

## CAC-Community Engagement Success Story

### Juan Hidalgo and Isaí Ambrosio



Juan and Isaí worked together for 3 years when Juan was the Santa Cruz County Agricultural Commissioner (CAC). Isaí is the Director of the Davenport Resource Service Center, a program of the [Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County](#), in Davenport, CA.

#### How did you begin developing a working relationship with each other?

**Isaí:** I first met Juan during a 1-year Santa Cruz County Leadership program in 2017. It was a community-focused program where we would hear from local agencies, and Juan gave a presentation about agriculture in the county. I was impressed by how he expressed himself and his willingness to reach out, and I connected with his presentation about crops, since I was previously a farmworker.

**Juan:** At the beginning of the pandemic, my office was trying to figure out how to get supplies out to agriculture workers and community members. We reached out to the local Health Department, a trusted agency in the community, and they shared their community-based organization (CBO) contacts with me, including the Community Action Board. We began meeting monthly to share what our organizations were doing and see how we could partner to serve our communities.

**Isaí:** After my first Zoom meeting, I sent Juan a follow-up email saying that it was nice to see him again and that I was looking forward to working together. Juan responded really down-to-earth, and he said to let him know if my group ever needed anything, such as supplies or even another county contact.

#### What is an example of how you collaborated with each other?

**Isaí:** I work in the northernmost part of Santa Cruz County, and my organization is the only service provider in this area. That's why we were designated as an essential service provider since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and we never stopped working in person. During this time, Juan wanted to reach out to the farm workers and families here and share information with them as we were beginning to understand what COVID was. As the CAC, he felt he had a duty to farmworkers in this county. He's a good leader, and after we connected, Juan would reach out with continuous emails, making sure we had what we needed and letting us know when he had supplies like COVID tests, personal protective equipment (PPE), hand sanitizer, or informational flyers that we could share.

**Juan:** Throughout the pandemic, the CAC office received several supplies from state and county agencies to be distributed to our ag workers and community members. At first, we received over 100,000 face coverings, and we worked together with growers and CBOs, like Isaí's, who were instrumental in making sure they reached our communities. When there was a big spike of COVID transmission in early 2021, we were able to provide N95 masks to community members and ag workers by connecting with our local organizations so that our communities could stay safe.

**Isaí:** Our organization would take those materials and have weekly events where we would set up a table with supplies and hold health screenings. We also did (and continue to do) monthly home visits to the 10 farms in the area, and we'd leave food at their doors. Because the Davenport Resource Service Center has been operating for over 55 years, we really get to see the impact that we've had, especially on the entire family, since we have programs for people at any age. We've been committed to this community, and it really helps to have those connections in place for any emergency situations.

#### How else did you partner with each other?

**Juan:** In mid-August 2020, the CZU (Lightning Complex) fires also broke out in this area. We had 60,000 N95 masks in reserve at that point, and we were able to distribute them to our agricultural workers through local growers, but these ran out in 2 days. Then, the director of one of our non-profit partners, Salud Para La Gente, reached out saying that they had extra masks in case we needed any. Because of these connections, I was able to reach out to Isaí and share another 30,000 face masks.

**Isaí:** Juan emailed right away to see if we needed anything or if we needed support connecting with other local officials. On our end, our Resource Service Center kept working throughout these fires, calling our farmworkers to make sure they were in a safe place when we were all evacuated. Once people were back, we went to their homes to distribute air purifiers, masks, food, and water.

#### What community engagement advice would you give to CACs?

**Juan:** I would say, be open to listening to our community members and organizations to see what their needs are. Then, based on our CAC programs, you can see where you might be able to help provide support. In our situation with COVID, we were able to help directly by providing PPE supplies. But even with the fires, although that's not directly our program, we took advantage of the connections we already had; during the CZU fires, we shared worker health requirements related to smoke and air quality with our growers to make sure they understood how to protect their workers.

Even if it's not directly related to our programs, listen to their concerns. Some community members may not be aware of the county processes in place, and it can be a great opportunity to share more about our roles and requirements to address the situation. If it's not in my jurisdiction, I like to make the connection with the appropriate county agency to help our community members find a resolution.

**Isaí:** First, go out and meet the families and farmworkers in person. Go and see their space, at least once, so that when you're talking with other agencies about the community, you have the context to know the situation and know what you're talking about. It's a great way to build that personal connection, by meeting people in person.

Even though Juan was in one of the highest positions in the county (as the CAC), he wasn't afraid to ask if we needed anything, and he would email us whenever his office had resources to be distributed. Not only was he willing to share his knowledge and resources, but Juan also made things really easy to access. I would stop by his office, sign in, and the supplies would be ready to go.

#### What CAC engagement advice would you give to communities?

**Isaí:** Similarly, I would say get to know the person—make that personal connection first. Talk to them and see what they do, what their specific role in the community is. A 15-minute conversation with our county leaders is always good. I found it really helpful to have those conversations when I would pick up supplies from Juan's office. Following up with them via email is also a good way to stay connected.

**Juan:** I'm always open to having community members reach out via email or phone. Don't hesitate to reach out to our office. If I'm not available when you initially try to contact me, I always make sure to reach back out and return your message so that I can hear what you have to say.