

## Case Study: Highlights

### Title: Advanced Funding Increases Engagement of Grassroots Organizations to Address COVID-19 Disparities

Grassroots community-based organizations (CBOs) have a critical role in addressing health disparities, especially among minoritized populations. These organizations often have close ties to communities and are more accessible to and trusted by communities they serve, compared to larger entities such as academic institutions, health care systems, or government agencies (Nguyen et al., 2021). Furthermore, CBOs have been shown to effectively influence community behavior, increase self-efficacy of community members, and improve access to resources (Ohmer et al., 2007; McLeroy et al., 2003). As such, it is essential that CBOs have more equitable and efficient access to federal funding. However, these very organizations often face the greatest barriers to such funding, due to limited staff capacity, less established infrastructure, and fewer cash reserves.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, MCDPH observed an acute need to strengthen its partnership network with smaller organizations. To that end, MCDPH leveraged OT21-2103 funding to disburse federal funding to small CBOs who were working directly with historically minoritized populations who were facing the greatest barriers during the pandemic.

***MCDPH altered their sub-contracting process in order to allow CBOs to receive 40% of grant funding at the start of their contract.*** Additionally, MCDPH modified the ways in which its staff work together across the compliance, accounting, contracting, and program departments. Finally, MCDPH hired new staff to work directly with CBO grantees, in order to support their grant implementation processes and partnership with MCDPH.

Providing 40% of funds upfront to CBOs proved to be notably helpful in two primary ways:

- 1) **It increased the number of small CBOs that were able to contract with MCDPH**, compared to previous funding cycles that use a more typical cost-reimbursement model. This effectively widened MCDPH's partnership network.
- 2) **It allowed CBOs to jumpstart their work more immediately.** CBOs were able to hire critical staff right away and begin implementing grant activities, due to having a sizeable amount of grant money available at the outset.

In these ways, the model of providing 40% of funding upfront was found to be more equitable and more efficient than more typical contracting processes, especially for smaller CBOs.

These findings are relevant to other entities that want to increase their engagement of grassroots community organizations. Such organizations may have established community efforts underway but lack the startup capital to increase their impact. In order to make federal and state funding more accessible, it may be necessary to modify contracting processes to allow upfront funding disbursements. However, funders should also ensure that all aspects of the grant-making process are feasible for smaller organizations, including the application, grant administration, and grant reporting processes. Additionally, the administrative support from MCDPH staff and the intentional efforts to collaborate across departments within the County were critical factors to improving the efficacy of this effort.

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