Navigating the COVID-19 Messaging Ecosystem:

Insights from California Farmworker Communities

Ed Kissam, WKF Fund, February 24, 2021

COVID-19 Evidence Academy: Translating Innovations in Testing

Sustaining Community Trust and Engagement

- "Trusted voices" are the foundation--necessary but not sufficient to secure the attention of the most marginalized groups in diverse communities.

- Trust about message relevance must be earned. The default in an era of information overload is inattention. Disseminating "canned" talking points without connection to audiences' concerns undermines campaign impact.

- Campaigns go beyond mere dissemination of information toward addressing testing as a key contribution to real-world problem-solving--as a step toward protecting one's family from illness and preparing oneself for next steps.

- Messengers must be prepared to listen deeply to community members' framing of testing-related (and other) issues as they experience them. And go on to catalyze problem-solving.

- This can transform messaging about COVID-19 from boring lectures into community dialogue where messengers renew their reputations as trusted allies.

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3-Dimensional Visualization of Community Diversity

- Responding to racial/ethnic and language diversity is crucial but not sufficient. There are always other important dimensions of community diversity:

- Diversity in orientation toward the pandemic-—e.g. young economically-pressed farmworkers unaware of asymptomatic transmission or unconcerned about mild illness vs. middle-aged packinghouse workers who are mothers with children

- Situational diversity--people with transportation problems, digital literacy and/or online connectivity problems, "core" vs. "peripheral" workers

- In California farmworker communities, "Generation 1.5" and "2nd Generation" youth and young adults are important influencers in talking with their Mexican-born parents

- Some agricultural employers, including farm labor contractors and/or mayordomos may be trusted voices, influencers, facilitators. But others may currently be indifferent. Different challenges and pathways are needed to engage each of them.

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Building Your Own Messaging Campaign Within The Overall Information Ecosystem

- <u>PSA's and slogans</u> are just part of a robust messaging campaign--need to craft a local biome of information flow that is dynamic, inter-laced, and sustainable

- <u>News--</u>focus on most relevant developments and with complete, trustworthy information on local details.

- <u>Public affairs--</u> spur community conversations about problems, solutions, new developments (our partner Radio Bilingue's call-in show: Linea Abierta)

- <u>PSA's--</u>Focus on persuasive themes and new critical information and carefully vetted to avoid redundancy/tune-out

- <u>Testimonials--</u>Persuasive messages "from people like me to people like me" to bolster aspirations to be tested as necessary and to be easily shared with family, co-workers, friends, neighbors

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The Key to Authenticity: Community Dialogue That Identifies And Addresses Real-World Challenges

- Message campaigns that enhance collaboration among diverse community stakeholders, that catalyze action, will make a genuine contribution to improving access and optimal utilization of testing.

- Address and overcome real and imagined barriers to testing (online registration, difficulties in getting results, concern about mis-use of personal information, worries about cost, coping with unwelcome results)

- *Si se puede!* Craft messages to bolster audiences' aspirations to overcome barriers and to rapidly seek testing whenever needed (after close contact, immediately after recognizing symptoms).

- Remember the 3-dimensional diversity of "the community" and tailor messaging to resonate with diverse audience segments and foster collaboration.

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Pushing Toward the Future: Specific Goals For All Vulnerable Communities

- <u>Product improvement</u>. Advocate to transform testing from a drive-by encounter to become the initial portal for successful contact-tracing, isolation or quarantine as needed and accurate messaging about help available.

- <u>Product improvement</u>. Advocate for and promotion of innovative and appropriate user-friendly solutions: pop-up testing at churches, local schools, parks, testing at worksites.

- <u>System Improvement</u>. Catalyze community support--from *promotora/es*, community service volunteers, community activists to provide "wraparound" support for follow-on to testing.

- <u>System evolution</u>--Transition from demand-driven to routine testing based not just on worries about symptoms but increasing attention to close contacts with COVID-19+ family members, friends, co-workers

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Messaging Must Keep Pace With Technology, Evolving Local Systems…and the virus

- Explain increased availability of rapid-turnaround testing--crucial for low-paid, seasonal workers who must make every minute count.

- Include messaging to highlight the need for continued social-distancing, mask use even after 1st jab of 2-dose vaccines and ongoing need to seek testing due to close contact. And especially for those not yet vaccinated (e.g. children and youth).

- Messaging from farmworkers to local, state, federal government-- need to eliminate a key disincentive -the prospect of economic disaster from lost income if positive.

- Community collaboration to secure economic support for self-isolated and quarantined undocumented workers

- Onward toward incorporating genomic surveillance into testing and explaining the rationale….

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