

# Evaluation of RECERT COVID-19 Communications Projects

Round One Funding: July- September 2020

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Sponsored by: Racial Equity and Community  
Engagement Response TEAM (RECERT)

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## Executive Summary

In July 2020, Ramsey County's COVID-19 Racial Equity and Community Engagement Response Team (RECERT) awarded \$300,000 to 27 contractors for a first round of two separate culturally-specific and focused media and messaging-related funding opportunities for trusted messengers, community and local media agencies. This funding was made possible by the appropriation to Ramsey County under the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

The contractors replicated or redesigned COVID-19 media and communication messaging and/or resources provided by Ramsey County in order to provide culturally-specific, relevant, linguistically appropriate, accurate and timely messages and communication related to COVID-19 to racially, ethnically and culturally diverse communities in Ramsey County (i.e. African American/American Descendants of Slavery (ADOS), African Born, Latino/a, Native American and Asian/Pacific Islander.)

One funding opportunity, *Media and Messaging*, contracted with 12 community agencies and individuals who prioritized a media platform (i.e. online, radio, print, social media, television) to distribute COVID-19 messaging and communications to a targeted community. The other funding opportunity, *Trusted Messenger*, contracted with 15 trusted messengers and community agencies to provide outreach, engagement, resource connection and referrals around COVID-19 messaging as well as community and county services and resources.

### Evaluation

RECERT initiated evaluation of these efforts both to make improvements for future partnership opportunities as well as part of a broader coordinated effort to evaluate the impact of CARES funding spent by Ramsey County. Contractor evaluation reports, reflection sessions with contractors and county staff were used to understand the services and strategies employed for contractors, the perceived impact on target communities, successes and challenges for contractors and how Ramsey County can its contracting processes.

### Findings

Key accomplishments were:

- All (100%) of the \$300,000 funding was provided to organizations within racially and ethnically diverse communities.
- Over 500,000 individuals were reached through Media and Messaging and over 100,000 Ramsey County residents were reached through the Trusted Messenger funding.<sup>1</sup> Several partners noted that their reach extended beyond Ramsey County to across Minnesota and the United States or even a global audience.
- Worked with many different cultural and ethnic communities including African American/African Descendants of Slavery, African-born (Somali, Oromo, Nigerian, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Liberian), Asian (Hmong, Karen, Karenni, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Lao), Latino/x American Indian, White and mixed culture communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on partner estimates. The count likely includes duplication as residents may have been reached by multiple partners.

### ***Successes and Impact on Target Communities***

Partners under both contracts were successful with this funding and reported key strategies that facilitated their success. Partners engaged effectively with their target populations, including hard-to-reach communities, and their activities were well-received by communities. Common successful strategies reported by partners included collaboration, working with community leaders and use of phone calls to reach elders and other isolated community members.

Partners believe they had an impact in a number of areas, including increase in knowledge and protective behaviors around COVID-19 risks, prevention, testing and management. Clients were connected with county and community services, many of whom would have otherwise gone without services and resources during this time. Partners also reported providing emotional support related to the impact of COVID-19 and increasing participation in the Census and voter registration.

### ***Strengths***

Ramsey County is a leader across jurisdictions in the U.S. around meeting a critical need by targeting messaging and prevention in racially and ethnically diverse communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Partners were treated as experts in their own communities and given a significant amount of flexibility and empowerment to best meet the needs of their communities. Many partners engaged in collaboration and strategic alliances and developed creative and culturally appropriate approaches to their messaging.

RECERT leadership, in collaboration with Ramsey County Contracting and Procurement were able to significantly simplify and speed up the solicitation and contracting process for these projects.

### ***Barriers and Challenges***

The tight timeframe for the use of CARES funding and urgent need to be responsive to the COVID-19 pandemic created additional challenges in marketing the funding opportunity and timelines to carry out the work.

Partners reported a lot of confusion around the difference between the two contract types and many partners applied for both and often identified themselves as a Trusted Messenger even if they had a contract under the Media and Messaging project. In practice many partners carried out activities that fell under both project scopes. Other challenges included:

- Limited knowledge and capacity for some contractors around reimbursement-based contracts, general ledgers, and invoicing.
- Need for more county capacity and support around prioritization of messaging, approval of materials, and general technical assistance.
- Contractors adjusting to remote service delivery due to COVID-19 pandemic.
- Potential duplication of efforts across contractors targeting the same cultural community.

### ***Round Two Improvements***

Right as the contracts for Round One were wrapping up, RECERT leadership was actively planning for a second round of funding and quickly pivoted to incorporate learnings and feedback received from Round One into the design of Round Two. These changes address many of the barriers addressed above as well as recommendations laid out in the next section.

### ***Recommendations***

On the next page are recommendations for replication and expansion of “Trusted Messenger” type partnerships as well as general recommendations for all of Ramsey County Contracting and Procurement opportunities.

## **For “Trusted Messenger” Partnerships:**

The recommendations for future Trusted Messenger partnerships are:

- Keep similar scope for next round of funding and consider combining the two contract types in a single contract.
- Engage in contract partnership rather than contract management, which requires dedicated resources to develop and maintain an active partnership and frequent two-way communication between RECERT and the contractors.
- Encouraging more established organizations to collaborate with smaller grassroots efforts under a subcontractor model to engage new partners in the work that may otherwise have barriers to applying for the funds.
- Set collaboration expectations or incentives in proposal/contract development and selection.
- Support collaboration and cohort development through the duration of contract.
- Coordinate with other jurisdictions funding similar efforts.
- Support partners in prioritizing and targeting messaging.

## **For Ramsey County Contracting and Procurement:**

Below are general recommendations that can apply to many other contracting opportunities at Ramsey County.

- Shift from a transactional to relational model of contracting.
- Increase timely marketing of funding opportunity.
- Use a third party for outreach and application assistance around funding opportunities.
- Simplify the application process and use wording that is easy for applicants to understand.
- Provide additional support and information for the application process.
- Support community organizations in becoming fiscal entities for smaller providers.
- Have more community representation on review of proposals.
- Provide orientation on contract and invoicing process.
- Provide advanced funds.

## Introduction

In July 2020, Ramsey County's COVID-19 Racial Equity and Community Engagement Response Team (RECERT) awarded \$300,000 to 27 contractors for a first round of two separate culturally specific and focused media and messaging-related funding opportunities for trusted messengers, community and local media agencies. This funding was made possible by the appropriation to Ramsey County under the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

The selected contractors worked in partnership with RECERT and the County's Incident Management Communications. The county provided COVID-19 media and communication resources, including public health messages, resources and technical assistance contacts that could be utilized, replicated and/or redesigned by contractors to be culturally specific, relevant, linguistically appropriate and accurate for the community reached. The contracts ran from July 2020 – September 2020.

### Media and Messaging

The first funding opportunity was called *Media and Messaging* and contracted with 12 community agencies and individuals to provide media services to aid the county in getting culturally specific, relevant, linguistically appropriate, accurate, and timely messages and communication related to COVID-19 to racially, ethnically and culturally diverse communities in Ramsey County. (See Appendix A for the list of fund recipients.)

The objective of the Media and Messaging initiative was to ensure that individuals and families are engaged and have timely, accurate and up-to-date information about COVID-19 in Ramsey County communities. Media services included formats such as online, radio, print, direct mail, social media, television/video and other culturally specific and appropriate forms of communication and messaging.

Contractors were encouraged to use methods that are adaptable to quickly changing information and explore alternative, effective methods of communication, so long as people maintain physical distancing. The contractors' primary audience(s) must include one or more of the following populations: African American/American Descendants of Slavery (ADOS), African Born, Latino/a, Asian/Pacific Islander and American Indian residents in Ramsey County.

### Trusted Messenger

The second funding opportunity was called Trusted Messenger and contracted with 15 trusted messengers and community agencies to provide outreach and engage racially, ethnically and culturally diverse communities during the COVID-19 response. (See Appendix B for list of fund recipients.)

The purpose of the Trusted Messenger program was to engage with individuals and families and provide accurate and up to-date information to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This program was also intended to help individuals and families to access resources and services for which they qualify both in their community and with Ramsey County.

The selected contractors covered a range of outreach, engagement, resource connection and referrals that reached a diverse racial, ethnic and cultural communities.

## Evaluation Purpose and Objectives

RECERT initiated evaluation of these efforts to assess the impact of culturally specific messenger and media messaging activities with racially and ethnically diverse communities, to make improvements for future partnership opportunities as well as part of a broader coordinated effort to evaluate the impact of CARES funding spent by Ramsey County.

This evaluation aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What proportion of funds went to support racially and ethnically diverse communities?
3. Who was served by the contractors and what services/strategies did they employ?
4. How well did RECERT reach the intended communities with these contracts?
5. What impact did the work have on the targeted residents/communities?
5. What were the successes and challenges for contractors?
6. How can Ramsey County improve its contracting processes to make them more accessible to community organizations?
7. How could the trusted messenger model be expanded across service teams?

### Methods

The methods that were used to answer the evaluation questions were:

- **Evaluation reports submitted by contractors**

Contractors were asked to submit an evaluation report at the end of the contract period. The reports were submitted via an online survey. (See Appendix C for a list of report criteria for each contract type)

- **Reflection session with contractors/partners**

Two reflection sessions were held for each contract type on October 2, 2020. The number of participants in each reflection session are as follows:

Trusted Messenger #1- 11 participants  
Trusted Messenger #2- 5 participants  
Media & Messaging #1- 4 participants  
Media & Messaging #2- 4 participants

A copy of the reflection session questions can be found in Appendix D.

- **Reflection session with Ramsey County employees involved in contract support**

One reflection session with county employees was started on October 13, 2020 and finished on October 22, 2020. The reflection session was held across both contract types. The first session was attended by 13 employees and the second session was attended by 12 employees. A copy of the reflection session questions can be found in Appendix E.

## Findings

Below are the findings from the evaluation of both projects.

### Funding of Racially and Ethnically Diverse Communities

All (100%) of the \$300,000 funding was provided to organizations within racially and ethnically diverse communities.

### Populations Served

As part of their evaluation reports, partners provided information about the populations served and services provided. The below information is based on partner self-reports.

RECERT partnered with 15 community organizations through Trusted Messenger funding which resulted in the following:

- Over 100,000 Ramsey County residents were reached<sup>2</sup>. A number of partners noted that their reach extended beyond Ramsey County to across Minnesota and the United States or even a global audience.
- Worked with many different cultural and ethnic communities including African American, African-born (Somali, Oromo, Nigerian), Asian (Hmong, Karen, Karenni), Latino/x American Indian, White and mixed culture communities.
- A number of partners reported other specific population focuses, including men who are homeless and/or involved in the criminal justice system, youth and young adults, pregnant and postpartum women, elders and low-income residents.

RECERT partnered with 12 media and other community organizations through Media and Messaging which resulted in the following:

- Over 500,000 individuals were reached. For many partners, it was not possible to track whether individuals were in Ramsey County because their reach was statewide, nationwide or even global.
- Media and messaging was distributed to many different cultural and ethnic communities including Asian (Vietnamese, Hmong, Karen, Karenni, Cambodian, Lao), African American, African-born (Somali, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Oromo, Liberian, Nigerian) , Latino/x and Spanish-speaking individuals and American Indian.

### Strategies and Services

Below are the strategies and services carried out by the Trusted Messenger and Media and Messaging Partners. Although the scope of each contract type was intentionally different, there was a lot of overlap in the actual strategies and platforms used by the partners.

*Trusted Messenger* contractors employed several strategies to reach their target communities, including:

- Direct outreach and engagement
- Messaging campaigns using text messaging, phone calls, emails and mailings

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<sup>2</sup> Based on partner estimates. The count likely includes duplication as residents may have been reached by multiple partners.



- Distributing flyers
- Use of social media (Facebook, Whatsapp)
- Education sessions (over conference call or virtual meeting platform)
- Discussion and storytelling circles
- Public service announcements
- Peer educator training
- Development of strategic partnerships
- Graphic design and visual storytelling
- Facebook pages and websites
- Video, audio and print production
- Participation in events planned by others
- Development of educational fact sheets and posters
- Facebook live events
- Word of mouth
- Phone calls to community members and clients
- Other direct outreach to existing clients
- Translation of materials
- Announcements at places of worship

Of particular note was the high use of phone calls to reach out to communities with barriers to accessing other technology, including calling individual clients and conducting sessions over conference call. This appeared to be a key strategy to reaching the elders of each community.

Residents were linked with a variety of county services, most commonly financial assistance, food support, how to obtain masks, free COVID-19 testing. Other types of services included Census and voter registration, employment support, TechPak program, public health services, mental health resources, child support, immigration services, small business relief fund.

*Media and Messaging* contractors reported they used a variety of media and communication strategies to reach their target audiences, including:

- Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube)
- Printed material (Newspaper, bulletins, flyers, etc...)
- Direct Mail
- Radio
- Television/ video
- Websites
- Messaging at events planned by others,
- Face to face interaction
- Community town halls and forums using Zoom and other virtual meeting platforms
- Graphic design
- Phone banking
- Posting at culturally specific businesses
- Media releases

The content of the messaging included COVID-19 prevention and management information, COVID-19 testing and mask distribution opportunities, as well as community and government resources. Some contractors reported also providing direct assistance applying for public assistance and unemployment insurance, referral to resources (financial assistance, housing, food support, mental health, workforce) and completion of Census and voter registration paperwork.

## **Successes and Impact on Target Communities**

Partners under both contracts reported a number of ways they were successful with this funding, including strategies that facilitated their success.

Partners reported overwhelming engagement with their target populations. This included subsections of their communities, such as seniors and youth and other hard-to-reach communities. Community partners also reported that they were able to be a trusted source of information for their communities and that their activities were well-received by the target populations. They also believe that they were successful in providing media and information in a way that was linguistically and culturally appropriate.

Partners based their success on high traffic on their platforms, use and/or participation in their media and messaging, as well as direct positive feedback from participants and community.

Common successful strategies reported by the partners included:

- Collaboration
- Working with community leaders
- Use of phone calls

The community partners acknowledged that it was not always possible to measure the impact of their work on participants and broader community, given the ways through activities were delivered, ability to identify who participated and tight timeframe for the contract.

However, partners shared anecdotal information that supports the impact they had in a number of areas:

- Communities increased in knowledge and awareness around COVID-19 risks, prevention, testing and management. Some partners also noted that they believe community members had increased in use of preventative behaviors (such as wearing of masks) and testing.
- Clients were connected with county and community services and resources. Partners noted that without their intervention many community members would have gone without services and resources during this time.
- Many partner activities also contributed to the emotional support of community members as they navigate the hardships brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Other impacts include increased participation in the Census and voter registration.

## **Strengths**

In addition to the successes covered above that were achieved through the funded work of each partner, RECERT's initiatives were recognized as having a number of strengths. First of all, contracted partners acknowledged that Ramsey County is a leader across jurisdictions in the U.S. around targeting messaging and prevention in racially and ethnically diverse communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

There was also overwhelming consensus across partners that the goals for these initiatives successfully targeted critical community needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Partners were given a significant amount of flexibility and empowerment through these projects. Partners were also treated as experts in how to best communicate with their communities. Many

partners engaged in collaboration and strategic alliances and developed creative and culturally appropriate approaches to their messaging, for example through visual storytelling.

Although some barriers may have existed for partners in the contracting process, RECERT leadership, in collaboration with Ramsey County Contracting and Procurement were able to significantly simplify the solicitation and contracting process for these projects. The solicitation process was different for this funding opportunity because the Request for Qualifications (RFQ) was available outside of DemandStar through the emergency request for informal quote process. RECERT able to expedite the entire contracting process due to emergency procurement policies. In addition, RECERT was able to expedite the selection process and quickly execute contracts.

## **Barriers and Challenges**

### ***Scope of the Two Contracts***

RECERT issued these funds in two distinct lines of funding and slightly different scopes. The Trusted Messenger initiative provided \$10,000 to fifteen community organizations to carry out engagement and outreach around specific areas of messaging as well as connecting targeted communities with available resources. The Media & Messaging initiative provided two partners \$25,000 and ten partners with \$10,000 to use specific media platforms, including newspapers, radio, online platforms to engage and connect with the target communities.

Partners reported a lot of confusion around the difference between the two contract types and many partners applied for both and often identified themselves as a Trusted Messenger even if they had a contract under the Media and Messaging project. Also, as discussed earlier in this report, in practice many partners carried out activities from both project scopes.

Seven of the 27 funded partners applied for both opportunities. Some partners noted that they submitted proposals hoping for the full \$25,000 but were given \$10,000. It was not clear to these partners as to how they should scale back their workplans based on the lesser amount of funding.

### ***Solicitation and Application Process***

Both county staff and partners acknowledged that the length of the solicitation timeline was not ideal, as it was hard to get the opportunity circulated to potential respondents and to allow for time to submit their quotes. Although there was a total of 41 organizations that applied for the Trusted Messenger contract and/or for the Media and Messaging contract, some partners noticed that well known culturally-specific media organizations did not apply for the contracts

Partner experience with the application process varied. Some found it very confusing with discerning the difference between the two funding opportunities and determining which one to apply for. Some partners also found the process time-consuming. On the other hand, many partners reported that the process was much easier than past county request for proposals. Although the Request For Quotes (RFQ) included evaluation criteria and how points would be assigned, some county reviewers expressed concern that some applicants, especially those new to partnering with Ramsey County, may not have known how to use the evaluation criteria to make sure their application was competitive as possible.

Another issue that came up is that a group of potential applicants had received technical assistance from the Public Health Outreach team around submitting a proposal as a collaboration, but the lead applicant did not end up sharing the funds.

### ***Contract Execution and Invoicing***

Partners noted that the length of the contract period was a barrier to implementing the work in the most effective way. The timeline needed to be short in order to address immediate needs of COVID-19 communications under the deadlines of CARES funding. Although most contracts were executed on the same day, some partners noted that there was a delay in executing their contract which further shortened the timeline to carry out the work. These delays were often due to not receiving necessary documentation from partners, the approval process that occur both internal and external (such as review of the contract, negotiations, signatures/approvals, etc.). Others noted that the delay in the payment advance was a challenge, as they did not have the start-up funds to cover the initial costs of the contract.

County staff noted that knowledge around developing an invoice and completing general ledgers was a barrier for some partners. Although information was provided in the contract that partners would be reimbursed after proof of expenses incurred have been submitted, some partners didn't seem to understand this.

### ***Support around Prioritization of Messaging and Approval of Materials***

Many partners noted that although they appreciated the flexibility they were given through these funds, it was often a challenge to know how to prioritize which messages to focus on amongst the wide variety being shared by Ramsey County. They wish that they had more assistance in this area to strategize around how to prioritize the messaging. In addition, it could have been helpful to have example messaging materials available as part of the request for quotes or as part of the kick-off process for the grant.

On the county side, staff reported that it was hard to tell if partners were interested in the materials being distributed as there was no systemic mechanism in place to receive this feedback from partners on what topics were most important. The county convened learning sessions which was a place where that feedback could be shared. This did happen, such as partners requesting more public health messaging, but there was still not a way for use of and feedback on individual messaging campaigns to be tracked.

There seemed to be a lot of confusion and frustration across partners in the approval of partner-developed materials. Although it was outlined in both contracts that all materials needed to be approved by Ramsey County staff before being distributed, it is not clear whether all partners understood this, as not all materials were submitted for approval. In addition, partners reported delays in getting their materials approved and a lack of ability to find out the status of their materials in the review process. Some partners ended up making multiple contacts to check on the status of their materials and it may not have been clear who their county contact should be about this information.

In addition, some partners would have liked more transparency with the county's internal process for reviewing materials, including who was reviewing the materials and what criteria they were looking for to determine an approval. Although RECERT provided criteria during the orientation some partners still experienced challenges with this.

### ***County Capacity to Support Partners/Contracts***

One factor that contributed to the delay in the approval of materials was limited staff capacity to review the materials, especially for translation. There were multiple staff pulled into roles around these contracts, often on top of their full-time duties. However, the liaison work was assigned to six staff in addition to staff finance and planning staff that specifically worked on processing financial forms and invoices. Sometimes this created additional challenges in having a coordinated,

consistent response to partners. The county liaisons did not always feel like they had access to the necessary information and resources, such as access to Basecamp project management website nor the shared mailbox, in order to support the partners.

### ***Other Barriers Impacting Partners***

Partners reported additional barriers through their evaluation reports, including the need to unexpectedly adjust to delivering services remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, some partners acknowledged that some clients have been reluctant to engage around their messaging. At least one partner had asked for COVID-19 case data that would be specific to their cultural community for targeting their planning, but Ramsey County was not able to provide this.

Another issue that partners raised is concern about the potential duplication of efforts across partners who were targeting the same cultural community. Partners were not always aware of the activities nor materials developed by the other partners, which created the possibility that multiple partners may be translating and distributing the same materials without coordination.

## **Round Two Improvements**

Right as the contracts for Round One were wrapping up, RECERT leadership was actively planning for a second round of funding and quickly pivoted to incorporate learnings and feedback received from Round One into the design of Round Two. These changes address many of the barriers addressed above as well as recommendations laid out in the next section.

In Round Two, RECERT:

- Combined the scope of the two Round 1 contracts into a single Trusted Messenger initiative. RECERT also added funding to support community conversations and cultural community connectors.
- Targeted invitations to submit proposals to specific media and community organization to ensure coverage across communities.
- Encouraged formal and informal collaboration across partners working with the same cultural and ethnic communities, including subcontracting with smaller providers who may not have the capacity to directly contract with the county.
- Provided more support and technical assistance to partners, including a kick-off orientation, kick-off technical assistance meetings, and weekly virtual office hours with county staff.
- Centralized the county work and technical assistance to two county staff. Partners were reminded of the review and approval process. Still having communication come through the RacialEquity inbox.
- Provide additional clarity around material approval requirements and streamlined process for approval of partner media and messaging materials. Processes.
- Implemented weekly messaging topics to help partners to prioritize and target key messaging for their communities.
- Provided additional opportunities and instructions for how partner organizations can add team members and subcontractors have access to Basecamp and county communications.

## Recommendations

Below are recommendations for replication and expansion of “Trusted Messenger” type partnerships as well as general recommendations for all of Ramsey County Contracting and Procurement opportunities.

### **For “Trusted Messenger” Partnerships:**

The recommendations for future Trusted Messenger partnerships are:

#### *Scope of Work*

- **Keep similar scope for next round of funding.** There was overwhelming consensus amongst the partners that the goals of the grants were spot on. Many partners were already doing messaging work and funding allowed them to expand their work.
- **Consider combining the two contract types into a single contract** with a choice of activities/strategies that span the purpose of both. Many partners found confusion between the two and even applied for both. A number of partners ended up carrying out activities that crossed the scope of both contracts. Most partners saw themselves as a “trusted messenger” in their community, regardless of their contract type.
- **Recognize key functions** in the process of successfully delivering messaging to culturally-diverse communities. Partners should have one or more of the following:
  - Ability to translate and adapt messaging to identify with culture and values of community.
  - Perceived by community as a messenger whose information they can trust.
  - Access to hard to reach populations.

#### *Contract Partnership rather than Contract Management*

The work of the Trusted Messenger and Media and Messaging projects require active partnership between Ramsey County and the partners. A number of contractors noted that they did not feel like full partner in the work. In addition, a strong partnership needs to exist between RECERT, communications and the areas of the county with messaging to distribute. Because the messaging around COVID-19 has constantly evolved, active monitoring and two-way conversation between the county and partners is essential.

- Utilize Ramsey County communication mechanisms to distribute partner’s media and messages.

#### *Encourage and Facilitate Collaboration and Cohort Development*

Collaboration was a common theme that came out throughout all sources for this evaluation.

- **Encouraging more established organizations to collaborate with smaller grassroots efforts** under a subcontractor model to engage new partners in the work that may otherwise have barriers to applying for the funds. Some small grassroots, community level organizations would not have the business infrastructure and start-up capital needed to do the work under this grant. Language barriers and lack of knowledge of government contracting are barriers. If they do apply can easily be out strategized by more established organizations.
- **Set collaboration expectations or incentives in proposal/contract development and selection.** Some partners naturally worked with each other and other organizations to carry out the work. Partners would have liked to see more formal encouragement of collaboration by Ramsey County, especially with bringing partners together that are focused on the same culture/community. Funded partners targeting the same community didn’t always know what

each other was doing. Partners felt that collaborating with the other partners who were targeting the same communities would allow them to avoid duplication and boost the messaging of the other partners, in order to have an even greater reach to their communities.

- **Support collaboration and cohort development through the duration of contract.** Many partners reported that the learning sessions had been very helpful to them and would have liked additional opportunities to meet and collaborate with the other funded partners. Having more frequent optional meetings would help provide opportunities for partners to update each other on their work as well as strategize and unify around messaging.
- **Coordinate with other jurisdictions funding similar efforts.** Partners noted that other jurisdictions (Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), Hennepin County) have also issued funds for similar efforts. Coordinating across jurisdictions could help in covering gaps in reaching target audiences as well as reduce duplication of efforts.

### *Dedicated County Resources*

The success of this work relies on active engagement and communication between Ramsey County and the partner organizations. This work requires investment in messaging facilitation and technical assistance. During this first round, the RECERT team worked together to carry out various activities related to these contracts, as a part of their full-time job duties. It will be helpful to have fewer, more highly designated staff to attend to this work.

- **Designate a central person** who can be responsible for responding to emails or ensuring timely response. Make clear who the different county staff are and their roles with contract work. Partners prefer to have a single person as their contact for technical assistance related to the contract.
- **Be more proactive and responsive in communication with partners. Improve timely response to partner emails and phone calls.** Many partners experienced significant delays in getting responses when emailing the RECERT email account. RECERT asked for up to 72 hours to respond, but sometimes responses took longer than this due to limited capacity and further review if needed. There was also confusion by the liaison role and use of liaison varied greatly. Partners want a point person they can contact to coordinate work.
- **Increase and streamline technical assistance and support.** Partners would like to have more opportunities to consult and brainstorm with Ramsey County contacts about their plans and options. Partners would have liked more feedback about their work and their role as a partner to Ramsey County. In addition, When partners wanted to modify their plan, they weren't sure if this was an option and believe having someone to consult would have helped.
- **Ensure appropriate contact information for partners.** Be aware that the staff involved with completing the application/proposal is not the same as who may be coordinating the work nor doing the invoicing. Make sure to collect contact information for different roles around grant. Some partners were not getting communications directly and had to be forwarded by the person who submitted application.
- **Provide better access to and coordination** of Basecamp and other project management tools. Not all staff from partner organizations had access to Basecamp. When partners received notifications from Basecamp, it was not clear if all required action.
- **Suggested roles for the next project are:** communications person, translation partner, technical assistance, project manager, and subject matter expert (such as public health.)

### *Messaging*

Below are recommendations for how Ramsey County works with partners to identify and distribute messaging opportunities. Partners generally appreciated the amount of freedom they were given around messaging distribution but would have liked more support in this area.

- **Provide a centralized process for distributing messaging to partner organizations.** In addition to messaging posted by RECERT, partners often were also getting communications/messaging from other Ramsey County departments directly. Some county teams would approach multiple partners to get assistance with translation.
- **Improve timeliness of when messaging is shared with partners, especially when time sensitive.** Often information was posted at the last minute not giving enough time for partners to translate and get out to their communities. Even if distribution of the materials was optional, partners would have liked more advanced notice. Provide as much material at the beginning of the contract or as part of the solicitation announcement.
- **Consider having weekly targeted messages.** One suggestion is to have a targeted message or theme each week on which partners can focus.
- **Provide more clarity around how partners should triage and prioritize messages and communications coming from Ramsey County.** As mentioned above, partners experienced a lot of confusion around how to prioritize messaging when there was so much information coming out, sometimes from multiple parts of the county. Some partners felt they were left to put a lot of “guess work” into prioritizing. In addition, it wasn’t always clear when emails were sent out whether it was expected that they would distribute all messages or if it was optional.

#### *Materials Approval by Ramsey County*

- **Provide clarity around expectations of approval of materials by Ramsey County and remove barriers to timely approval process.** There appeared to be confusion or differing approaches across partners as to whether all materials needed to be submitted for approval. In addition, partners experienced significant delays in getting submitted materials approved. Some partners had to make multiple contacts to follow up on material submitted. Partners would also like more information as to what is being reviewed as part of the approval process and what criteria are used to determine approval.
- **Develop a system for documenting material submissions and approval status.** This will allow Ramsey County to better monitor the flow of material being submitted for approval as well as monitor activity for individual partners.

#### **For Ramsey County Contracting and Procurement:**

Below are general recommendations that can apply to many other contracting opportunities at Ramsey County.

- **Shift from a transactional to relational model of contracting.** Rather than focusing on a transfer of goods and services, focus on how relationships are developed and sustained with community organizations and businesses that are built on trust, collaboration, two-way communication and building the capacity of the community.
- **Increase timely marketing of funding opportunity.** Oftentimes information about funding opportunities do not reach potential partners or is received with such short notice that those partners are not able to apply or submit as strong of proposals as if they had advanced notice. In addition, those who already have an existing relationship with Ramsey County are often receive announcements directly from county staff, putting them at advantage over community organizations that have not had the opportunity to work with Ramsey County.
- **Use a third party for outreach and application assistance around funding opportunities.** One strategy for supporting culturally- specific and smaller organizations in successfully obtaining Ramsey County contracts is to provide a third party that can carry out



this outreach and support within their own communities to educate potential applicants on the application process.

- **Simplify the application process and use wording that is easy for applicants to understand.** This will allow applicants to be more successful in providing most relevant information and to not be penalized in the scoring process for not understanding the questions.
- **Provide additional support and information for the application process.** Provide additional opportunities to get questions answered about the funding/application process, scoring and selection process. It is important for applicants to know how points will be assigned to their proposal/application.
- **Support community organizations in becoming fiscal entities for smaller providers.** Oftentimes grassroots efforts or small organizations are the most closely connected to their communities, yet don't have the infrastructure or capacity to seek out and obtain a Ramsey County contract. One strategy is to incentivize and provide opportunities for organizations to subcontract with these smaller organizations.
- **Have more community representation on review of proposals.** It is important to have community involvement in selecting the partners who will best serve their communities.
- **Provide orientation on contract and invoicing process.** Organizations new to partnering with Ramsey County may not know how to prepare an invoice or develop a general ledger. Make sure to review contract requirements so that they are understood by partners.
- **Provide advanced funds.** Partners may not have start-up funds to cover initial costs.

## Appendix A: Media and Messaging Partners

Partner	Project Description	Award Amount	Target Population
Santanmaria Broadcasting	Santamaria Broadcasting will work with La Raza with an on-air presence to include not only ads and PSA types of spots, but also live mentions by their DJs, live interviews with Ramsey County representatives, Call-in shows that are interactive with the greater community, in-studio “town hall” type of panels using COVID-19 approved social distancing. La Raza is the only Spanish language media outlet in the Twin Cities with a dedicated journalistic news team.	\$25,000	Latino/a residents
Center for Hmong Arts and Talent	The Center for Hmong Arts and Talent will run a campaign with digital and grassroots strategies to reach all segments of the Asian American community in Ramsey County. The goal is to reach as many people as possible but also very intentional utilizing non-traditional means of reaching populations such as elders, recent immigrants and non-English speakers – who are the most vulnerable.	\$25,000	Hmong, Karen, Vietnamese, Filipino, Lao, Chinese, Khmer, Korean and Asian residents
Southeast Asian Diaspora Project	The Southeast Asian Diaspora (SEAD ) Project will develop, translate, and disseminate culturally specific, relevant, accurate, and timely messages related to COVID-19 to Southeast Asian diaspora communities in Ramsey County. This project leverages SEAD’s role as a trusted community resource and facilitator, as well as their extensive experience with effective community-based storytelling through literary and visual design.	\$10,000	Hmong, Karen, Khmer, Lao and Vietnamese residents
CTV North Suburbs	CTV North Suburbs will provide outreach and engagement within the Ramsey County Spanish-speaking community. They are a video communication-based nonprofit with a strong network of community stakeholders and increasingly more Spanish-speaking stakeholders.	\$10,000	Latino/a residents
Social Impact Strategies Group	Social Impact Strategies has a strategy with an intention to focus on ensuring that individuals and families are engaged and have timely, accurate and up to date COVID-19 information that is linguistically and culturally appropriate in Ramsey County Hmong communities.	\$10,000	Asian residents, specifically Hmong residents
ZeHabesha LLC	ZeHabesha, LLC will reach Eritrean, Ethiopia, Oromo, Liberian, Nigerian, and Somali people in Ramsey County using communication platforms such radio, TV, online podcasting and popular Facebook accounts. ZeHabesha will ensure that communities are safer because they are well informed.	\$10,000	Eritrean, Ethiopia, Oromo, Liberian, Nigerian, and Somali residents



Partner	Project Description	Award Amount	Target Population
OMG Digital Media	OMG Digital Media will provide cultural messaging delivered in a creative way to help African Americans understand the seriousness of the virus and what resources are available and when they should seek treatment. OMG will work with organizations, churches and community groups who serve communities of color.	\$10,000	Black elders/residents
Assn. of Nigerian Nurses MN	The Association of Nigerian Nurses of MN will provide education and community engagement activities to support, sensitize, and educate the African communities to participate in COVID-19 prevention, testing, contact tracing and treatment. They understand the impact of COVID-19 on the African immigrants with no health insurance, no job, low wage, need for food, clothing, housing and healthcare.	\$10,000	African Born residents
CLUES	CLUES will provide culturally and linguistically specific information targeting Latino communities in Ramsey County related to COVID-19 information, guidance, and resources. Information will be shared via live video streams, radio and TV, social media messages, group texts, and print materials.	\$10,000	Latino/a residents
Grace Restoration Intl	Grace Restoration will meet with community leaders to assess the need of each community; host community education and awareness for the community; the media services/ messaging will be delivered through check-in where designed/ trained staff will be calling homes (based on language spoken); fliers will be sent to identified homes.	\$10,000	African American, African Born, Somali, Oromo
Empire Smile	Empire Smile is a culturally responsive media agency that promote community engagement, outreach and education, organize activities to increase public awareness of immigrant health issues, to improve cultural diversity by promoting education, entertainment and arts through events to build collaborative relationship with community stakeholders using our podcasts, collaborations, social capital and the support of the community.	\$10,000	African Born residents
Fairview Health Foundation	Fairview Health Foundation will focus on engaging with Hmong, Karen, and Hispanic/Latino communities in East Side neighborhoods through targeted and intentional messaging and communication. They will work with partners and cultural brokers to create materials that consider family, value structures, history, and living conditions in a digestible format through the platform's community members utilize.	\$10,000	Hmong, Karen, and Hispanic/Latino communities' residents

## Appendix B: Trusted Messenger Partners

Partner	Project Description	Award Amount	Target Population
Karen Organization MN	The Karen Organization of MN will reach refugees from Burma to improve financial stability, housing security, healthcare access, and related support services.	\$10,000	Karen Residents
Girls are Powerful	Girls are Powerful will share up to date information on COVID-19 with messages of strength and wellness encouraging community building empowerment. They will work with local businesses, organizations, and community leaders.	\$10,000	Black Residents
Kaleidoscope	Kaleidoscope will culturally-adapt COVID-19 messages from trusted sources (St. Paul-Ramsey County Public Health, MDH, CDC, and WHO) into several accessible communication formats (e.g., audio and video PSAs and video educational briefings), disseminate these messages across a multitude of heavily-trafficked Hmong media outlets (e.g., YouTube channels, Facebook pages, Hmong radio stations), and evaluate the reach, content, and receptivity of these messages.	\$10,000	Hmong Residents
Wellshare International	Wellshare International have produced materials used by large health care institutions, media partners like TPT and many community-based organizations alike. They also leverage the engagement of their team of 20 Community Health Workers (CHWs) in their ongoing implementation of both their standard public health programs as well as new specific COVID-19 response efforts.	\$10,000	Somali, Spanish, Hmong, Arabic and will be adding Oromo, Latinx, and Karen Residents
The Anika Foundation	Community Connections is an effort that highlights emerging and established leaders in the ADOS and broader African Heritage community. By doing so, they issue a strong message from trusted messengers who will leverage their sphere of influence to help residents make informed health & safety decisions during the COVID19 pandemic.	\$10,000	Black residents; Some cross reach to Latino/a, API and European American communities.
Hmong American Partnership (HAP)	HAP will provide outreach to ensure that business owners in Ramsey County's Southeast Asian community have accurate and up-to-date information to safely operate their businesses while preventing the spread of COVID-19.	\$10,000	Hmong and Southeast Asian Residents



Partner	Project Description	Award Amount	Target Population
Darul Uloom	Darul Uloom serves as the community center and as an Islamic Center. The families are Somali, and they live mostly on the Eastside of St. Paul. Darul Uloom will get messages to over 800 people at one time about COVID-19 and other health related issues.	\$10,000	Somali and Oromo Residents
Voices of Racial Justice	Voices for Racial Justice will provide outreach and engage BIPOC communities in St. Paul and Ramsey County during the COVID-19 crisis.	\$10,000	Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) residents
The Other Media Group	The Other Media Group (OMG) will work in partnership to adapt, amplify, disseminate, and inform maternal and child health-related (MCH) media about COVID-19 to the Hmong community in Ramsey County. OMG will lead the project as the technology and media expert and partner with the Hmong Breastfeeding Coalition (HBC) and Minnesota Breastfeeding Coalition (MBC) as subject matter experts (SMEs) with broad ranging connections to the MCH community across the county.	\$10,000	Hmong Residents
Vietnamese Social Services	VSS of MN will develop, implement, and monitor a community engagement plan. The plan will include strategies for communicating effectively to protect Vietnamese, Somali, and Karen communities during COVID-19.	\$10,000	Vietnamese, Karen, Somali, Karenni residents
Minnesota Institute for Nigerian Development	The Minnesota Institute for Nigerian Development will organize outreach activities that will engage the target group and connect them with community and government agencies for resources that will improve their health and well-being, especially in the areas of mental health and food security. Specifically, they will organize a virtual town hall meeting, where a knowledgeable resource person will discuss available resources.	\$10,000	Black immigrants, Nigerian residents
Portico Healthnet	Portico Healthnet will help racially, ethnically and culturally diverse Ramsey County residents enroll in health care coverage, understand how to use the health care system, and access community and county resources that support their health and wellbeing. Portico provides culturally inclusive services and has become a trusted resource for Ramsey County agencies and residents.	\$10,000	BIPOC, immigrants, refugees, and complex immigration status residents

Partner	Project Description	Award Amount	Target Population
Restoration for All Inc.	Restoration for All, Inc. will implement a project titled “Essential Connections (E-Connects) project” and the proposed activities are designed and proposed to increase African immigrants’ (West and East Africans in the faith-based communities) understanding of and participation in COVID-19 testing, case interviews and contact tracing, and to reduce fear or stigma. E-Connects aims at reaching out to more than 150 vulnerable persons defined as: undocumented immigrants, asylum seekers, those that are going through removal proceedings, trafficked victims and survivors, older adults/elders as well as people living with disabilities using a multichannel approach spanning: learning-based model, campaign-based model, advocacy-based model, and support-based model.	\$10,000	African immigrants (West and East Africans) residents
Ujamaa Place	Ujamaa Place has created a community engaged ecosystem built on cultural foundation of love, hope, pride and trust which will be integrated with COVID-19 and health equity messaging that helps African Americans understand the seriousness of the virus, what resources are available and when they should seek treatment.	\$10,000	Black Men/residents
Minnesota Dawah Institute	MDI serves the community in the Frogtown and midway areas. They will get messages to over 800 people at one time about COVID-19 and other health related issues.	\$10,000	Somali and Oromo residents

## Appendix C: Contractor Evaluation Report Criteria

### **Media & Messaging Contractor Evaluation Report:**

At the end of the contract term, contractors will be expected to submit a brief evaluation of the project to Ramsey County staff. The evaluation will include:

1. Number of Ramsey County residents served. Include demographic information of the audience reached by age, race/ethnicity, zip codes, etc.
2. Types of media services and/or messaging provided by your agency/organization.
3. Description of successes.
4. Description of the barriers/challenges. Description of the changes occurred in the lives of residents that participated in this initiative (i.e. resident testimony, media examples, outreach, etc.

### **Trusted Messenger Contractor Evaluation Report:**

At the end of the contract term, contractors will be expected to submit a brief evaluation of the project to Ramsey County staff. The evaluation will include:

1. Number of Ramsey County residents served by age, race/ethnicity/ location/zip code, etc.
2. Types of services provided by your agency/organization
3. Description of Community services that residents were linked to
4. Description of County services that residents were linked to
5. Description of successes
6. Description of the barriers/challenges
7. Description of the changes occurred in the lives of residents that participated



## Appendix D: Guide for Media & Messaging and Trusted Messenger Reflection Sessions

### Introduction

Thank you so much for taking time to come to today's reflection session. The purpose of this session is to give you an opportunity to reflect on and share your experiences and learnings from your partnership with Ramsey County around the Trusted Messenger and Media & Messaging projects. The information collected in these reflection sessions will be used to help RECERT plan for similar future funding opportunities and will also be included in the larger evaluation Ramsey County is undertaking on projects funded by federal CARES dollars. The feedback shared during this session will be combined with the other session and summarized. Your individual name and organization will not be included in any reports. We are recording today's session as a way of documenting notes from the session.

Any questions before we begin?

### Reflection Session Questions

#### ***Application and Contracting Process***

1. How was the application and contracting process?
  - a. Probe: What made this process easy for you?
  - b. Probe: What made this process difficult for you?
  - c. Probe: What may have prevented you or other organizations from applying?

#### ***Service Design, Implementation and Impact***

##### ***(Share slide that includes goals of project)***

2. Do you feel the goals of the project aligned with the needs of the community?
  - a. Probe: What goals do you think should have been targeted?
3. How did the project expectations help or limit you?
  - a. Probe: Were there areas where you would have benefitted from more guidance or flexibility?
4. How did you determine what topics or messaging to focus on?
  - a. Probe: Was it help to have a wide range of messages to choose from or would you have liked more prioritization?
5. Which of your services you offered had the greatest success? Why do you think that was?
  - a. What specific impacts did you see in the intended communities?
6. What were things you tried that weren't as successful as you hoped?
  - a. Probe: What have you learned from this that you would change in the future?

#### ***Technical Assistance and other Support from Ramsey County***

7. *\*How was the timeline from invoice to payment?*
8. In what ways were the supports provided to you by Ramsey County helpful?
  - a. Probe: Community learning sessions
  - b. Probe: Basecamp, drop box





- c. Probe: Presentation and discussion from Public Health about COVID-19
- d. Probe: County TA liaisons
- 9. How could Ramsey County have been of better support to you?
  - a. Probe: What supports were missing from the support/services provided by Ramsey County

***Future Opportunities***

- 10. *\*How do you think success should be determined for these grants? How can it be measured?*
- 11. What recommendations do you have for Ramsey County if we were to provide funding for similar services in the future?
- 12. How can Ramsey County be a better partner around funding opportunities?
- 13. *\* Is there anything else you would like to share that we haven't asked about?*

## Appendix E: Guide for County Staff Reflection Session

### Media & Messaging and Trusted Messenger Contract Support

#### Introduction

Thank you so much for taking time to come to today's reflection session. The purpose of this session is to give you an opportunity to reflect on and share your experiences and learnings from your role with supporting the Trusted Messenger and Media & Messaging projects. The information collected in these reflection sessions will be used to help RECERT plan for similar future funding opportunities and will also be included in the larger evaluation Ramsey County is undertaking on projects funded by federal CARES dollars. The feedback shared during this session will be combined with the other session and summarized. We are recording today's session as a way of documenting notes from the session.

Any questions before we begin?

#### Reflection Session Questions

##### ***Application and Contracting Process***

1. How was the funding opportunity dissemination and application process?
  - a. Where did the interested applicants seem to struggle?
  - b. What do you think would help for the next round?
2. How was the selection and contracting process?
  - a. Probe: What made this process easy for you and the partners?
  - b. Probe: What made this process difficult for you and the partners?
3. How would you describe the difference between the purpose of two grant types?

##### ***Process of Disseminating Communications and Approving Materials***

4. Do you feel like partners were given too much or too little flexibility with the grants?
  - a. Probe: Are there places where partners would have benefitted from more direction or flexibility?
5. How did the process of disseminating communications to the partners go?
  - a. Probe: how was it decided what communications to submit
6. How did the process of approving materials go?
  - a. Probe: What did you look for in approving materials?
  - b. Probe: Were there sufficient resources to ensure quality assurance and meet partner needs for turn around?

##### **Support and Technical Assistance to Partners**

7. How was support and technical assistance provided to the partners?
  - a. What were the county roles and how did partners request help?
  - b. What additional partner supports would you recommend for the future?
8. What were the most common questions or requests for support from partners?



9. How did the tools/resources used for these contracts work out?
  - a. Probe: Community learning sessions
  - b. Probe: Basecamp, drop box
  - c. Probe: Presentation and discussion from Public Health about COVID-19
  - d. Probe: County TA liaisons
10. Are there areas where you didn't have the support you needed to fully support the partners?

***Future Opportunities***

11. How do you think success should be determined for these grants?
  - a. Probe: How can it be measured?
12. What do you think should be continued if we were to provide funding for similar services in the future? What should be done differently?
13. How can Ramsey County be a better partner around funding opportunities?
14. Is there anything else you would like to share that we haven't asked about?