

## CONVERGE COVID-19 Working Groups for Public Health and Social Sciences Research

### Research Agenda-Setting Paper

*This paper was written to help advance convergence-oriented research in the hazards and disaster field. It highlights areas where additional research could contribute new knowledge to the response to and recovery from the pandemic and other disasters yet to come. Questions about the research topics and ethical and methodological issues highlighted here should be directed to the authors who contributed to this paper.*

#### Working Group Name:

Immigrant Communities and Effective Risk-Communication in COVID-19

#### Working Group Description:

Building on strategies of immigrant-serving agencies and a collaborative hub in Houston, this Working Group analyzes communication strategies utilized to serve immigrant communities during COVID-19. It focuses on communications involving agencies in the collaborative, as well as those emanating from government and funders. Second, it explores communication with immigrant communities, examining accessibility, digital access and literacy, and trust of sources. This group will put its research into practice among organizations and within communities.

#### Priority Research Topics and Specific Research Questions:

Priority Research Topics	Potential Research Questions
1. Effective communications and support between immigrant-serving agencies during an emergency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Research Question 1</u>: How can a collaborative organization effectively connect agencies within its network to be resources for one another in emergency response?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 2</u>: What do agencies need to know about one another to effectively leverage resources?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 3</u>: What structures and systems support inter-agency communications?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 4</u>: What relationships are necessary to support inter-agency communications?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 5</u>: What gaps and barriers exist to accomplishing effective and robust communication strategies?</li> </ul>
2. Effective communications and support between immigrant-serving agencies and county emergency responders and/or funders during an emergency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Research Question 1</u>: How can a collaborative organization effectively connect agencies in its network with county emergency responders and/or funders to be resources for one another in emergency response?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 2</u>: What do grassroots immigrant-serving and other agencies need to know about available resources during an emergency?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Research Question 3</u>: How can grassroots immigrant-serving agencies effectively connect with county emergency responders and/or funders?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 4</u>: What systems are required to ensure safe distribution of resources to immigrants without legal status?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 5</u>: What gaps and barriers exist to accomplishing these types of effective communications and robust systems?</li> </ul>
<p>3. Accessibility of information and resources for immigrant communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Research Question 1</u>: Are emergency resources translated to the main languages of Houston's immigrant communities in a timely, meaningful, and useful way?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 2</u>: How do demographic characteristics such as immigrant status, primary language spoken at home, ethnicity, age, gender, and level of education influence accessibility?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 3</u>: What are the main sources of information for different immigrant communities in Houston?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 4</u>: Do these sources provide COVID-19 and evidence-informed disaster related resources?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 5</u>: How do immigrant communities communicate their needs and how do agencies ensure follow-up?</li> </ul>
<p>4. Reach and equity of communication strategies of immigrant-serving agencies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Research Question 1</u>: Do strategies consider the community's preferred mode of communication (oral or written) in each primary language(s)?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 2</u>: How can communication strategies include illiterate immigrant community members or those who do not speak the primary language(s) of the community?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 3</u>: How do immigrant communities prefer to communicate with the organizations that they get services from?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 4</u>: How is information most often shared/spread within immigrant communities?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 5</u>: How can immigrant communities be actively involved in risk-communication planning?</li> </ul>
<p>5. Digital literacy among immigrant communities and its influence on risk-communication.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Research Question 1</u>: How does the availability and quantity of technology in households impact the access to risk-communication for immigrant communities?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 2</u>: How does the availability and quality of WiFi and mobile phone data impact the access to risk-communication for immigrant communities?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 3</u>: How does the level of technological and digital knowledge of immigrant community members influence the access to risk-communication?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 4</u>: How familiar are different immigrant communities with a variety of digital outlets (i.e., social media, online news, video chat, blogs, search engines, emergency specific tools and apps)?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 5</u>: Which digital platforms are mainly used for communication among immigrant community members?</li> </ul>

<p>6. The impact of COVID-19 on risk communication.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Research Question 1</u>: How has social distancing changed where immigrant communities get information from?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 2</u>: How has social distancing changed how information is spread/shared within communities?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 3</u>: How interested are communities to learn more about COVID-19?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 4</u>: Who do immigrant communities communicate with when they have questions regarding COVID-19 and how do they reach them?</li> </ul>
<p>7. Trust among immigrant communities and its impact on risk-communication.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Research Question 1</u>: Which sources do immigrant communities most trust during COVID-19 and other disasters and why?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 2</u>: How have immigration policies influenced trust between immigrant community members and organizations?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 3</u>: How have immigration policies influenced trust between immigrant communities and emergency responders?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 4</u>: Which types of information are missing from risk-communication for immigrant communities?</li> <li>• <u>Research Question 5</u>: Has the public charge rule changed how immigrant communities get information or seek resources?</li> </ul>

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**Ethical / Methodological Considerations:**

The fear of immigrant communities to share personal information is one of the main ethical considerations specific to this topic area. Immigrants, especially those without legal status or in mixed-status families, are a highly vulnerable population. Many are at the intersection of lack of legal status, limited English proficiency, and poverty. Due to our current political climate—both nationally and at the Texas state level—immigrants fear being connected to systems that keep personal identifiable information (PII). Yet many systems for emergency resource distribution require PII, often with the good intention of case management across agencies to provide comprehensive services. The agencies that immigrants work with hold a trusted relationship that must not be compromised. Additionally, considerations must be made on which PII is in fact necessary in order to provide services, and case management systems must be improved to ensure immigrant communities feel safe accessing services.

The main challenge that this Working Group faces is how to explore if risk-communication is fully participatory and bi-directional. Smaller grassroots, faith- and community-based organizations have the most direct communication with the communities they serve and are trusted. However, they often lack resources to provide timely risk-communication and therefore collaboration among agencies is necessary. Further, to ensure risk-communication is fully equitable, organizations cannot develop strategies by themselves but rather must ensure collaboration where all participants, stakeholders, and the immigrant community are equal partners and constantly revise risk-communication together.

We received IRB approval by the Baylor College of Medicine for community surveys to ensure ethical coordination. Participation is voluntary, participants are contacted through the Alliance and other CBOs. Interviews are conducted by phone by the working group members and case managers who speak the participant’s languages and are trusted community members. We commit to bridging the gap between

academia and practice by utilizing the results of this research to implement action steps for and with local organizations and immigrant communities in Houston.

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**Other Frameworks, Considerations for Collaboration, and/or Resources:**

This research builds on relevant past research from Working Group members, the Humanitarian Action Plan (<https://hap.houstonimmigration.org/>) by the Houston Immigration Collaborative, one published report by Living Hope Wheelchair Association (<https://lhwassociation.org/about/news-stories/report-pre-existing-conditions-time-disaster>) and two studies pending publication.

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*This COVID-19 Working Group effort was supported by the National Science Foundation-funded Social Science Extreme Events Research (SSEER) network and the CONVERGE facility at the Natural Hazards Center at the University of Colorado Boulder (NSF Award #1841338). Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the NSF, SSEER, or CONVERGE.*