or you can go to more than one place. This is a challenge you can get over, and the more you do it, the easier it gets.

### *How do trusted messengers overcome challenges in reaching communities?*

**Marianne Hugo:** The first challenge is how we become ingrained in a community. When we do our recruiting and hiring, we look for people that have a background in the language we need for an area, or they are from that area. People are more receptive to somebody who can speak their language and understands where they are coming from. Also, one of our mantras is 'we go where the people go'.

**Hatzune Aguilar:** We have seconds to establish a connection with an individual who we may be speaking to for the first time. We need to get their attention in the moment and make them feel like they want to speak to us. It's important for us to develop our stories. We practice talking about how issues are meaningful to us as individuals because then we can have more authentic and relatable conversations with others.

**Regina Brown Wilson:** Everybody has social media and can put information out. But what you have is a lot of people talking all at the same time and nobody listens. You need to have a bigger microphone to make sure your message is getting out. Ethnic media cuts through the noise and the chatter that happens on social media. I think that the more relationships are built between CBOs and ethnic media, the more messages will be heard.

**The Office of Community Partnerships and Strategic Communications**, housed within the Office of Planning and Research, initiates and executes campaigns related to the state's highest priority public awareness and community outreach efforts. The intent of a single state entity coordinating California's most important campaigns is so that the state can realize more inclusive and effective outcomes while preventing equity gaps in statewide outreach.

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