



LEARNING BRIEF

March 28, 2024

No. 1.3

Community Connections San Diego



Community-based organizations and OCPSC staff together outside the City Heights/Weingart Branch Library in San Diego.

Purpose, Outcomes, and Process

The November 2023 Community Connections meeting engaged 16 of OCPSC-funded community-based organizations (CBOs) in the City Heights neighborhood of San Diego to learn about the progress and challenges faced while conducting outreach to refugee and migrant communities for Office of Community Partnership and Strategic Communications (OCPSC) campaigns. Many of the attendees are members of the San Diego Refugee Communities Coalition (SDRCC). SDRCC is a collective of 12 ethnic CBOs whose mission is to lead coordinated action that addresses structural inequities faced by refugee communities. This work builds upon the October 2022 Community Connections meeting in City Heights. We gained deeper knowledge about the characteristics of refugee and migrant communities. Yumi Sera, Executive Director of OCPSC and Braden Kay, Extreme Heat Program Manager of the Office of

“It’s important that the community and OCPSC have these dialogues, so there is continuity as far as working together, what the message is and what methods we are using. That’s something that will make our work more effective in the future.”

Abdi Mohamoud
Founder & Executive Director,
Horn of Africa - Member, San
Diego Refugee Communities

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Planning and Research (OPR), facilitated the discussion with questions around trusted ways to reach people, mistrust of government, and how to strengthen government and civil society relations.



This photo is of Guerline Jozef, Amina Sheik Mohamed, and Amar Dass

"The partnership between OCPSC and SDRCC's ethnic community-based organizations (ECBOs) and other refugee serving organizations has created a dynamic space for the exchange of ideas and innovations. This collaborative framework enhances the effectiveness of our current endeavors and lays the foundation for sustainable and adaptable models that can be replicated."

Amina Sheik Mohamed

MPH, Senior Director of UC San Diego Refugee Health Unit and Co-Founder of San Diego Refugee Communities Coalition

Community Connections is a series of meetings designed to engage directly with community-based organizations and other civil society organizations to gain a deeper understanding of priority communities and CBOs, strengthen relationships between the Campaign and CBOs, and create continuous feedback loops of information to shape strategies and plans.

The Office of Community Partnerships and Strategic Communications (OCPSC), housed within the Office of Planning and Research (OPR), manages the State's highest priority community engagement and public awareness efforts. OCPSC coordinates statewide outreach efforts between the state and trusted community partners to directly engage Californians – particularly those experiencing the greatest health and social inequities – and provide them with culturally competent and accessible information and resources.

Context

Census data indicates nearly 23 percent of San Diego County residents were immigrants or foreign born as of 2021. To meet the needs of these diverse communities, OCPSC funds five CBOs in San Diego County to deliver culturally tailored and accessible information on the State's highest priority campaigns. The CBOs are trusted messengers, who have a reliable presence in their communities and have a profound understanding of community needs.



Analysis

1) *CBOs serving refugee and immigrant populations in San Diego address their communities' unique geographic and socioeconomic circumstances.*

In addition to statewide public education OCPSC campaigns, CBOs in San Diego work to advance equity by addressing unique needs of the growing refugee and immigrant populations. Their communities include people who are newly arriving to the United States such as asylum seekers, refugees, temporary or permanent residents and migrant workers, among others. These groups are faced with navigating immigration laws and administration and finding housing, employment, healthcare, and education opportunities in a new cultural and linguistic setting. CBOs in the City Heights neighborhood focus their outreach on refugee and immigrant populations who are low-income and primarily speak languages other than English. As newcomers to the U.S., many arrive with low literacy, in their native language, and experience housing and food insecurity.

Josiane Valsaint of Haitian Bridge Alliance said hundreds of Haitians and migrants from other countries arrive at the U.S.-Mexico border daily. Alor Calderon of the Employee Rights Center said how they worked with day laborers to serve migrant families in shelters three times a month with food and information on and about how to prevent exposure to extreme heat.

When explaining their outreach strategy, Moyosore Buari of the Community Health Initiative at the SDRCC, highlighted the importance of considering the Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, a theory in which individuals require basic physiological needs met such as food and shelter before they can prioritize other needs. She explained that ECBOs within SDRCC include campaign messaging (COVID-19, extreme heat, water conservation or ITIN) when providing access to social drivers of health needs, like housing and food services. Conversations with community members around accessing basic needs build trust with community members and create a gateway to conversations on COVID vaccines or extreme heat.

San Diego County's location in the southernmost part of California is notable as the San Diego, United States-Tijuana, Mexico border is one of the busiest international land border crossings in the world.¹ Due to their proximity to the border, CBOs in San Diego are on the front lines of providing essential information and services to growing populations of newcomers from various countries and cultures.

2) *As trusted messengers, CBOs use their cultural knowledge by leveraging social connections when conducting outreach.*

¹ (n.d.). The Border Between the U.S. And Mexico. Smart Border Coalition. Retrieved November 3, 2023, from <https://smartbordercoalition.com/about-the-border>

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For CBOs serving refugee and immigrant populations, social connectedness is the foundation of their outreach and community engagement work. Social connections consist of individual two-way relationships. As trusted messengers, CBO staff speak several languages and navigate unique relationship dynamics of various cultures which factor by age, gender, practices, or occupation. By leveraging social connectedness, CBOs engage community members to receive essential information in their primary language and in culturally relevant ways. CBOs in turn learn firsthand about their communities immediate felt needs, which guide their strategies and plans to achieve equity.



Josiane Valsaint, and Mawa Hassan.

The San Diego Refugee Communities Coalition (SDRCC) operates in over 18 languages including Arabic, Burmese, Dari, Haitian Creole, Somali, and Ukrainian. At times, CBO staff conduct outreach in different languages or dialects within one ethnic community or even within one household. Within one conversation, a message can be translated into multiple languages thus expanding its reach. Rute Abraham, a Community Health Worker with Refugee Assistance Center - member of the SDRCC, recalled an outreach visit to an Ethiopian household speaking English, Tigrinya, and Amharic. Somali Family Services employs speakers of Somali, Ethiopian, Russian, and different Asian languages in their assistance centers. *This photo is of Nyanhial Makuach,*

Nao Kabashima, Executive Director of Karen Organization of San Diego - member of the SDRCC, shared how the OCPSC's Save Our Water coloring books for children were effective in engaging parents and families. Noting how ethnic communities prefer receiving information in their primary languages, the SDRCC's Community Health Workers (CHWs) translate information from the OCPSC's campaign materials into several languages as a combined effort. CBOs emphasized the time and effort required to build trust within communities.

Three times a month, the Employee Rights Center works with Haitian day laborers to conduct outreach to Haitian migrants in shelters. These consistent visits deepen social connectedness, affirming the Employee Rights Center as a trusted resource in San Diego's Haitian community.

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CBOs' deep knowledge of the languages and cultures of their communities is the foundation for their work, in establishing trusted relationships within their communities. They know what spaces are considered safe, how receptive, and influential some community members are in helping to spread these messages



and Nyaduoth Gatkuoth.

within communities. Ongoing relationships between CBOs and community members create a sense of belonging, care, and support that increase the likelihood of community members engaging with campaign messages. Social connectedness is part of the foundation of trust, communication, and collaboration that strengthens community outreach efforts.

This photo is of Maly Elk-Doungpanga

3) **Collaboration among CBOs representing various ethnic groups is a key component of outreach strategy and building trust within communities.**

An ethnic community-based organization (ECBOs) is a non-profit organization founded and led by a current or former refugee, or a group of current and former refugees and immigrants, primarily for the advancement of refugees.² Organized collaboration among ECBOs has enhanced the breadth of public awareness efforts and social service provision in San Diego. Collaborative relationships among CBOs also extend outreach to broader cross-sections of communities. Consistent messaging from the coalition contributes to community trust and the legitimacy of each of the individual organizations.

*Intentional collaboration **increases CBO effectiveness** (a unified message is broadcasted, and organizational capacity is expanded), **efficiency** (there are fewer overlapping activities and data is shared), **and equity** (more people are reached with essential information and services).*

² Office of Refugee Resettlement (n.d.). *Ethnic Community Self-Help (ECSH) Program Implementation Guidelines*. Administration for Children and Families. Retrieved November 3, 2023, from <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/local/story/2023-10-24/county-to-establish-second-welcome-center-for-immigrants-refugees>

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Natasha Salgado of the City Heights Community Development Corporation (CDC) said their organization provides trainings for outreach workers. In addition, they are mindful of language inclusivity by actively partnering with organizations with multilingual staff who can fill language and communication gaps.

Alor Calderon (ERC) expressed satisfaction with coordinated, concurrent efforts with other CBOs. He elaborated when more than one organization promotes the same message, the message starts to reinforce itself within communities. The increased trust in the coalition has led to more engagement from community members on issues that prior to the campaigns were not considered priorities.

CBOs align themselves under their mission to foster inclusivity and equity for their communities. As an active coalition, they envision eliminating preventable health disparities as well as broad access to opportunities for socioeconomic advancement.

Tips From CBOs

1. Consider a holistic view of CBO responsibilities in reaching growing populations with distinctive needs.
2. Continue to provide links to other resources and services, including grant opportunities to CBOs.
3. Consider how different communities and age groups receive information.
4. Create more touchpoints of outreach by tailoring messaging for each community and age group.
5. Create more opportunities for smaller CBOs to access programs.
6. Keep language and communication access at the forefront to find creative solutions, including for those who do not know how to read or write.
7. Connect campaign messages to each community's priority socioeconomic needs.



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Attendees

	Name	Organization	Title
CBOs			
1	Natasha Salgado	City Heights CDC	Director of Economic Development
2	Rosa Olascoaga	City Heights CDC	Director of Policy
3	Maly Elk-Doungpanga	City Heights CDC	Program Manager
4	Alor Calderon	Employee Rights Center	Director
5	Guerline Jozef	Haitian Bridge Alliance	Executive Director
6	Josiane Valsaint	Haitian Bridge Alliance	Community Health Worker
7	Abdi Mohamoud	Horn of Africa	President & CEO
8	Amal Sufi	Horn of Africa	Community Health Worker
9	Nao Kabashima	Karen Organization of San Diego	Executive Director
10	Mu Aye	Karen Organization of San Diego	FEP Manager/CHW
11	Ramah Awad	Majdal Arab Community Center of San Diego	Executive Director
12	Ruth Abraham	Refugee Assistant Center	
13	Arwa Allzhawaqa	RIHLA	Executive Director
14	Shakila Nadir Ali	San Diego Refugee Communities Coalition	Community Health Initiative
15	Amarjit Dass	San Diego Refugee Communities Coalition	Director
16	Moyosore Buari	San Diego Refugee Communities Coalition	Program Manager, Community Health Initiative
17	Nyanhial Makuach	San Diego Refugee Communities Coalition	Community Health Worker
18	Ayesha Zafari	San Diego Refugee Communities Coalition	Community Support Specialist
19	Natallia Trahumala	Slavics.org	Manager
20	Krystina Shehelkunova	Slavics.org	Executive Director
21	Hamadi Dumale	Somali Bantu	Executive Director
22	Asma Hussein	Somali Family Service of San Diego	Youth Program Coordinator
23	Najla Ibrahim	Somali Family Service of San Diego	Director of Health and Wellness
24	Nyaduoht Gatkuoth	Southern Sudanese Community Center	Youth Program Director and Policy Analyst
25	Chuol Tut	Southern Sudanese Community Center	Executive Director
26	Mawa Hassan	Sudanese	Worker
27	Amina Shiek Mohamed	UCSD Refugee Health Unit	Senior Director
28	Faiza Warsame	UWEAST	Program Coordinator
29	Issa Mohamed	UWEAST	Community Health Worker
30	Sahra Abd	UWEAST	Executive Director



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PHILANTHROPY			
31	Alan Kwok	Northern CA Grantmakers	Senior Advisor
32	Kamaal Martin	Catalyst	Vice President
STATE STAFF			
33	Michael Conrique	OCPSC	Special Assistant
34	Jo'Ann Dela Cruz	OCPSC	Program Support Manager
35	Aubrie Fong	OCPSC	Deputy Director of Partnerships
36	Braden Kay	OPR	Extreme Heat Program Manager
37	Marc Marconi	OCPSC	Regional Program Manager – Border Region
38	Yumi Sera	OCPSC	Executive Director