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Memorandum

To: Our Funding Partners and Community Stakeholders
From: Linda X. Tortolero, President & CEO
Subject: Current Status of MLEA's Community Engagement & Mobilization Program
Date: April 28, 2020

As a funding partner and community stakeholder of Mujeres Latinas en Acción, I would like to apprise you of COVID-19's impact on the daily programmatic activities, staff and survivors.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me at ltortolero@mujereslat.org or Gil Zamora, Director of Development at gzamora@mujereslat.org with any questions or ideas you may have.

Office Closures

Until Friday, March 20th, Mujeres' Community Engagement program at our Pilsen headquarters and our North Riverside remained open from Monday – Friday 9AM – 5PM. Our Brighton Park satellite office, which is located within a federal qualified health clinic complex, closed on March 17th to reduce the risk of exposure. Our staff immediately informed families and have stayed in contact ever since. Signage at our Brighton Park also directed potential walk-in participants to our other two sites and Mujeres' phone line where they can be connected to our program staff was also listed.

After the Governor's "Stay at Home" executive order came into effect, all of Mujeres' physical offices closed, effective March 21, 2020. We posted information on the front doors with our telephone number as well as Mujeres' main site phone number. Once the order is lifted, Mujeres leadership anticipates that social distancing practices in the office will continue. Mujeres' offices will reopen with minimal staff physically present staff to attend to the needs of walk-ins. We will look to the guidance of our government and health officials for best practices.

Staff Transition to Telework

After the Governor's "Stay at Home" order, all program staff began to work remotely, answer calls and connecting callers with resource and offering emotional support. All staff have downloaded the 8x8 phone application on their cellphones which forwards calls from our office phone system. It also allows the staff to place outgoing calls to participants or colleagues from our office phone system. This allows all personal phone numbers to stay private.

Service Impact Mujeres' Community Engagement and Mobilization (CEM) Program, works with women to set and lead the way for Mujeres' organizing, policy campaigns, and community health. Our CEM team works at the intersection of immigrant justice, gender-based violence, women's health and economic justice. We have found strength and leadership in the intersections of these movements.



CEM Program's multi-prong approach, includes, community education, Promotoras de Salud (Community Health Workers), and grassroots campaigns for immigrant justice. Mujeres recognizes that our community needs are rapidly changing, and as the stay-at-home orders came into effect there was a lot of confusion and questions in the Latina community in the western suburb region. Our CEM team has been calling community members to see how we can be support them during this time. We are assuring that our volunteers and the community at large know that Mujeres' services are still here for them. Below are the pivots and alterations we have currently made to our CEM program:

- *Community Forums:* Our monthly and popular community meetings, Café en Acción, have been key educating immigrant families of the south west Chicago neighborhoods and the western suburbs. As the health and safety of our community is paramount, during the COVI19 pandemic we will be suspending in person community gatherings and instead we will facilitate these trainings virtually through Facebook Live and Zoom platforms. Mujeres' Facebook has a massive following among Chicago Latina families on social media, and we anticipate that going virtual could lead to a wider reach.

- *Joint Virtual Efforts:* Collaboration and coalition building are part of our strategy to assure that community is well informed. We will explore joint virtual efforts with local schools, community organizations or collaboratives to share vital community education on issues and campaigns such as the 2020 Census, changes to the public charge regulation, pathways to citizenship, and health related resources.

- *Community Phone Bank:* Since the start of Stay-at-home orders, our CEM team has set up a phone bank to assure that our participants are informed on all essential resources that available. This has proven effective and we are able to reach and average of 1,500 individuals to promote our 2020 Census campaign per weeks. This will also be a key strategy to keep the community well-informed and supported during the pandemic.

- *Trainings:* We've adapted our trainings of Promotoras so they can take place with over Zoom, with follow-up coaching support from our program staff via phone. Through these trainings, Promotoras will develop capacities to become points of contacts on vital community health resources, as well as advocates on issues that impact vulnerable families.

Once the "Stay at Home" executive order is lifted, Mujeres' leadership will consider how best to commence activities that have been suspended while practicing social distancing. Understandably, these activities may need to be adjusted to best meet the needs of our participants while keeping everyone safe and healthy.

Challenges During COVID19:

Essential Needs & Economic Hardships The stress of the pandemic is requiring that our staff provide emotional support to community members as well as provide information about crucial resources, such as food, medicine, hygiene and sanitation supplies. *The demand for support to cover our community's basic human needs is immense.* Mujeres was fortunate to receive first round grant funding (\$25,000) for



cash assistance with the Chicago Community Coronavirus Responsiveness Fund. This funding has already been distributed and we hope to secure another grant soon. Mujeres has quickly seized on any other opportunities to provide cash assistance or gift cards for our families many of whom are undocumented and highly vulnerable for multiple reasons. We also have received \$25,000 from the Illinois Immigration Funder Collaborative to support suburban, undocumented individuals and families. Mujeres will be looking to support increased communications capacity to assure the most vulnerable in our community know and understand the resources and referrals we can provide in this crucial time.

Keeping the Community Informed A challenge for Mujeres is that we recognize that some of the most vulnerable in our community may not have a computer or reliable internet connection. We are exploring other mass text message platforms which can allow us to keep community members informed via on text messages on resource as they become available (such as COVID19 testing or food distribution). We are also exploring platforms to keep community members informed and connected via multiple social media platforms.

Vicarious Trauma Before COVID-19, Mujeres had begun to address the self-care needs of our staff including encouraging the use of sick time for mental wellbeing and a new employee assistance program that provides up to 5 mental health counseling sessions. As COVID-19 affects everyone, and Mujeres leadership will be continuously mindful of our staff's experiences with vicarious trauma over the pandemic's course. It is our position that our funding partners should also consider supporting the needs of personnel. Survivors have reported an increase in feeling isolated, without their normal support systems, leaving them vulnerable to depression and other mental health struggles. The stress this pandemic is likely to increase the challenges our staff face as they work help survivors find healing.