LEAH ZALLMAN CENTER FOR IMMIGRANT HEALTH RESEARCH

NO KID HUNGRY by SHARE OUR STRENGTH

From Fear to Trust

Community-led Solutions to Increase Food Access in Immigrant Communities

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Funding and Research Partners

No Kid Hungry
No child should go hungry in America. But millions of kids in the United States live with hunger. No Kid Hungry is working to end childhood hunger by helping launch and improve programs that give all kids the healthy food they need to thrive. This is a problem we know how to solve. No Kid Hungry is a campaign of Share Our Strength, an organization committed to ending hunger and poverty.

The **Leah Zallman Center for Immigrant Health Research (LZC)** is a research center at the Institute for Community Health. We are a team of interdisciplinary social science researchers with expertise at the intersection of immigrant, economic, and health justice. We partner with immigrant communities, advocates, policymakers, and social and health systems on actionable research to improve immigrant health and well-being. We are proud to build on ICH's decades-long history of using participatory methods to ensure that community voices in research are amplified to the state and national level as part of evidence-based policymaking.

Partner Organizations

Guided by God's love, **Catholic Charities** helps people in southeast Texas by providing caring, compassionate services and advocating for social justice in collaboration with parishes and communities.

We are all part of the **Catholic Community Services of Southern Arizona** family. Together, our work touches lives, every day, in great and small ways. While our services are many, one thread binds our work together: We help children, families, and individuals live with independence and dignity.

Chicanos Por La Causa (CPLC) formed in 1969 to fight discrimination against the Mexican American community. Inspired by Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez, we advocated for equity in education, politics, and labor conditions. Today, CPLC provides services to people of all backgrounds while honoring our Mexican-American roots.

The **Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona** responds to the root causes of hunger, and seeks to restore dignity, health, opportunity and hope to people living in poverty. Our mission is to change lives in the communities we serve by feeding the hungry today, and building a healthy, hunger-free tomorrow.

Creighton Community Foundation was established to support Creighton School District #14 and the communities within its east central Phoenix boundaries. We labor to bring resources to bear upon life needs and whole person development of people and children within some of the poorest neighborhoods in urban Phoenix.

The **Dolores Huerta Foundation** is on a mission to inspire and organize communities to build volunteer organizations empowered to pursue social justice. We believe that those most directly impacted by inequity have the knowledge to implement community driven solutions when empowered with the tools, training and resources.

Esperanza Community Center promotes a harmonious integrated community in which all people can achieve their highest potential, and seeks to be a model for other communities dealing with day laborers.

Valuing the dignity of every human being, respecting cultural beliefs and traditions, and recognizing the strength and resilience of our diverse Latino community, **Hispanic Services Council** is a bridge that links the community to opportunities that help them thrive and achieve their fullest potential.

Founded in 1982 as a haven for immigrants and refugees, **Hispanic Unity of Florida** has grown to serve diverse and multi-cultural working families from the United States as well as more than 25 other countries. We provide a range of wrap-around services to help more than 23,000 clients of all ages, from preschoolers to adults, successfully transition to a productive new life.

The **Inland Coalition for Immigrant Justice** is dedicated to convening organizations to collectively advocate and work to improve the lives of immigrant communities while working toward a just solution to the immigration system.

La Maestra Community Health Centers provide quality healthcare and education, improve the overall well-being of the family, bringing the underserved, ethnically diverse communities into the mainstream of our society, through a caring, effective, culturally and linguistically competent manner, respecting the dignity of all patients.

The **Mexican American Unity Council, Inc. (MAUC)** provides guidance, services in areas of education, housing, community and economic development.

NDLON improves the lives of day laborers, migrants and low-wage workers. We build leadership and power among those facing injustice so they can challenge inequality and expand labor, civil and political rights for all.

Proyecto Vida Digna (PVD) is a local nonprofit that builds the power of undocumented migrants and their families. Our mission is to make life better for the low-income families in South Texas. We help families gain new skills, share their voice, and grow their power.

The Concilio's mission is to build stronger communities by unlocking opportunities for Latino families. We help Latino families striving to create strong futures for themselves and future generations, as well as other diverse North Texas families who share their hopes and challenges.

Established in 1867, **Tucson Unified** is one of the oldest and Southern Arizona's largest school district. We serve about 47,000 students and their families in our 89 schools and programs.








Background

Immigrant Resilience and Repair Since Public Charge

The concept of public charge dates to 1882; however, in 2019, the federal government officially expanded the definition to include immigrants who receive assistance with housing, nutrition, healthcare, and other benefits. This anti-immigrant policy caused historic levels of direct harm and hunger for immigrant families and U.S. citizen children. The rule was challenged in courts and reversed in 2021 and further protections were added in 2022, making it explicit that using nutrition, or housing programs or using healthcare programs at a doctor's office, clinic, or hospital is not considered in public charge determinations.[i]

However, anti-immigrant narratives and misinformation continue to cause confusion and fear about whether a person's immigration status will be jeopardized if they access benefits. This fear—and the subsequent decision to avoid enrolling in public benefits—is known as the "chilling effect." Narratives surrounding public charge also obscure the fact that immigrants contribute extensively to the U.S. economy. Immigrants paid over $500 billion in taxes and generated $1.4 trillion in spending power in 2021.[ii]

Distinguishing between "immigrant" and "non-immigrant" families and their rights is divisive, confusing, and at times incorrect. Today, 1 in 4 children in the United States live in families that include at least one immigrant parent.[iii] Of the over 17 million children with immigrant parents, the overwhelming majority (87%) are U.S. citizens.[iv] Many of these children are eligible to receive resources provided by our nation's federal child nutrition programs—including free and reduced-price school breakfast and lunch, free summer meals, and monthly SNAP and WIC benefits.

Public Charge Over the Years

1999 definition of public charge: "A non-citizen who is likely to become primarily dependent on the federal government for subsistence, as demonstrated by either the receipt of public cash assistance for income maintenance or institutionalization for long-term care at government expense." – 1999 U.S. Department of Justice

2019 change to definition: Added new non-cash benefits (such as SNAP, Medicaid, and housing) as categories for being dependent on government (instead of just cash assistance or institutionalization) and determined green card and other visa applicants inadmissible to the United States for "being more likely than not" to use benefits at any time in the future (instead of being "primarily dependent" on benefits for subsistence).

2022 reversal to 1999 definition with added clarification: The use of nutrition, housing programs or healthcare programs at a doctor's office, clinic, or hospital is not considered in public charge determinations.

Current federal eligibility criteria for SNAP and Medicaid: Limited to U.S. citizens and green card holders who meet certain criteria, including at least five years of permanent residency.

Lasting effects of public charge: 3-4 million children in immigrant families missed out on public benefits they were eligible for that could have addressed hunger in 2022.

The chilling effect of the 2019 public charge policy caused an estimated 2.1 million immigrant essential workers and household members to forgo Medicaid and 1.3 million to forgo Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, increasing their food insecurity and health risks just months before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.[v] In a 2019 nationally representative survey of adults with lived immigrant experience, 48% of those who withdrew from federal assistance programs avoided SNAP, 16% declined WIC, and 13% refused free or reduced-price school lunches.[vi] The chilling effect caused direct harm to immigrant families and millions of U.S. citizen children, who faced increased hunger, developmental risks, and reduced access to healthcare.[vii]

Despite the rule's reversal and added protections, many immigrant families remain unsure of their rights and are understandably fearful and hesitant to engage with government.[viii] One nationally representative survey indicated that throughout 2022, 43% of immigrant families with children reported at least one type of material hardship, yet despite hardship, one in six adults in immigrant families with children avoided non-cash benefits for fear of jeopardizing their green card applications.[ix]

Child hunger may be one of the most widespread, structural, social policy failures of the United States. More than 44 million people across the country[x]—of whom 13 million are children—are food insecure.[1] Meanwhile, new narratives about the role of government and the rights of immigrants have stuck. Inconsistent and politicized state-level policies

[1] We rely on this definition of food insecurity throughout this report, pulled from : https://www.nokidhungry.org/blog/how-many-kids-united-states-live-hunger "Households that are food insecure are those that struggled to provide enough food for everyone living there at some point during the year."

affecting the rights of immigrants also contribute to an ongoing environment of fear and confusion. This directly affects the stability and health of undocumented, mixed-status, refugee, asylee, permanent resident, and naturalized citizen families from all corners of the globe.

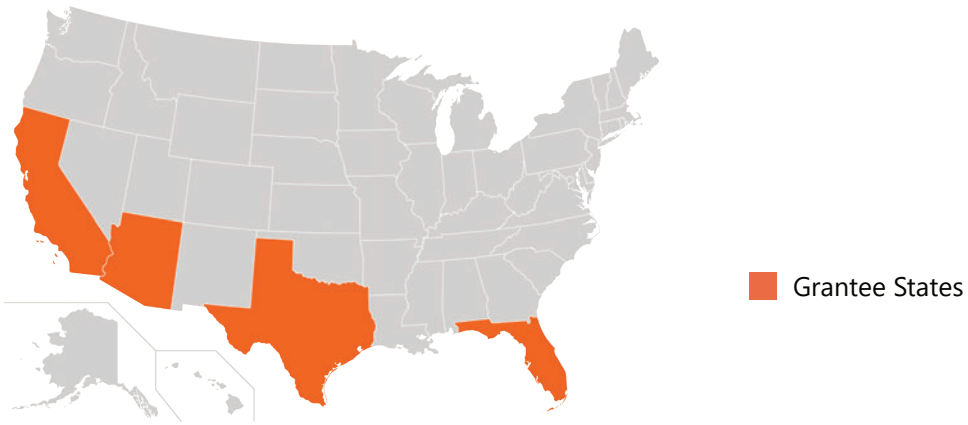
In response, community-based leaders and organizations have built resilience and repair into their food justice work. Immigrant advocates and community-based organizations across the country are leading efforts to repair the harm caused by the 2019 public charge rule, feed families, and foster resilience and power to access basic human rights in the absence of policy solutions.

Narrative: "An array of related and connected stories and messages on a particular subject, issue, or problem. They suggest causes, problems, and solutions."

– the Butterfly Lab[xi]

From 2022–2023, No Kid Hungry invested in 17 community-based organizations in four border states (see **Figure 1** below) to support their efforts in predominantly Latino[2] immigrant communities—each one unique in origin, place, and status—using different strategies to connect families with vital resources to support their well-being. The grantee organizations employed culturally sensitive, low-barrier strategies to feed families and care for their communities with minimal resources. No Kid Hungry's investment expanded the capacity of these organizations and created a network of grantees, which fostered the exchange of ideas and created the opportunity for co-learning through a participatory evaluation, led by the Leah Zallman Center for Immigrant Health Research (see **Appendix A** for methods).

Figure 1. States Served by No Kid Hungry Grantee Organizations



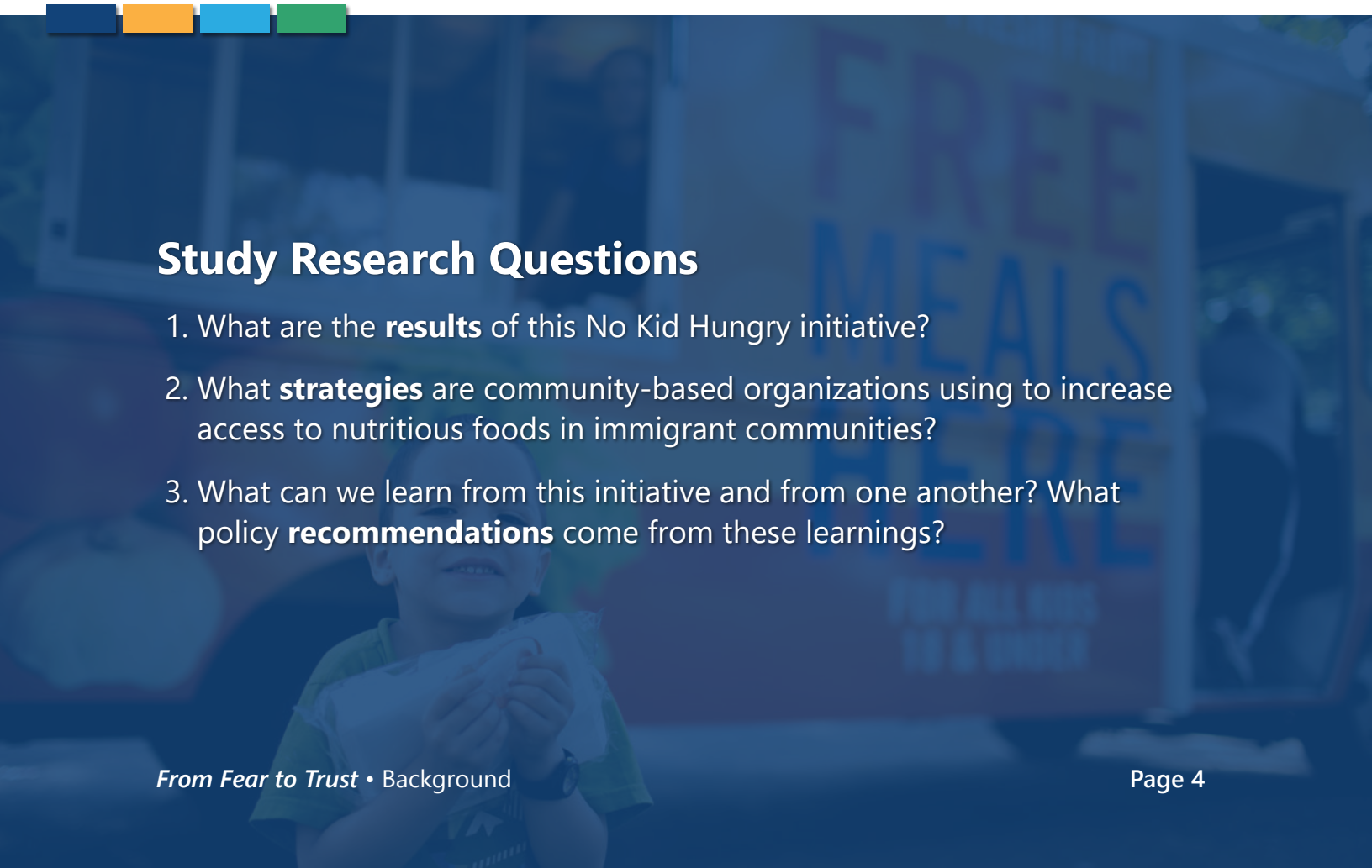
[2] After conversations with No Kid Hungry and the grantee organizations, we decided to use the term 'Latino' throughout this report to refer to people of Latin American origin or descent. We heard from grantees that the majority of the people they work with identify as Hispanic or Latino. We acknowledge that there are other terms that members of the community use to identify themselves, a testament to the diversity of the Latino/a/x/e community.

This report demonstrates how No Kid Hungry grantee organizations in four states:

- employed specific strategies and promising practices to get millions of pounds of food to families
- moved thousands of immigrant families from fear to trust, referring them to resources and/or enrolling them in benefits
- worked within a complex environment of shifting policies and narratives that directly affect immigrant health and well-being
- resisted harmful anti-immigrant narratives and developed positive counter narratives as part of their work.

We[3] conclude with insights and recommendations for immigrant advocates, social service providers, funders, and policymakers to heal the harmful effects of the 2019 public charge rule on immigrant communities.

[3] The authors chose to use the term "we" in this report to reflect the participatory nature of this study. The opinions expressed in this report belong to the authors and do not represent the official position of any of the partner organizations.



Study Research Questions

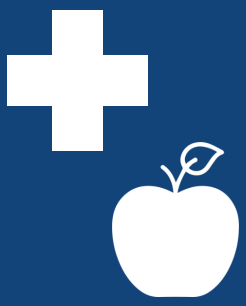
1. What are the **results** of this No Kid Hungry initiative?
2. What **strategies** are community-based organizations using to increase access to nutritious foods in immigrant communities?
3. What can we learn from this initiative and from one another? What policy **recommendations** come from these learnings?

Quick Facts on Immigrant Families in the United States

Today, **1 in 4 children** in the United States **live in families that include at least one immigrant parent**.

Of the over **17 million children** with immigrant parents, **the overwhelming majority (87%) are U.S. citizens**.

Immigrants paid **over $500 billion in taxes and generated $1.4 trillion in spending power** in 2021.



In the wake of public charge, **2.1 million immigrant essential workers and household members likely forwent Medicaid** and **1.3 million forwent Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits**.

In the wake of public charge, **3-4 million children in immigrant families missed out on public benefits they were eligible for** that could have addressed hunger in 2022.

Outcomes

No Kid Hungry Supports Community-led Strategies in Four States

In Spring 2022, Share Our Strength – No Kid Hungry deployed more than $1 million to 17 national, state, and community-based organizations[4] working on addressing nutrition among immigrant children and families in Arizona, California, Florida, and Texas. The goal of these "public charge grants" was to support community-based organizations as they worked with immigrant families to understand their rights and the public benefits available to them.

The organizations provided culturally and linguistically aligned outreach, food distribution, and resource linkage services to thousands of immigrant families in one year. In the Program Findings section of this report, we provide an in-depth description of the strategies used so other organizations can learn from this vital community work. Here we describe the communities served and the outcomes achieved through this initiative.

Representatives from 16 grantee organizations reported that most participants (75%) served by this program prefer to communicate in Spanish and identify as Latino. However, grantees also served a wide range of immigrants in all four states. Participants varied in language spoken at home, country of origin, SNAP eligibility, and immigration status, among other characteristics. Perspectives on food access and public benefits varied between and within immigrant communities, challenging the idea that there is just one singular narrative about immigrants and their lived experiences.

Each month, grantee organizations:

- distributed **254,000 pounds of food**
- fed **12,000 families**
- directly assisted **65,000 individuals and 31,000 families**

For example, advocates noted that many immigrant or mixed-status families prefer to avoid interactions with the government, including benefits programs. They explained that although some families avoid public assistance because they fear that it may jeopardize their green card applications or lead to family members being deported, others avoid it because they migrated to the United States with the aspiration of working and achieving economic independence, an option unavailable to some in their home countries.

Grantee organizations served a range of families with different statuses, including mixed status, undocumented, newly arrived, and established families. Some also served

[4] Originally, No Kid Hungry's public charge initiative began with 17 grantees; the findings in this report reflect data from the 16 organizations that were fully engaged with the initiative and evaluation.

refugees and asylum seekers. Each group comes to the table with a different history and eligibility to engage in benefits and other government services. One staff member in Florida described the diverse communities they serve through their resource programs, saying,

> **We have seen a lot of asylees and folks who have just recently entered the country, mostly from Haiti, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and their needs are slightly different . . . Many of the asylees now have some sort of claim to public benefits that many immigrants don't.**

Organizations served the most families in urban areas (76%), followed by rural (53%) and suburban (29%).[5] While most organizations primarily served Latino families (84%) and Spanish speakers (77%), other languages spoken by participants included Arabic, ASL, Burmese, Dari, Farsi, French, Indigenous Mayan languages, Japanese, Karen, Kinyarwanda, Kirundi, Laotian, Pashto, Somali, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese. Demographic factors influenced the types of strategies grantee organizations used in their food distribution and outreach efforts.

Research Question 1: What are the results of this No Kid Hungry initiative?

Through the dedicated efforts of these 16 community-based organizations, hundreds of thousands of Latino and other immigrant adults and children experienced greater food security. With No Kid Hungry funding, the initiative produced the following outcomes:

- **Food distributed:** Grantees distributed approximately **three million pounds** of food to community members over the course of the year. Organizations ranged in size and scale, distributing between 250 pounds to 140,000 pounds per month to their participants.
- **Families fed:** Organizations fed an average of **12,000 families** every month.
- **Direct benefits enrollment**: During the grant period, organizations directly supported more than **8,000 individuals and 2,400 families with the SNAP enrollment process** and more than **500 families with the WIC enrollment process** monthly.
- **Referrals:** During the grant period, more than **11,000 families** were referred to other direct service organizations for benefits enrollment.
- **Outreach and education:** During the grant period, organizations engaged in outreach and education activities with more than **45,000 individuals and 17,000 families.**

[5] Percentages do not sum to 100 as many grantees serve families across the three geographic designations.










Program Findings

How Latino Communities are Getting Food on the Table and Thawing the Chilling Effects of Public Charge

Research Question 2: What strategies are community-based organizations using to increase access to nutritious foods in immigrant communities?

The breadth of efforts from the grantee organizations in this No Kid Hungry initiative speaks to the multi-faceted nature of addressing hunger in Latino and immigrant communities. Staff learned from each other through a series of initiative-wide grantee meetings and tracked how approaches and strategies to build trust and a sense of belonging among immigrant communities led to increased food security and well-being. We organized the work of grantees into two **overlapping but distinct thematic areas**:

1) work to increase immigrant families' direct access to nutritious food, or "get food on the table"

2) work to move folks from fear to trust, including enrolling families in public benefits when eligible.

While grantees' approaches differed slightly across the two thematic areas, certain core values were evident across all. We list these **promising practices** below:

- **Offer stigma-free services**
- **Provide culturally responsive services and culturally relevant food**
- **Ensure low barriers to SNAP enrollment and food access and meet community members where they are**
- **Hire and trust community-embedded, bilingual staff and promotores/community health workers**
- **Show up consistently**

We highlight the most effective approaches in the body of this report so that others can learn from this vital community knowledge and adopt some of these approaches into their own work. We list the strategies that grantee organizations used in **Tables 1** and **2**. We also discuss some of the challenges facing communities as they continue to encounter, resist, and resolve programmatic and structural barriers in their work.

Effective Approaches to Getting Food on the Table

1. **Provide trust-based, low-barrier services**
2. **Deliver food and provide meals and groceries at multiple locations**
3. **Offer families the dignity of choice**
4. **Provide fresh and culturally familiar food**
5. **Engage with community members in culturally and linguistically responsive ways**

1. Provide trust-based, low-barrier services

Repeatedly, staff and advocates reported that trust-building is key to increasing food security for immigrant families. Through activities like food box distribution, canvassing, volunteering, workshops, school events, mobile meal kits, family potlucks, and farmers' markets, grantee organizations engage directly with community members and build relationships. Staff members emphasized the need for low-barrier services, meaning they never ask for identification or other personal information that might make immigrants feel uneasy. A staff member in Texas shared, "**We give the community the feeling of safety by not having to worry about their immigration status**."

2. Deliver food and provide meals and groceries at multiple locations

Of the grantees participating in this No Kid Hungry initiative, 13 organizations run food pantries/banks and/or offer pre-packed food boxes. Schools emerged as a key forum for feeding immigrant families, with eight grantee organizations working with schools to provide on-site meals to school children and six organizations providing food for them

to take home to their families. As some immigrant families face transportation barriers and geographical isolation that prevent them from easily accessing food on-site at organizations, 11 organizations deliver food directly to people's homes or develop new community-based locations for outreach and food distribution. Community gardens, potluck dinners, and community events are other ways that these grantee organizations ensure that they can feed as many families as possible in their neighborhoods. Making referrals and sending community members to other organizations (e.g., food banks) where they could benefit from additional food services is also a common practice.

3. Offer families the dignity of choice

Some organizations described an organizational shift in calling their food pantry a "**market**" and switching to having families choose their own groceries at the market. They wanted to humanize the experience for immigrant families and reduce the stigma that many feel standing in line for food. One staff member in Texas shared, "**There's client choice where they walk into the market and shop according to their household size**." Another staff member in Arizona expressed a hope that one day they would be able to offer "**a full choice model where there's certain food banks that allow people to come in and it's like a grocery store**."

Community stakeholders emphasized the value in providing fresh and culturally familiar food to immigrant families.

4. Provide fresh and culturally familiar food

Organizations and community stakeholders emphasized the value in providing fresh and culturally familiar food to immigrant families. Oftentimes, food pantry or food bank recipients receive items they do not know how to use; too much of the same item, which leads to waste; or highly processed, preservative-packed food. A staff member in Arizona said, "**We are really particular now in making sure that we are pushing fresh fruit, more of our ancestral foods approach versus the processed**." A community center staff praised one of the California-based organizations' approach, saying,

> **I think this is one of the only, if not the only, organization that I know that actually really caters to a specific community in regards to the food that they give . . . They really go through the work of putting together bags for Hispanic families that they know they're going to eat all of these ingredients and all of these foods that they're getting. They do the same for the Asian community, and they do the same thing for different communities.**

A staff at that organization affirmed this approach, sharing, "**We try to get food that people know how to cook . . . that's familiar or culturally relevant**." A community center staff noted,

We give out anywhere from 30 to 40 pounds of food per family every week and it's always high-quality healthy food as well. So, rice and beans, shelf-stable proteins. We try and give a gallon of milk to every family and definitely produce so that way they're getting the nutrient-dense foods.

5. Engage with community members in a culturally and linguistically responsive way

Many organizations underscored the importance of personal connections and linguistic and cultural congruency with community members. Multiple staff from different organizations noted that while their primary audience is Latino, Spanish-speaking immigrants, they are increasingly serving immigrants from other regions of the world and need more multilingual staff. One staff member in Arizona shared, "**There is a population of folks that don't even speak Spanish. They speak a dialect, so it's another barrier that a lot of immigrants have to go through, especially when it comes to food programs.**" For the Latino community members who do speak Spanish, the ability to communicate in a first or more familiar language with bilingual Spanish-English staff at these organizations helps many of them to feel more comfortable interacting with the organizations. A staff member in Texas said, "**We have bilingual staff that were able to reach the communities where they were at. We try to meet people where they're at and that part of it is language.**"

The approaches above emerged as key to grantee organizations' ability to get food on the tables of Latino families. In **Table 1** below, we provide a list of the specific strategies that the organizations used in their daily efforts to address hunger.

Table 1. Organizations' Strategies for Getting Food on the Table

Strategy	
Provide food (groceries and meals) through food banks, pantries, markets, meals, and boxes	Grantees provide direct distribution of food to individuals and families using various modalities and by referring families to local food banks.
Deliver food directly to families and communities	Organizations deliver food on a monthly or even weekly basis to immigrant families and neighborhoods. This is important because transportation is a major challenge for many families. Climate change also makes it more difficult for people to commute to pick-up sites (e.g., during heat waves). Grantees shared that the pandemic deepened the need for this type of work and accelerated local groups and nonprofits to launch food delivery efforts.
Offer community gardens as a community resource	Community gardens engage immigrant families, while providing food for households and schools. The gardens create opportunities for community members to connect with one another, grow culturally familiar produce, obtain fresh fruits and vegetables, and learn how to grow and cook new foods.
Build partnerships between schools and local organizations to provide food to school children and families	Local schools are central to a variety of food distribution efforts. Schools host community organizations' food distributions (e.g., drive-in food distributions) and food events (e.g., potlucks), and occasionally provide food for community-based organizations' distribution. The schools themselves provide free lunches during the summer or snacks and dinners through after-school programs. Many schools also operate their own pantries and community gardens.
Conduct outreach/communication and provide referrals to other direct service agencies	Organizations conduct outreach and communicate food services options to community members. They also provide referrals. Outreach activities include tabling at school events, YMCAs, or senior centers, canvassing, or word-of-mouth. All these channels serve to connect community members to food services.

Effective Approaches to Moving People from Fear to Trust

1. **Reinforce culturally responsive practices**
2. **Involve *promotores* in the work**
3. **Show up consistently**
4. **Create welcoming and inclusive environments**
5. **Broker trust-building between community members and local government**

Grantee organizations noted that building trust takes significant time and resources. They are working strategically and tirelessly to undo the damage of public charge and build a sense of belonging among immigrant communities. Several spoke about the partnerships they have with other agencies and organizations within their service area to provide complementary services. They discussed how partners help to distribute food, conduct outreach and education, and enroll immigrant families in benefits. Through outreach, surveys, and education, organizations are learning directly from community members and tailoring their strategies accordingly so that they can better meet their needs. Of the 16 grantees that participated in this initiative,

Cafecitos and Community

A grantee organization in Arizona started 'Cafecito,' a monthly initiative providing coffee, pastries, and a space for community members to interact with one another, staff, and volunteers. Held at a food bank, Cafecito provides a regular, "*low-stakes space to share and exchange and make connections*."

- 15 conduct campaigns to increase awareness of public benefits and/or reduce the associated fear and stigma surrounding the use of public assistance
- 15 engage in coalition building to partner with other community leaders and organizations
- 14 provide direct assistance to community members in filling out applications and enrolling in SNAP/WIC
- 14 provide referrals to partners for public benefits

1. Reinforce culturally responsive practices

Many grantee organizations are bridging cultural gaps and meeting community members where they are by reinforcing culturally responsive practices. These practices include connecting immigrant families to garden projects to meet cultural and dietary needs, offering bilingual educational materials and trainings, and hiring staff with similar lived experiences and backgrounds. A staff member in Arizona pointed out,

> Many of the folks that have experience in their home countries with growing food and gardening will really resonate with our school gardens and come and connect there . . . It's a place where you can get over language barriers very quickly.

2. Involve *promotores* in the work

> ***Promotor:*** A specially trained community member who provides basic health education to fellow community members.

Involving community-embedded *promotores*—community health workers—in the work is one way that organizations connect with immigrant community members and repair trust. *Promotores* build trusting relationships with families in need and often meet community members in places they live, work, play, and worship. While it takes time to train a *promotor* and trust building is a slow process, the organizations deeply believe in the effectiveness of this approach, as one staff member in Florida explains,

> That's the number one strategy we use . . . We sometimes co-locate the *promotor* at a food pantry, at family resource centers, at community centers because, one, it gives the *promotor* access to different individuals where they can promote programs like the food stamp program, WIC, things of that nature. But then, also, that *promotor* learns about that organization . . . and they then bring that out into the community so it's really a win-win . . . It breaks down those barriers for people—especially immigrants—to feel comfortable with going to some of these established organization or government facilities.

3. Show up consistently

Consistency in showing up also builds community trust. One Arizona advocate shared, "The first week, we got hardly any people really talking to us. But, then the next week, people were coming up and they're like, '. . . I saw you last week, can I schedule?'" A community center employee highlighted,

> You need somebody who is driven, who knows and understands the need of the population and is going to be persistent. Because you can show up one day and do your work and be the greatest at it, and you may not get anybody to come and talk to you. But don't despair and don't give up, right. Because they saw you one time, they're going to remember you the second. And maybe by the eighth, ninth, tenth time that you're there, they're going to know you by name.

4. Create welcoming and inclusive environments

Key informants and organization staff discussed their approaches to creating welcoming and inclusive environments for immigrants. One approach that came up repeatedly was providing services like outreach and food distribution in immigrants' primary languages. Most of the populations that these Latino organizations work with are comfortable communicating in Spanish, with one staff member in Arizona noting, "Ninety percent of our services are first in Spanish, the same thing with, I'm sure, most of my colleagues here for the state."

One approach that came up repeatedly was providing services like outreach and food distribution in immigrants' primary languages.

5. Broker trust-building between community members and local government

Recent policy efforts to criminalize the presence of undocumented immigrants hamper grantee organizations' efforts to broker trust between community members and local government.[xii] In states where undocumented status is not a criminal offense, staff and community stakeholders highlighted collaboration efforts with local law enforcement agencies to build trust between community members and the police—one of the most tangible representations of government. Besides using these meetings to combat community members' fears about Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) showing up if they sought help, grantee organizations hoped that these efforts would help immigrants to move to a place where they felt that they could trust the system enough to apply for benefits. A staff member in Florida shared,

> The deputy chief of police . . . attended the meeting, heard people asking questions, and stood there and said, "We're here to serve and protect. We're not here, we're not going to knock on doors and arrest anyone . . . We don't care about your status." So, the community heard it from him and I think that alleviated a lot of fears.

The approaches above were key for moving people from fear to trust and assisting families to enroll in SNAP and public benefits. In **Table 2** below, we provide a full list of the strategies that the grantee organizations used in their continued efforts to address the chilling effect of the now reversed 2019 public charge rule.

Table 2. Organizations' Strategies to Move People from Fear to Trust

Strategy	
Combine SNAP outreach efforts with food distribution	SNAP outreach efforts can be more effective when combined with solving families' immediate basic needs. Grantees use food banks, drive-up lines, farmers markets, and community kitchens as opportunities and venues to introduce SNAP to families and encourage applications.
Conduct outreach with immigrant families in trusted spaces	Organizations conduct outreach in situations where immigrant families are already gathering. These contexts include health fairs, swap meets, COVID vaccination sites, health clinics, legal outreach meetings, faith-based events, Christmas events, coffee chats, community meetings, senior centers, YMCAs, and parent-teacher conference nights at schools. Some use flyers and other educational materials to inform immigrant families about public benefits. Advertising services and resources, including billboards in rural areas, spread the word about services.
Build personal connections with immigrant families	Organizations emphasized the importance of connecting with community members and having conversations with them in-person. Developing personal connections with community members and talking about shared lived experiences with community members, through one-on-one conversations, builds trust and facilitates getting immigrant families enrolled in benefits. Some organizations visit community members in their homes. Organizations hire staff who speak the languages of the families they serve in order to facilitate relationship building.
Offer a consistent presence in the community	To build trust with immigrant families, organizations consistently participate in community events such as food distribution or health fairs in a visible way in order to be well known in the community. Staff wear clothing that is familiar to immigrant families (e.g., clothing that has a similar logo as the local school's).
Provide assistance with applications and appointments	Organizations help immigrant families with enrolling in SNAP by helping them navigate the application process and setting up appointments for them.
Utilize digital and traditional media strategies to reach more people	Organizations use social media, television, and radio campaigns; messaging apps like WhatsApp; and podcasts and talk shows to inform communities about SNAP enrollment or other opportunities. Some use QR codes, flyers, and other educational materials to reach and inform immigrant families about public benefits.

Provide referrals and build strategic partnerships

Organizations refer community members to other organizations that can help with benefits enrollment if they themselves do not provide those services. They partner with other organizations to hold events to promote enrollment in SNAP and other benefits. Grantees also bring in other agencies to their organizations to help with enrollment.

Embed *promotores* in the work and hire community-embedded staff

Promotores/community health workers and trusted staff members at these organizations frequently speak the same language as community members, share the same values and beliefs, are mobile and meet community members where they are, and can more effectively talk and educate community members—all of which builds trust. Embedding promotores in SNAP enrollment efforts is an effective strategy to reach immigrant families.

Encourage word-of-mouth referrals from community members

Hearing of an organization from a fellow community member is one of the most effective forms of outreach. Organizations bank on community members providing word-of-mouth referrals to build up communal trust in these organizations, which ultimately helps get more immigrant families enrolled in SNAP.

Promote language inclusion and justice

Language inclusion and work that promotes language justice increases trust between immigrant families and the organizations that help them get enrolled in SNAP. Language justice involves providing opportunities for community members to interact and express themselves in the language they feel most comfortable and powerful in. It entails providing resources like translation of written materials or interpretation to create multilingual environments. Grantee organizations interacted with most community members in Spanish and ensured translation of materials, flyers, etc.

Broker meetings with government authorities and agencies to build trust in the government and the public benefits system

Planned interactions between immigrant community members and bodies of authority can build trust when facilitated by trusted organizations. Grantees organized meetings for community members and local police to alleviate fears and build trust in the system.

Challenges Grantees Face in Food Access and SNAP Enrollment Efforts

The many efforts of these community-based organizations to enroll immigrants in SNAP and other public benefits are hindered and complicated by several factors, including the fact that the state government agencies handling SNAP enrollments are understaffed and backlogged, resulting in applicants not being processed in time or having to wait for months. Staff shared that this reality affects the trust that *promotores* labor to build with community members. A staff member in Florida said, "**People's applications are not being processed in time. They lose trust in promotores when truly it's the agency . . . It degrades the trust that the community has in us**."

The SNAP enrollment system is complex, which sometimes leads to incorrect data entry and lengthy appointments and wait times, further discouraging families from applying. A staff member in California said, "**I think that that has been a challenge for many of our community members—navigating the whole process of these applications. It's very bureaucratic**."

Inflation and other economic challenges have also directly affected both SNAP enrollment and grantees' food distribution efforts. Staff noted that some immigrants, especially seniors, did not want to go through the complicated enrollment process to receive a small amount of SNAP dollars. The rise in grocery prices weighs on grantee organizations' commitment to providing nutritious and culturally familiar foods to immigrant families. A staff member in California noted,

> **As the cost of food has increased, [our organization] has been forced to scale back the amount of fresh produce and products like eggs and milk. While we continue to lean on the partnership developed with [the regional food bank], we still have to supplement products to ensure our food boxes are culturally relevant and offer healthy options. This has become increasingly challenging with the rising cost of food. Additional resources and access to fresh produce would be a huge benefit.**

Organizations also have to fight against misinformation, with false or incomplete news circulating on social media and immigrant families frequently calling staff with questions. A staff member in Arizona shared,

> **We spend a lot of time correcting misinformation about the potential impact of accessing SNAP on someone's immigration status. People are receptive once you discuss on a one-on-one setting and we have infographics about the information. But it takes a while for that [to] sink in on a collective level. Fear is a powerful motivator and counteracting that chilling effect is very challenging.**

Staff pointed out that immigration attorneys are seen as trusted, knowledgeable figures, which complicates matters if the attorneys provide inaccurate information. A staff member in Arizona said, "**It's really hard to counteract misinformation coming from immigration lawyers. It's something we've been struggling with**."

In addition to these challenges, policies and narratives regarding immigration and immigrant rights vary widely from state to state and even at local community levels. These contextual factors are explored further in the following Policy and Narrative Findings section.

Immigrant Advocates' Reflections on the Chilling Effect

"La mayoría está asustada con la carga pública. Hay familias que no quieren aplicar por la carga pública."

"Most are scared about public charge. There are families who do not want to apply [for benefits] because of public charge."

"I can certainly see individuals receding deeper into the shadows, not coming out to a food distribution, et cetera, because of that chilling effect, which is what the law was really intended to do."

"Yo creo que pues todo el mundo está confundido con la carga pública."

"I think that, well, everyone is confused with public charge."










Policy and Narrative Findings

Scarcity and Shame in Basic Needs

Federal and state policies intersect to create a range of realities for immigrant families across the United States, with corresponding impacts on family health and well-being. Politicians' public messages about immigration also shape larger narratives that affect immigrant communities' levels of fear and belonging. States with more immigrant integration policies (e.g., expanded public benefits eligibility, access to state healthcare) demonstrate smaller health inequities between U.S.-born residents and noncitizens.[xiii] However, the positive effects of multiple integration policies are diminished in states with more policies that criminalize immigration (e.g., collaboration with ICE, legal status checks). Across the country, community-based organizations play a vital role in updating immigrant families on the ever-changing policy landscape; translating confusing policies into accessible language for immigrant communities; correcting misinformation; advocating for immigrant health and integration policies; and developing positive, facts-based counter-narratives.

Harmful narrative themes:

- Scarcity
- Shame in being a "public charge"
- Undeservedness / othering
- Criminalization

The previous section demonstrated how grantee organizations provided safe and welcoming spaces and access points for Latino and other immigrant families to obtain

food and enroll in benefits, when eligible. We also identified a deeper layer of narrative change work that grantees engaged in, to different degrees. In this section, we identify specific harmful narrative themes (largely based on misinformation) that affected communities and we identify ways in which No Kid Hungry grantees drew on positive facts-based counter-narratives in their outreach, educational, and community work. Although grantees were not explicitly funded to do narrative change work, we see this natural community-led strategy as having the potential to move families from fear to trust at a larger scale. In some cases, the counter-narrative themes described here are early seeds of ideas that have significant potential to reduce harm. In others, counter-narrative themes were more salient and consistent across sites. Narrative work has the potential to change hearts and minds at the level of cultural change—in mainstream society and within Latino communities—in ways that programs and policies cannot.[xiv]

Scarcity v. Abundance

Anti-immigrant narratives described by grantees and partners in this study predominantly draw on the theme of scarcity, positioning immigrants as a drain on limited resources in society. The narrative of scarcity continues to fuel xenophobia and anti-immigrant policies. This politically charged narrative is predicated on the idea that resources are scarce and should be protected from immigrants who take what would otherwise be available to U.S. citizens—a view that only 24% of the country holds.[xv] As one faith organization leader stated, "**One view is that they are a burden, taking our jobs, doing nothing. They don't speak English. It's not their country–they should go somewhere else**."

Positive counter-narrative themes:

- **Abundance**
- **Independence and autonomy**
- **Belonging and contributing**
- **Rights and power**

The United States has more than enough food to feed us all. The inability of working adults to feed their families is a collective social policy failure that can be tied to structural inequities such as income and wealth inequities, lack of affordable housing and healthcare, and racism. As a staff member in Arizona points out below, wealthy Americans regularly receive tax-funded public benefits and entitlements such as mortgage interest deductions and tax breaks, but these resources are hidden from public view and distributed without stigma attached:

> **I think stigma is still a huge thing in public benefits. We experience it all the time with staff, with volunteers. People are like, "Oh, that person showed up in a Mercedes." I was like, "How do you know they just didn't lose their job? Why**

> does that matter?" . . . There's so many public benefits, like tax relief for mortgage insurance, all this kind of stuff that people are like, "Oh, this isn't an entitlement," when it's the exact same—it's a government handout to help in this. But, like, tax breaks for the wealthy and mortgage breaks and all this kind of stuff doesn't have the stigma that access does, that food benefits do . . . So, I think it's just continuing to fight against that narrative.

Shame in Being a "Public Charge" v. Independence and Autonomy

Anti-immigrant narratives that play on the notion of dependency were commonly described as part of mainstream thinking. A healthcare employee noted, "**I think the immigrant community is, for the most part, seen as, again on that legal aspect, as people who come and just take advantage of the situation, right, of the government in the areas where they live**."

Contrary to this idea, many key informants pointed out that immigrant communities did not want to be "**dependent**" on benefits and were resistant to accepting government assistance. Key informants noted a strong stigma attached to using public benefits within some Latino communities, which prevents people from stepping forward to ask for help. This stigma is often rooted in the deep internalized shame that many immigrants feel in not being able to meet their family's basic needs through work alone. A faith leader shared, "**[People are] ashamed. Some immigrants had a good life in their country. It is embarrassing to line up and ask for food. We have seen that . . . They feel embarrassment to ask for help**."

One staff member in Florida said,

> **One of the things is addressing the shame, the shame that goes and is associated with charity, and having conversations with families. It's interesting because if we have conversations in a group, no one participates and people shut down. People feel ashamed, they're embarrassed, they don't want to talk**.

Grantees work closely with families and communities, empathizing with community members and acknowledging their goals of independence and autonomy. They meet individually with immigrant community members to shift the narrative of shame. One staff member in Florida shared how they help to break down the stigma around public benefits by offering their own experience:

> I stress the importance of having meals and access to food and how that helps your son or daughter be able to focus on school and not be worried about being hungry and the fact that food insecurity is a real thing, not just for you, but for many people in this community, and there should be no shame associated with that, right? It's a process of education. Sharing my personal story of saying, "You know, my family accepted this as well and I'm not scared. I'm not ashamed of this. In fact, I'm proud of the fact that my mom was able to ask for help when she did. It gave us what we needed for that time. And then, now I can look back and also help others.

Undeservedness and Othering v. Belonging and Contributing

In the United States, a strong culture of determining whether someone "deserves" assistance is visible in many of our policy decisions.[xvi] People who are typically considered "deserving" include children, those with certain disabilities, and the elderly. Immigration status–or a lack thereof–is also a driving factor in deciding a person's "deservedness." Since the mid-1990s, immigrant families' access to social safety net programs has been increasingly restricted[xvii] and undocumented immigrants are ineligible for most federal assistance programs.[xviii]

Some immigrants have internalized this narrative, holding that certain groups are entitled to benefits and services while others are "undeserving." A staff member in Florida shared,

> One of the prevailing narratives here in south Florida that you hear every day, it's from immigrant communities themselves. I go back to my point of "different nationalities come with different socioeconomic statuses." There's certainly an anti-immigrant sentiment within the immigrant community here in south Florida, turning their back on recent arrivals, [saying], "I did it the right way, [they immigrated] the wrong way."

Rather than focusing on how community resources can meet the needs of fellow human beings, pejorative narratives have served to "other" immigrant communities. A community leader voiced their frustration with the unbalanced portrayals of immigrants in media:

> Always when it's a need to blame someone, it's the immigrants. Yes, we are the target of political agendas . . . When something bad–a war crime was perpetrated by a Latino or immigrant–it's like the first page. But when a

> success or something good with the immigrants, they don't say anything. So, for one person who did something bad, it's like, "All the immigrants are bad. All the immigrants are doing something bad."

A *promotor* shared,

> Que haya cierta forma de rechazo, verdad? Por sentirse que están siendo invadidos por nuestra cultura, de vida, de la población que está aquí. Y quizás, lo que escuchamos es que no [nos quieren] dar ciertas ayudas, no [quieren que apliquemos] para programas. // This is a type of rejection, right? They feel that they are being invaded by our culture, our lifestyle, our presence here. And maybe what we're hearing is that they do not want to provide us with assistance, they do not want us to apply for benefits.

Over the course of this initiative, two grantees utilized media and educational campaigns to reach a larger audience and counter harmful narratives about immigrants. Many cite statistics that highlight the immense economic contributions immigrants make to the United States. One faith leader shared, "They contribute with taxes, they contribute with inputting into our social systems. I don't believe they're a drain on the economy." At a national level, immigrants contribute $500 billion in taxes and hold $1.4 trillion in spending power.[xix] In California, for example, immigrants comprise 85% of agricultural laborers, 60% of software engineers, and 51% of dentists.[xx] Immigrants also have a significant presence in healthcare assistance, construction, and restaurant and domestic service labor market sectors.

> **"This grant allowed us, for the first time, to try a traditional media campaign around our services, information around public charge, and changing the immigrant narrative. We are still measuring the results but the fact that we are able to try something new is a great win for us."**
>
> **– Florida organization**

At a local level, key informants noted that immigrants are hardworking and contribute to the sociocultural fabric of communities. A staff member in California noted, "**The degree of culture that has been shared here from different communities has been really beautiful. There are celebrations and festivals and things like that, and there are so many traditions that are so beautiful**." A business owner shared that "**many [immigrants] are hard-working and they do their best to stay out of trouble**." A government worker said,

> **I ended up needing some help myself in reference to distributing some of the food, and I ended up getting some [immigrant] families that came and supported that. And so, I was amazed at the resiliency of them. Even in the midst of [personal challenges]–they sought to help other people even though they needed the help as well.**

A staff member in Florida shared,

> **[Immigrants are] very resilient, and there's a lot of positive aspects to them. They value faith. They value family. They value opportunities to better themselves and their families. Very hard-working. So, lots of really, really good things that they bring to the community that they share amongst themselves.**

Criminalization v. Rights and Power

Public charge policies over the years (see **Appendix B: A Brief Policy History**) combined with other anti-immigrant policies at federal and state levels effectively criminalized families' attempts to meet their basic needs. Advocates explained that immigrants (including those with and without green cards) were afraid they would be arrested or deported just for seeking nutrition services for themselves or their children. Key informants discussed how these harmful narratives create real fear in immigrant communities about accessing benefits and negatively affect access to food and nutrition along with overall well-being. One staff member in Arizona said,

> **Obviously, there's a lot of concerns into, like, "What does it mean if I were to access it?" And I'll give an example—during the pandemic, when the P-EBT cards were being handed out, some folks didn't want to use it because of fear of public charge.**

We saw clear examples of how Latino-serving organizations' efforts to address food insecurity in communities and enroll eligible immigrants in SNAP were affected by the sociopolitical context of the states they were in. Key informants noted that aggressive anti-immigrant policies (even those unrelated to public benefits, such as border policies)

reinforced negative narratives and created a general environment of fear. Related to SNAP eligibility and enrollment, one community center staff shared,

> Y algunos de ellos sí tienen [acceso] o varios de ellos también sí tenían, pero no tienen la información. Otros tenían información, tienen acceso, pero tienen miedo para aplicar. Algunos otros tenían la idea, pero también, no sabían cómo hacerlo. // Some or even many of them have access [are eligible for benefits], but they lack the information [about how to apply]. Others have the information and have access but they are afraid to apply. Still, some would like to apply, but do not know how.

Staff and community stakeholders alike identified several pending and recently passed anti-immigrant policies that generated fear. The end of Title 42,[xxi] with its lack of clarity and opposing news stories, created confusion within immigrant communities. Meanwhile, recent state-specific policies like SB 1718 in Florida[xxii] and SB 3 and 4 in Texas[xxiii] have instilled enough fear in immigrant communities to prompt families to leave the state. One staff member in Florida said, "We had just started believing that public charge fears had subsided. People were starting to reach out again." Another Florida-based organization staff reported,

> The governor signed SB 1718, effective July 1st. The response every time was fear . . . Some of our families have even left the state. When we called and reached out to them, they said, you know, "We're in Tennessee. We're in Georgia. We're in Alabama. We've left."

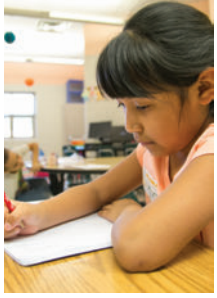
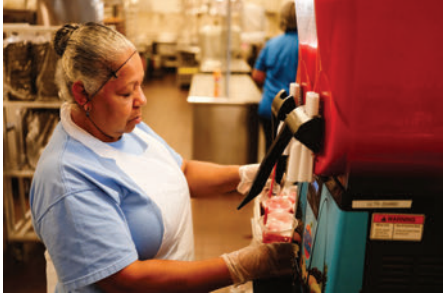
Linking Outreach to Civic Engagement

"This is a grassroots movement to create awareness—teaching clients to exercise their rights and responsibilities to go out and vote. Many people feel like the system is very far from them. You need to get involved. Community engagement in your neighborhood and schools, education in our city, creating awareness."

– Texas faith leader

Some grantees see an explicit link between family empowerment and civic participation and encourage families to know and exercise their rights in different ways. A staff member in California explained,

> I can share that once a family member is in, community members know what the opportunities are. They become empowered. And so, this has really led to a lot of advocacy efforts locally . . . Just being able to support them in understanding how to budget with the money that they are given, it makes a big difference in being able to then go into the [school] district and [letting] them know like, "Hey, let's switch out these cereal bars for whole fruits." And so, they've been able to do that, and they've been able to make changes and advocate at the Capitol for the bills that they feel passionate about that will help support their communities.






Recommendations and Conclusion

Toward Just Food Systems for Immigrant Health

Research Question 3: What can we learn from this initiative and from one another? What policy recommendations come from these learnings?

Health behaviors and clinical care account for only 50 percent of a person's health; the other 50 percent is dependent on social and economic factors and the person's physical environment.[xxiv] We should expect that the policies and local social climates that immigrants encounter will affect their overall health and well-being. However, research on the impact of structural factors such as policies and narratives on population-level health disparities is an underexplored area that warrants further attention. This study demonstrates how policies and narratives in one area—access to public benefits to meet food and other basic needs—are key determinants in the overall health and well-being of immigrant families and communities.

Community-led work to get food on the table and move people from fear to trust is likely to continue to play an essential role in the well-being of immigrant families. Throughout this study, we learned how Latino–led and –serving organizations define success and that more work is needed to align funding opportunities and evaluation metrics with community priorities. Narrative change and federal and state legislative advocacy work to create communities where basic resources are accessible to all are critical. Below, we outline three overarching recommendations for the field.

1. Expand Programs and Policies that Strengthen Local Food Access and Trust Building

- Support effective community-based organizations that are meeting their communities' food and nutritional needs by providing annual funding
- Allocate more funding to community-based organizations specifically working on SNAP applications given the extra work they do to provide culturally and linguistically responsive support to immigrant families
- Fund community-based organizations to conduct narrative change work
- Provide flexible, long-term funding to align with the pace of social change
- Allocate government resources and hire more employees to eliminate the SNAP enrollment backlog and prevent future occurrences
- Simplify the SNAP enrollment process
- Fund a targeted national media campaign to combat misinformation

We strongly recommend that funders, government agencies, and legislators continue to support and/or expand the deployment of resources to alleviate hunger and meet the basic needs of immigrant families in the United States.

The 2019 public charge ruling created a landscape of food scarcity just months before the COVID-19 pandemic began. Many immigrants leaving public assistance were also affected by structural inequities such as overrepresentation in the essential workforce, overcrowding and substandard housing, and lower rates of health insurance. Due to these baseline disparities that were in place prior to the onset of the pandemic, immigrants faced higher risks of infection, which led to further disparities in COVID-19 infections, deaths, and other physical and mental health outcomes. These health disparities then exacerbated socioeconomic inequities such as rising unemployment rates, business closures, and homelessness.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act[xxv] provided economic relief for many Americans during the pandemic and temporarily strengthened the infrastructure of emergency food systems across the country, preventing many families from becoming destitute. Advocates pointed out that during this time, some immigrant families suspended their shame and applied for public assistance; the stigma of getting emergency food benefits was not as strong because so many people—citizens and immigrants alike—shared the experience of the COVID-19 crisis. However, not everyone was deemed deserving of help, even though the pandemic was considered an emergency. Undocumented immigrants were ineligible for the benefits provided in the CARES Act, even though they contribute tens of billions of dollars in taxes[xxvi]

Now that pandemic-era benefits have expired, combined with the rise in food prices, we anticipate an increased need for food access and food justice for all as we return to this permanent "emergency." As a staff member in Arizona said,

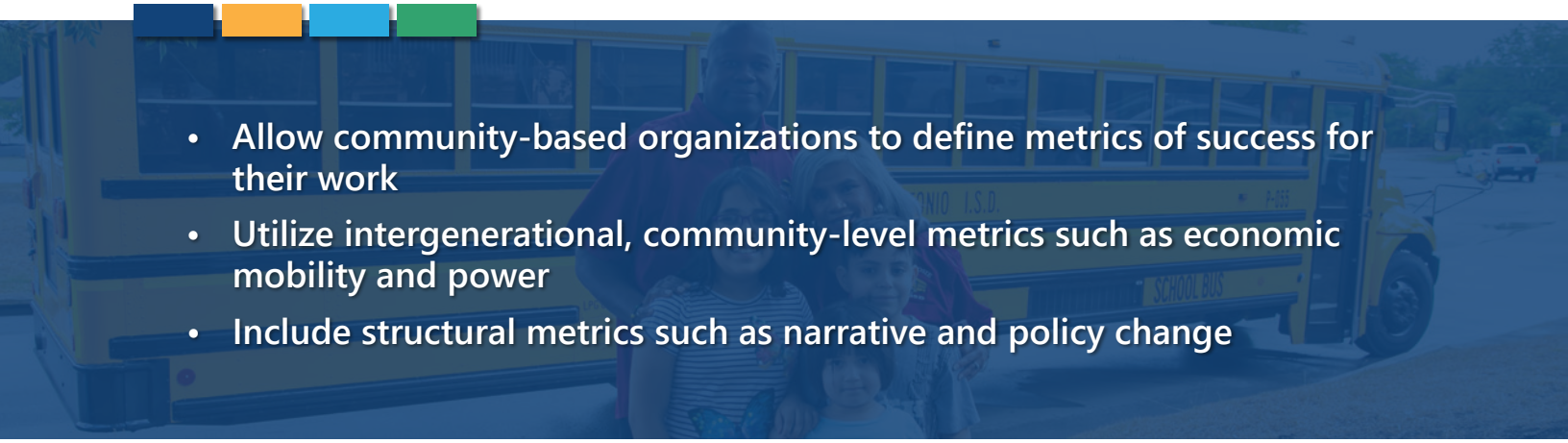
> **I hate the fact that we call everything "emergency food benefits" because we've been in a 40-year emergency . . . We saw during the pandemic what happens when government funds the needs and people are like, "Okay, I'll go," and no one felt, "This is bad," because everyone needed it and they just went, and there was money for it, and poverty levels changed.**

Unrestricted and increased funding is needed to address immigrant communities' ongoing needs and ensure that community-based organizations like the Latino-serving organizations in this initiative can continue providing food to immigrant families and carry out the trust-repairing work that they are doing on behalf of the government.

We heard from grantee organizations that the hard work of their *promotores* in building trust with community members is squandered due to the lengthy delays in state departments' SNAP application processing. We recommend that policymakers channel more government resources towards processing SNAP applications in a timely manner and streamlining the process to address hunger in the United States.

The misinformation stemming from the 2019 public charge rule is so prevalent that grantee organizations must dedicate significant time and resources to addressing Latino families' fear and confusion about public benefits in one-on-one settings. We recommend a targeted national media campaign to effectively change Latino communities' understanding of the public charge rule and hasten the thawing of the chilling effect. This could be aligned with funded, community-led narrative strategy projects that catalyze culture change.

2. Align Success Metrics with Community Goals



- Allow community-based organizations to define metrics of success for their work
- Utilize intergenerational, community-level metrics such as economic mobility and power
- Include structural metrics such as narrative and policy change

When asked how they define success, key informants and Latino staff and leaders provided a range of elements and goals, from hunger alleviation and enrollment in benefits in the short-term to long-term intergenerational and family and community outcomes such as economic mobility and power. We recommend that funders and program leaders align their measures of success with these multi-level goals.

As shared in this report, top programmatic goals included increasing the number of SNAP enrollment appointments and increasing the amount of food available for distribution to those in need. As a community health worker explained, "**I think through the number of appointments we're able to set, that would be a good indicator that we're reaching these communities**." Respondents also noted that short-term resources like safety net programs and social supports can sometimes enable individuals and communities to get through crises and become self-sufficient, which means that in the future, support from charitable organizations would no longer be needed. A community leader shared, "**You're able to help them sustain until they can get on their feet for whatever reason why they needed the help, and that's how I would mark it, actually**."

Maintaining a consistent presence in community settings and cultural and linguistic concordance between trusted staff and immigrant families were two of the grantees' most effective approaches. Indicators of successful or quality programs could include hiring a majority of staff members who share cultural and linguistic congruence with community members, capturing the preferred languages of people accessing services and how the organization is meeting those needs, and tracking repeated engagement with community members or deepened relationships with other community organizations.

In addition to these program-focused goals, some key informants believe that the true measure of success is economic security and mobility, which they closely link to educational attainment, specifically learning English and graduating from high school. A government employee shared,

> **Upward social mobility, upward economic mobility. If you can get some of the adults speaking English comfortably, you could potentially get a different job. If you get children who came in and are excelling past secondary level education that their parents didn't have, I would call that successful.**

Others elaborated on the idea of educational attainment, adding that financial education and literacy is an important way to ensure success and equity. Immigrant families with a certain level of financial literacy would be better able to integrate into society and would be less likely to be taken advantage of by unscrupulous businesspeople and practices. A community leader offered,

> **I would like to see financial education because some . . . need to understand financial literacy, how to deal with banks, how to go to look for a house and not be taken by the investor who's trying to sell..**

Finally, key informants and staff identified community power building as a measure of success. This includes movement towards specific narrative and policy changes in communities. For example, in California, some of the organizations work in coalitions to inspire immigrant communities to set agendas and advocate for the changes they would

Dedication and Consistency

"[The staff are] passionate about what they do, and they're persistent. When you see this food distribution, they're happening on rainy days, when it's snowing and hail, rain or shine, and they're out there in the community."

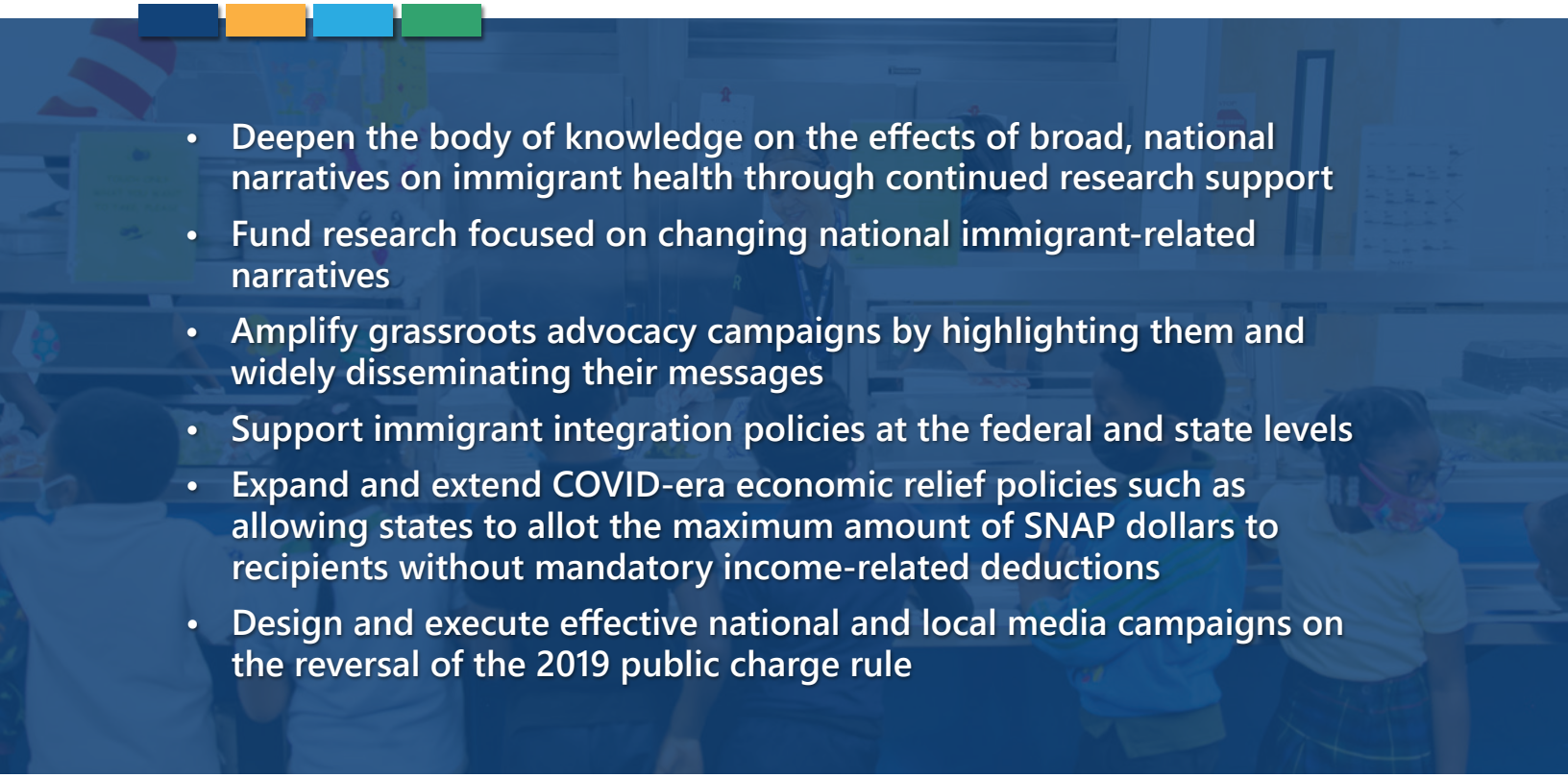
– California healthcare staff

like to see. A *promotor* explained how harnessing community knowledge and uplifting communities to advocate for themselves is a way to achieve success, saying,

> **Pues es a través de la educación, de pláticas comunitarias, pues es como el poder, verdad, de levantar su voz, de estar seguros en lo que puedan hacer, en lo que puedan lograr. Pero es un motivo para seguir, siendo persistente, para alcanzar la meta. // It's through education, community conversations; it's like the power, right, of lifting our voices, in knowing the possibilities, in knowing what can be achieved. This is our motivation to press forward and to continue to reach toward our goals.**

The prospective outcomes and measures of success described above require a deep level of dedication and resources, like time, money, and people power. The implication for funders and evaluators in measuring success and defining desired outcomes is that funding should be flexible and long term. This reinforces important points made by the equitable evaluation[xxvii] and trust-based philanthropy[xxviii] initiatives, among others. Additionally, evaluators and researchers should consider both short-term programmatic goals as well as long-term structural goals in their evaluation and recognize that each organization and the community they serve is unique.

3. Develop Projects that Align Narrative Change Work with Policy Advocacy



- Deepen the body of knowledge on the effects of broad, national narratives on immigrant health through continued research support
- Fund research focused on changing national immigrant-related narratives
- Amplify grassroots advocacy campaigns by highlighting them and widely disseminating their messages
- Support immigrant integration policies at the federal and state levels
- Expand and extend COVID-era economic relief policies such as allowing states to allot the maximum amount of SNAP dollars to recipients without mandatory income-related deductions
- Design and execute effective national and local media campaigns on the reversal of the 2019 public charge rule

Since the combination of public charge policies and narratives is strong enough to directly impact the well-being of immigrant families and communities, we theorize that it would also be possible to develop an equally strong portfolio of counter-narratives and policies throughout the country to heal that harm, increase access to basic needs, and improve immigrant well-being.

Global migration patterns will likely continue to inspire narratives of scarcity and shame in the United States and abroad.[xxix] It can be difficult to disentangle the effects of harmful policies and anti-immigrant narratives, as evidenced by the continued chilling effect in 2024, despite the policy's reversal and revision. The narrative change field is rapidly evolving, and experts are producing excellent resources and content to inform counter-narratives related to broad issues such as racial justice, immigrant rights,[xxx] and economic justice. Based on the lessons learned from this initiative, we see the intersections of child hunger, immigrant health, and food justice as a potential area of opportunity for investing in and developing policy-specific narrative change projects.

Typically, narrative change work starts by analyzing the roots of ideological frameworks that inform and are perpetuated by harmful narratives. However, in the case of food and

public benefits and migration, there is a well-documented history of narratives related to scarcity, shame, and deservedness that is further reinforced in this research. State-level policies that expand immigrant access to basic needs and well-being have been shown to positively affect immigrant health,[xxxi] while federal policies such as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program have benefited hundreds of thousands of immigrant young adults and their families.[xxxii] In other words, we know what works in the policy realm to counter the effects of these harmful narratives, and we have a starting place in understanding mainstream harmful narratives. However, we do not yet have an evidence base of effective counter-narratives that grow and shift public opinion in local and national spaces to align with these policy priorities.

We recommend that funders and community leaders dedicate resources to developing and implementing community-led narrative change projects to support the advocacy of state-level policies that would increase immigrant families' access to food and other basic needs. While mass media and culture shape and perpetuate narratives, local campaigns and storytelling produce narrative change that is more impactful and builds community power.[xxxiii] At the national level, more work is needed to knit together local insights; disrupt status quo narratives of scarcity and shame; and replace them with narratives of abundance, autonomy, and rights.

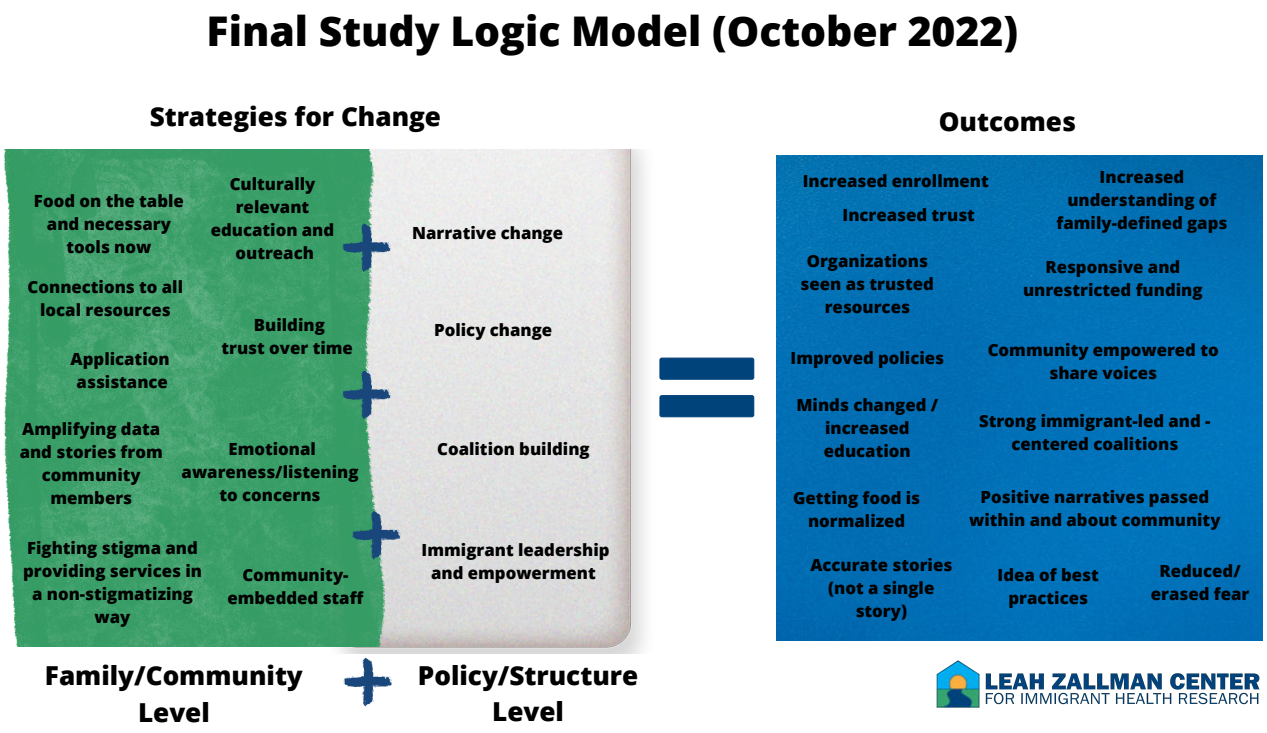
Conclusion

The United States has more than enough resources to feed all families—all adults and all children—who live in this country. The Latino grantee organizations that participated in this No Kid Hungry initiative have shown us that while the work can be difficult and the journey might feel long, they are making a real and tangible difference in the lives of hundreds of thousands of immigrant families. Addressing and ending hunger will require a concerted, combined effort from all of us—community members, policymakers, funders, researchers—but it is possible. As one staff said, "**It takes a village to help support our refugee and immigrant families**." **Let's build that village together.**

Appendix A: Methods

No Kid Hungry partnered with the Leah Zallman Center for Immigrant Health Research (LZC) at the Institute for Community Health to develop and implement a participatory evaluation. We utilized a collaborative approach in which decisions were made through dialogue and consensus between the two organizations. In addition, LZC and No Kid Hungry organized six strategic grantee engagement points to obtain grantee input on data collection and analysis and framing of findings. Together with No Kid Hungry and the grantee organizations, LZC co-developed and refined the research questions of the participatory evaluation and the multi-level conceptual framework that informed this study. **Figure 2** below shows the study logic model that was co-developed with No Kid Hungry and the grantee organizations over the course of three months.

Figure 2. Co-developed study logic model



LZC also worked closely with five grantees—one in Arizona (Phoenix), one in California (Pasadena), one in Florida (West Palm Beach), and two in Texas (Houston and San Benito)—to generate a list of potential key informants from their region or state who could comment on immigrant-related policies and narratives and the immigrant services landscape in their state. No Kid Hungry provided a stipend to these grantees for their time and community connections.

LZC collected data from the following sources:

- Background policy research and review of grantee applications to this initiative
- 6 cohort meetings for all grantees
- 2 mixed methods surveys for all grantees
- 4 focus groups and 2 interviews in English and Spanish with 16 staff members from 10 grantee organizations
- 28 key informant interviews in English and Spanish with government employees, school/university officials, community leaders, sector partners, legal services representatives, media staff, faith leaders and healthcare employees.

We used Dedoose, a qualitative analysis software, to code interview and focus group transcripts based on a codebook that we developed with deductive and inductive themes. We performed a systematic thematic analysis of open-ended responses to each question in the survey and extracted key themes with exemplary quotes. We uploaded close-ended survey questions to SAS and descriptively analyzed the statistics regarding grantee demographics, implementation, feedback, and outcomes. As quantitative data outcomes varied widely among organizations due to their sizes, scopes, and services, we opted to report totals for the initiative as a whole. We triangulated the quantitative survey data and qualitative interview and focus group data during our final round of analysis to arrive at the findings presented in this report.

LZC presented preliminary findings to No Kid Hungry and the grantee organizations at various points throughout this initiative to gather feedback and ensure that grantees had access to data and strategies in real time. The cohort meetings served as a space for vetting initial themes, sharing findings, holding peer-led discussions, and building and strengthening organizational networks.

Appendix B: A Brief Policy History

One of the most important pieces of food access-related legislation in recent history is the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996. PRWORA made unauthorized immigrants and lawful legal residents ineligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps.[xxxiv] The federal government left certain food assistance program eligibility decisions up to states, including the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).[xxxv] The buildup to and enactment of PRWORA resulted in a sharp decline (48%) of immigrants accessing government assistance within a 5-year timespan (1994-1999), marking the beginning of the "chilling effect."[xxxvi] Noticeably, even though refugees remained eligible for public benefits for seven years after their arrival in the United States, they, too, dramatically reduced their usage of federal assistance, with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) rates falling by 78% and food stamps utilization by 53%.[xxxvii]

With the unexpectedly large decline in public benefits participation, the 2002 Farm Security and Rural Investment Act reformed PRWORA, with one of the provisions reinstating eligibility for legal immigrants who had been in the country for at least five years.[xxxviii] Four years prior, Congress had restored eligibility to immigrant children, seniors, and adults with disabilities, a nod to the idea of deservedness.[xxxix] While immigrants who met the eligibility requirements were once again able to apply for federal assistance, immigrant communities' trust in the government had begun to erode, because there was no guarantee that the next administration would not revise or eliminate their eligibility again.

States with more immigrant integration policies demonstrate smaller health inequities between U.S.-born residents and noncitizens.

Today, state policies vary widely along benefit eligibility lines, which means that each of the organizations involved in this initiative works in a unique policy context. **Table 3** below provides a sample of national and state pro- and anti-immigrant policies and selected immigrant demographics. Research shows that states with more immigrant integration policies (e.g., increased public benefits eligibility, access to state healthcare) demonstrate smaller health inequities between U.S.-born residents and noncitizens.[xl] Conversely, the positive effects of multiple integration policies are diminished in states with more criminalization policies (e.g., collaboration with ICE, legal status checks), and those states see increased health inequities. In addition, federal and state policy environments are constantly evolving; each state has a long history of both anti-immigrant and pro-immigrant legislation that shapes the everyday life of immigrant families.

Table 3. A Sample of National and State Immigrant Demographics and Policies

	National	Arizona	California	Florida	Texas
Immigrant population relative to total population[xli]	15%	13%	27%	21%	17%
Share of the immigrant population at or below 200% of the federal poverty line (FPL)[xlii]	33%	39%	32%	37%	40%
FiveThirtyEight Partisan Lean score[6]	X	R+7.6	D-25.5	R+7.6	R+12.0
Example of a pro-immigrant policy	Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals[xliii]	Arizona Proposition 308[xliv]	California Values Act (SB 54)[xlv]	HB 851[xlvi]	Texas Dream Act (HB 1403)[xlvii]
Example of an anti-immigrant policy	2019 public charge rule[xlvii]	SB 1070[xlix]	CA Proposition 187[l]	SB 1718[li]	Operation Lone Star[lii]

[6] The partisan lean score (source: FiveThirtyEight's Partisan Lean Metric), is defined as "the average margin difference between how a state or district votes and how the country votes overall." This metric combines presidential as well as state-legislative election results. The scores reported here incorporate 2020 election results. We converted Democratic-leaning scores to negative numbers to enable average calculations based on methodology developed at the Institute for Community Health. Thus, the lower a state's partisan lean score is, the more politically liberal that state is, and the higher a state's partisan lean score is, the more politically conservative that state is, compared to the nation as a whole.

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