

# CAC-Community Engagement Success Story

Juan Hidalgo



Juan Hidalgo worked for 7 years as the Santa Cruz County Agricultural Commissioner (CAC), often engaging with community members.

## How did you approach working with your communities?

I like to build relationships by being open to engage whenever I'm asked, which has led to invitations to talk in front of many community groups (for example, the Rotary Club, City Council, and homeowners associations). In my experience, people who are interested in issues related to our programs contacted me, either by reaching out to the office or sending me an email, and I followed up from there. For me, it's about transparency (for example, what pesticides are being used, what regulations are in place, and what commodities are being grown in the county) and bringing awareness to our programs and how we help protect communities.

There are also those who reached out looking for the correct public agency for their concerns, so I like to stay in contact with other local agencies to point people in the correct direction. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I found it particularly helpful to work with the Health Department's public health educators, and [Salud Para La Gente](#), a local non-profit healthcare organization.

## How did you coordinate and engage in meetings with your communities?

Often, community groups would contact me with specific items to discuss. I typically held more informal meetings and used email communication to co-develop an agenda in advance. Also, I planned ahead for preferred languages to coordinate translation and interpretation.

I liked to share our role as CACs and the programs we have in place. Also, I found it especially helpful to acknowledge when I didn't have the answer to a question or couldn't confirm something on the spot, but I followed up with them afterwards. I was also able to connect community members with the appropriate agency if they asked about something outside of my role.

## What is an example of how you collaborated with communities?

During the pandemic, I needed to contact Santa Cruz residents and farmworkers, so I reached out to the local Health Department. They shared their community-based organization (CBO) contacts with me. This was instrumental in helping me to organize meetings so that we could all share the needs of the community, resources, and the latest information to stay safe. I was able to build from this network to reach out to additional CBOs and community members. It was a nice experience to get to know CBOs in the county and learn about the work they do, and it provided an opportunity to share how the CAC can help support their efforts.