

COVID-19 Pandemic Impact on Immigrant Families and Communities:

Recommendations for Philanthropic Action



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CONCERNED
WITH IMMIGRANTS
AND REFUGEES

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INTRODUCTION

In these tumultuous times when people the world over are experiencing fear, distress, and uncertainty in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, GCIR is leaning into our [core values](#) to guide how we mobilize philanthropy to support immigrant families and communities in the United States. Our funding recommendations center humanity, justice, belonging, and solidarity. We believe this moment calls for philanthropy to lead with courage to advance an inclusive, equitable, and holistic response. Philanthropic action must not only address urgent needs but reflect a vision that [all Americans, no matter where they were born, are united with one another](#) in the face of this devastating public health crisis.

As immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers face an avalanche of new and ongoing challenges, we urge funders to significantly increase grantmaking dollars, shift grantmaking practices, embrace risk, and assert leadership and influence in the public sphere. Our point-in-time analysis of community needs and top-line recommendations focus on immediate needs and reflect the situation as of the publication date. We will update our analysis and recommendations as needed and will uplift medium- and longer-term issues in the future. Please consult [our COVID-19 resource page](#) regularly for new information.

IMPACT ON IMMIGRANT FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

While the full scope of COVID-19's impact on an estimated 45 million immigrants in the United States is still unfolding, what we know for certain is that COVID-19 exacerbates an already dire situation for immigrant families, more than half of whom live at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. It compounds the devastation that has resulted from a three-year barrage of xenophobic rhetoric, ever-increasing enforcement and incarceration, and punitive policies—perhaps most publicly laid bare by family separation at the border. In light of the recently implemented [public charge](#) rule, confusion abounds as to whether any immigrant seeking to adjust status or obtain a visa should pursue COVID-19 testing and treatment. The possible Supreme Court decision on the [termination of Deferred Action of Childhood Arrivals \(DACA\)](#) may lead to upwards of 700,000 immigrants becoming undocumented during this pandemic. And the administration has [closed the borders to asylum seekers](#), potentially creating a humanitarian catastrophe.

The federal government has taken important steps to help workers, small business owners, and some industries impacted by COVID-19 through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Yet the CARES Act intentionally excludes the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants, even though [nearly all are working \(95.8%\) and paying taxes](#). These immigrants also do not qualify for other federal benefits and most state safety-net programs. Concentrated in low-wage sectors hardest hit by the pandemic—from hospitality and food service to landscaping and caregiving—immigrants who have lost jobs or who are seeing reduced hours, particularly the undocumented, have no other means of keeping a roof over their heads and putting food on the table.

In addition, because automatic federal stimulus payments are guaranteed only to those whose information is already in the Internal Revenue Service systems, low-income people who are not usually required to file tax returns will need to do so in order to receive their payments. Many



Ensuring that immigrants have access to linguistically and culturally competent information on COVID-19 is essential to protecting their health and slowing community spread.

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Farmworkers—who play a vital role in our food security—are at high risk for COVID-19 infection due to their overcrowded living conditions.

low-income immigrants with limited English proficiency could miss out on the federal relief for which they are eligible.

The CARES Act does provide some [protections on emergency paid sick leave and family leave](#) for which all immigrants should be eligible, and these limited remedies may benefit children of immigrants, particularly those in mixed-status families. Nevertheless, there remain grave concerns about the impact on children of immigrants, irrespective of status, as their parents struggle to maintain safety, well-being, digital access for education, and economic stability in their homes.

Immigrant communities are extremely diverse, and certain segments are particularly vulnerable in the face of the pandemic, including older adults, indigenous, black immigrants, people with disabilities, those with underlying health conditions, as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ), Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI), and Muslim, Arab, and South Asian (MASA) communities. As misinformation spreads and Asians are scapegoated for the COVID-19 outbreak, anti-Asian discrimination and hate crimes are surging. In addition, immigrant children, adults, and families who are currently being detained in immigrant prisons across the country lack access to adequate cleaning and sanitation supplies or appropriate medical care and testing for COVID-19, putting their lives at risk.

That the immigrant workforce is essential to our daily lives has never been more apparent than in this moment of crisis when shelter-in-place orders and similar restrictions have been implemented across the country. Immigrants workers, alongside their U.S.-born counterparts, continue to be exposed to the risk of COVID-19 infection in occupations that have been deemed essential, including farming and agriculture, construction, grocery work, warehouse distribution, and health care. As immigrant-led and -serving organizations attempt to respond to these existential threats within their communities, they are themselves struggling to adapt their services, strategies, and technologies in the face of decreased revenues, greater training needs, and little to no reserves to fall back on. As integral members of our communities, immigrant families must not be overlooked and allowed to fall through the cracks during this time of crisis.

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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Philanthropy plays a critical role in addressing challenges facing immigrant families, particularly mixed-status families that include undocumented members, and ensuring that they are supported. Private funding can support direct assistance to immigrants, programs that maintain their health and well-being, advocacy and organizing to expand government relief for immigrants, and ongoing movement and infrastructure building to advance long-term goals for a just and equitable society. Funders can also support communications efforts that uplift the unique challenges facing immigrant families, promote a narrative of belonging, and tell a story of America standing united. In addition, funders can adopt grantmaking practices to ease the administrative burden on grantees and afford them maximum flexibility to focus on meeting community needs at this moment of heightened fear, stress, and anxiety. Finally, philanthropy can and must assert its leadership and voice, speaking up in support of grantee organizations and the vulnerable communities they represent.

Provide Direct Support to Immigrant Families

- ▶ Support direct cash assistance through existing and newly established statewide or local relief funds for immigrants who are ineligible for unemployment insurance, cash assistance, housing assistance, or other existing or new federal, state, or local relief programs. Cash assistance is critically needed to help impacted immigrant families cover basic expenses such as rent and food.
- ▶ Fund local food and nutrition programs, including food pantries, to serve and actively reach out to immigrant communities in multiple languages.
- ▶ Increase the capacity of general safety-net providers to serve undocumented immigrants, including those that serve immigrants encountering mental health issues or are in situations of domestic violence.
- ▶ Expand access to COVID-19 information in culturally and linguistically competent and accessible mediums, venues, and platforms (e.g., PSAs, community radio stations, ethnic media outlets), including materials translated in a variety of languages (including indigenous languages) to ensure immigrant families know how to protect themselves and access testing and treatment resources.
- ▶ Support trusted immigrant healthcare providers, such as non-profit community clinics, as well as proven methodologies for promoting and protecting public health, such as *promotoras de salud*.

Increase Government Support for Immigrant Families

- ▶ Support continued advocacy at the federal level for more inclusive eligibility criteria in any additional COVID-19 relief packages and other policies affecting immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.
- ▶ Fund state and local advocacy and organizing to expand support for immigrant families, irrespective of immigration status, including:
 - ◆ Setting up state- and city-funded relief funds that provide assistance to immigrants who are ineligible for current federal and state programs.

Philanthropy plays a critical role in addressing challenges facing immigrant families and ensuring that they are supported.



Supporting trusted immigrant healthcare providers, such as non-profit community clinics, is key to promoting and protecting public health.

- ◆ Ensuring that all immigrants have access to free or low-cost COVID-19 testing and treatment, including through mobile units and community health centers in hard-to-reach communities—and that these sites are designated as “immigration enforcement-free” zones.
- ◆ Expanding access to the safety net, including state-level health insurance, such as Medicaid, state earned income tax credit, food assistance, sick leave, and other programs.
- ◆ Halting evictions, utility shut offs, administrative fines, towing cars for debt collection, and other practices that throw individuals and families into crisis.
- ◆ Ensuring educational equity, including by requiring school districts to provide resources necessary for successful remote instruction—such as multilingual materials, food, appropriate technology, and access to the internet—and continuing contracts for afterschool programs.
- ◆ Providing expanded state and locally funded supports, such as childcare for workers designated as essential and immigration legal services in light of unabated enforcement.



Funders can support efforts that help maintain the cohesion and resilience of immigrant families.

Reduce or Eliminate Enforcement, Detention, and Deportation During COVID-19

Advocacy and organizing, along with immigration legal services, are critically needed in light of ongoing immigration enforcement activities and the high number of immigrants in detention and at risk of deportation. Priorities include:

- ▶ Pushing for the release of detained immigrants, particularly those who are medically vulnerable, through parole and bond.
- ▶ Increasing access to justice and health services for detained immigrants by facilitating remote legal counsel, providing adequate cleaning and sanitary supplies, and offering testing and treatment in all immigration detention facilities and prisons.
- ▶ Limiting enforcement in all sensitive locations, including but not limited to food pantries, hospitals, community centers, schools, and other community-service agencies.
- ▶ Suspending immigration court proceedings as needed to protect the safety of clients, lawyers, and the immigration court staff.

Expand Anti-Hate and Anti-Discrimination Efforts

- ▶ Fund efforts to monitor and document hate speech and hate crimes—and ensure that these efforts track hate activities related to COVID-19.
- ▶ Support campaigns to counter growing hate speech, discrimination, and attacks against Asian American and Pacific Islander populations.

Invest in Census Outreach

- ▶ Provide additional funds to support shifting from in-person outreach to strategies that comply with physical distancing guidelines (e.g., text messaging campaigns, sending postcards, hosting virtual questionnaire assistance, purchasing ads).

Supporting advocacy and organizing at the federal, state, and local level is essential to expanding support for immigrant families, irrespective of immigration status.

- ▶ Fund technology needs—from phones and hot spots to laptops and videoconferencing platforms—to support grantees' ability to effectively deploy digital and telephonic outreach.
- ▶ Support the purchase of expanded phone and mail lists to extend outreach capabilities.

Additional census-specific resources for funders can be found at GCIR's [census resource page](#).

Support Communications and Narrative Strategies

COVID-19 underscores the critical importance of communications strategies that keep immigrants informed and safe during a public health crisis and that shape a narrative of inclusion and belonging.

- ▶ Support the distribution of information on COVID-19 that is linguistically and culturally competent and available in multiple languages and formats and through a wide range of venues, including ethnic newspapers, radio, and television, along with social media.
- ▶ Fund multi-platform communications efforts that showcase stories of how immigrants are coming together in their communities and joining forces with their U.S.-born neighbors in response to COVID-19.
- ▶ Invest in communications campaigns that promote unity, interconnectedness, and togetherness in the face of the pandemic.

Strengthen the Capacity of Immigrant-led and Immigrant-serving Organizations

Immigrant-led and immigrant-serving organizations are confronting additional challenges in meeting community needs in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Philanthropy can support them by funding:

- ▶ The purchase of protective gear and cleaning supplies for staff, volunteers, and clients at health clinics, domestic violence shelters, and food pantries, amongst others.
- ▶ Mental health and wellness programs for frontline staff working with immigrant, refugee, and asylum seeker communities, be they lawyers, case managers, social workers, or medical providers already grappling with secondary trauma.
- ▶ Technology needs for staff working remotely and for community members who can no longer access on-site services (e.g., purchase of laptops, broadband services, software licenses, videoconferencing service, cybersecurity, and training on these new tools).

Adopt Best Practices in Grantmaking

In this difficult time, funders can adopt a wide range of practices to reduce the administrative burden for grantees, mitigate already heightened stress and anxiety, provide financial stability in a challenging fundraising environment, and ultimately allow grantee organizations to focus on meeting community needs. For example:

- ▶ Extend current grants by a year.
- ▶ Accelerate payments on already-approved grants.

Immigrant-led and immigrant-serving organizations are confronting additional challenges in meeting community needs in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, from lack of technology to increased secondary trauma.



Staff at immigrant-serving organizations must now shift to digital outreach for census, civic engagement, and other efforts.

- ▶ Convert current project grants into general support grants.
- ▶ Make future grants for general support instead of project support.
- ▶ Automatically increase amounts on existing grants.
- ▶ Provide additional funding to cover unexpected needs resulting from COVID-19 (e.g., technology).
- ▶ Offer no-cost extensions and flexibility to adjust deliverables and outcomes.
- ▶ Reduce or eliminate reporting requirements.
- ▶ Streamline grant applications.

In addition to changing grantmaking practices, funders can speak up on behalf of immigrants, denounce racism and hate, and influence public debates on issues affecting immigrant children and families. Funders can work alongside grantees to [educate policymakers](#), inform public-sector partners on the challenges facing grantee organizations, and work with these stakeholders to maximize flexibility and stability of government contracts. Funders can also reach out to offer support and solidarity to grantees working on the frontlines of this pandemic, including those led by and serving AAPIs.

CONCLUSION

At the best of times, the health and economic stability of everyone in our diverse communities is interconnected. During this crisis, existing inequities are magnified, and it is imperative that we mitigate the disproportionate impact on marginalized communities, including mixed-status immigrant families, to ensure our collective well-being. As community needs evolve, GCIR will continue working with funders to ensure that their grantmaking is as strategic and impactful as possible in addressing urgent needs in the present and building a healthy, just, and equitable future for all.



The health and economic stability of everyone in our diverse communities is interconnected. Together, we will get past this public health crisis and continue our collective work to build a healthy, just, and equitable society for all.

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For more information on COVID-19, its impact on immigrants, and how philanthropy is responding, visit our [COVID-19 resource page](#). For further funding guidance and assistance in implementing these recommendations, please contact GCIR's COVID-19 leads, [Aryah Somers Landsberger](#) or [Kevin Douglas](#).