

Connecting With Diverse Audiences Through Ethnic Media During The Pandemic And Beyond

A guide for philanthropies, nonprofits
and public agencies

Timely, reliable, accurate information is a life-saving part of an emergency response. Without it, rumors and misinformation can spread, causing not just physical harm, but also long-lasting mistrust and fear, which can linger well beyond the event.

Around the world, the differential impact of COVID-19 was felt by low-income, immigrant, and other marginalized groups. In the United States and California, communities of color were impacted by unequal access to health care, technology, transportation, income and wealth, in-language materials, housing stability and were more at risk of exposure because they make up a large portion of the essential workforce.

Sensing an imminent information emergency in March 2020, Blue Shield of California Foundation (the Foundation) joined forces with Ethnic Media Services (EMS) to proactively develop and distribute timely, relevant, and science-based information about the pandemic to some of the state's and nation's most affected populations.



EMS rapidly developed weekly news briefings to help ethnic media reporters track the virus and its social and economic impacts. Within two weeks of the initial grant, EMS COVID-19 briefings were attracting 75 to 110 reporters per briefing, and featured recognized state, national and international experts.

This guide describes the key elements of this successful pilot and provides practical information to help others develop their own partnerships with ethnic media.

infodemic

a situation in which a lot of false information is being spread in a way that is harmful:

- According to the WHO, the COVID-19-related infodemic is just as dangerous as the virus itself.

(Cambridge Dictionary)

Background

What is Ethnic Media and Whom Do They Serve?

Ethnic media are media that provide news, information and entertainment targeted to specific ethnic and racial minority audiences traditionally underserved by general market news media. Media formats range from in-language multinational print, digital and broadcast outlets to hyper-local print, broadcast, digital platforms (niche media) to text chats, podcasts, and social media pages. In the United States, ethnic media span languages from Albanian to Zapoteco, including English, and serve thousands of diverse ethnic and racial communities. In 2014, a Newseum exhibit estimated that 25% of American adults rely on 3,000 ethnic media outlets for their news¹, information and entertainment. As the nation and the world become more multicultural, ethnic media will continue to play a vital role in journalism and communications in the US and around the world.

Why is Ethnic Media Essential to a Communications Strategy?

Ethnic media outlets:

- Understand the priorities and needs of their communities and can frame information effectively;
- Are often community leaders and can be a voice on behalf of their communities;
- Know the language and idioms of the people they serve and can translate content quickly and accurately;
- Have a highly targeted distribution strategy, which includes subscriptions, digital platforms, newsletters, social media, stores, faith organizations, restaurants, and community sites;
- Have a mission to support their communities and will dedicate much of their content to community wellbeing news and information;
- Have an ear-to-the-ground and can identify emerging issues, particularly around disparities; and
- Are trusted messengers.

A History Lesson in Linguistic Access

In 1732, Ben Franklin founded *Die Philadelphische Zeitung*, the first non-English newspaper in the U.S. The paper shut down within a year because it used a type-face that the target audience did not understand. Shortly after, the ethnic press firmly established itself as a sector when newspapers published in French, Spanish, Italian, Norwegian, Swedish and other languages mushroomed across the country to serve newly arrived immigrants. The first Black newspaper, *Freedom Journal*, was founded in New York City in 1827. The first Native American newspaper, the *Cherokee Phoenix*, launched 1828 in New Echota, Georgia. *El Misisipi* was the first Spanish-language newspaper founded in New Orleans in 1808.



¹ www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/museums/one-nation-with-news-for-all-newseum-looks-at-ethnic-media-in-america/2014/06/13/17bc0ca8-e28c-11e3-810f-764fe508b82d_story.html

Three Elements to a Successful Model

Ethnic media outlets are recognized by the Census Bureau as trusted messengers for communicating with millions of “hard to reach” immigrants and communities of color. They were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic because they rely on small business ads as their primary revenue. An EMS survey at the start of the pandemic found that 95% of California ethnic media outlets reported that they were facing major revenue losses; 52% worried that they might not survive the year. Despite these challenges, this partnership was successful due to three factors:

#1: High-Touch High-Tech

When it shifted its briefings from in-person and telephone formats to video, EMS was able to vastly expand its reach while also recruiting distinguished speakers from across the country. The expanded use of video conference technologies enabled EMS to create “rooms” for simultaneous interpreting in Spanish and Korean for most briefings, which resulted in over one-third of attendees joining interpreter channels.

#2: Breaking News and Culturally-Fluent Experts

The weekly COVID-19 briefings are a mainstay for reporters who depend on EMS’ experts to deliver relevant news and information to their communities. The briefings include:

- **Experts** who speak from both a position of authority (knowledge, training, experience) and authenticity (language, representing groups, and experience working in and with ethnic communities);
- **Issues** that are framed for diverse audiences. Before the term “essential workers” was coined, EMS’ experts shared prevention tips for workers who could not telecommute and who lived in multigenerational households;
- **Topics** that are of unique importance to ethnic communities, including immigration, the challenges of educating children at home, the burden on women, growing food insecurity, housing insecurity, psychological and emotional health, and the uneven rollout of state and federal aid, programs, and services, including the vaccine;
- **Diverse Panels** of at least three experts which ensure rich content, an abundance of relevant quotes; and that the time and resources of journalists are used efficiently;
- **Veteran ethnic media reporters** facilitate the briefings, direct the conversations and invite speakers of national renown who are a strong draw for journalists.

#3: Reporting Fellowships

The partnership between the Foundation and EMS also included fellowships for individual reporters to cover COVID-19. This reporting fellowship model is used widely at journalism schools, nonprofit news organizations and community-funded news operations. Because of the fellowships, outlets that are struggling financially can still dedicate staff time to covering COVID-19.

Because the fellowships supported a wide range of reporters and outlets, they also ensured that each briefing drew a multi-ethnic audience, enabling reporters to report on the pandemic’s impact on the communities they served and learn about other communities as well.

“ Ask any ethnic media producer what he or she most wants and they'll say the chance to improve coverage. That's why they got into the business in the first place. If you work for Al Enteshar, Sri Lanka Express, Radio Tonga, Impulso, Hoopa Radio, even the LA Sentinel, La Opinión or Sing Tao Daily— how can you find the time to identify, much less interview experts like Dr. Ashish Jah, Dean at the Brown University School of Public Health, Congressman Ro Khanna, Sunita Lough, IRS Deputy Commissioner for Services and Enforcement, or Dimitri Papademetrious, Migration Policy Institute director? But here they were on Zoom talking directly to you. ”

— Sandy Close, EMS co-director

Results

Replication

Begun as an experiment by EMS and the Foundation, this model has been so successful that in October 2020, Los Angeles County funded the replication of the model on a regional level. In December 2020, Sacramento County and Sierra Health Foundation followed suit and the Ford Foundation awarded EMS a two-year grant to support the initiative nationally.

Reach

By late June 2020, EMS' conferences engaged 183 reporters with an average attendance of 90; tracked more than 1,200 stories that reached 20 distinct ethnic groups, including Afro-Caribbean, Arabic, Armenian, Asian Indian, Black, Burmese, Chinese, English, Filipino, Indonesian, Khmer, Korean, Latinx, Native American, Nepalese, Pacific Islander, Pakistani, Thai, Vietnamese; and created a speaker pool of 100 experts, officials, frontline advocates, and providers whom ethnic media reporters could tap for future reporting.

Influence

Since the project launch, the EMS briefings have gained recognition as an important venue for thought leaders. National leaders like Dr. Ashish Jha, Brown University; Sunita Lough, Deputy Commissioner of the IRS, Congressman Ro Khanna, and representatives from recognized organizations like the Brennan Center, Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, United Nations, NALEO Educational Fund, Migration Policy Institute, Asian Americans Advancing Justice, and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights.

Build Relationships

Find ethnic media outlets by accessing the EMS Directory (ethnicmediaservices.org/directory-download/), searching the web, picking up newspapers at community locations like ethnic grocery stores, asking faith organizations, searching television listings for news in languages other than English and reaching out to ethnic journalist associations.

Contact them through email, web sites, social media and

1. Ask for a press kit if you are interested in running advertisements or announcements, or
2. Ask to speak to an editor or reporter about your news. Make sure you have an idea for a story when you contact them. It's preferable to also have in-language materials and a representative spokesperson, but don't worry if you don't.



Photo of ethnic newspapers in Australia by PJ R used under CC BY-ND 2.0.

Learn more

Ethnic Media Services

www.ethnicmediaservices.org

Maynard Institute for Journalism Education

www.mije.org

Race and the newsroom: What seven research studies say

www.niemanlab.org/2020/07/race-and-the-newsroom-what-seven-research-studies-say

The State of Community & Ethnic Media in California: Impact, Resource Gaps, and Opportunities

<https://socialinnovation.ucr.edu/community-ethnic-media>

Center for American Progress/New America Media national poll

The Ethnic Media in America: The Giant Hidden in Plain Sight

legacy.npr.org/documents/2005/jul/ncmfreport.pdf

Pew Research Center:

Ethnic Media in American Life

www.pewresearch.org/topics/ethnic-media

Contact

Julian Do, Co-Director, Ethnic Media Services,
jdo@ethnicmediaservices.org

Amanda Kim, Communications Officer, Blue Shield of California Foundation,
amanda.kim@blueshieldcafoundation.org

EMS Telebriefing Highlights

- Covid-19 Briefing — The Basics for All Communities
- Accessing Healthcare and Other Public Services During the Pandemic
- The Pandemic's Impact on Ethnic Populations
- A Conversation with California Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara
- How to Detect and Report on Covid-19 Disinformation
- Covid-19 Pandemic — Can America Safely Go Back to Work In May?
- Covid-19's Impact on the Developing World
- Coronavirus Scams, How to Avoid Them, Resources for Dealing with the Pandemic's Financial Impact
- The Shadow Pandemic: Covid-19's Impact on Women
- Strategies for Small Businesses to Survive and Thrive During the Pandemic
- Caught in the Grip of a Triple Crisis — How Does America Move Forward?
- Why Are Older Americans Showing the Highest Covid-19 Fatality Rates?
- Going Back to "Normal" Is Not An Option As U.S. Systems Fail — Can We Imagine A More Equitable Future?
- Strategies for Keeping Immigrant Families Healthy and Safe
- California's Hottest Spot For Covid-19: Imperial County's Lessons for Fighting the Surge
- Fallout From the Pandemic: A Tsunami of Evictions Poised To Hit U.S.
- Distance Learning for K-12: Can It Be Done With Equity for All Kids?
- Amid Pandemic, Trump Escalates War on Immigrants
- The Science of Covid-19: What We Still Don't Know About the Virus, Treatments and Vaccine, Stopping the Spread?
- Hunger In America Nears Levels of Great Depression—What Can Be Done?
- Update on Legislation To Address Eviction Crisis For Tenants and Landlords?
- Voting Access and Safety During the Pandemic: Is California Ready?
- The Crisis of Accessing Healthcare During Covid
- Spotting and Preventing Scams In the Inland Empire
- The Contagion of Hate — the Other Virus In America
- Questions Rarely Asked About Domestic Violence
- As Global Migration Plummets, How Will Borders Reopen and Economies Restart
- How LA County Is Meeting Health Care and Food Security Needs In the Covid-19 Pandemic
- Mom-and-Pop Landlords Struggle To Stay Afloat-Key To Low-Rent Apartment Supply
- Vaccines and the Community — Flexing Your Defense Against Covid-19
- The \$1.9 Trillion Covid Relief Bill: Who Wins, Who Loses?
- Back To School Beginnings and Covid-19
- Covid-19 — An Overview By Health Care Experts and Reports From the Frontlines
- College Enrollment Drops, Student Debt Grows: Will Debt Cancellation Help?
- Pandemic Fallout Global Famine on the Horizon
- LA County Combats Hunger In Pandemic
- Covid Death Rates Spotlight Health Equity Issues
- The Challenges of Vaccine Distribution
- Income Cliff Looms for Millions — What Federal Relief Bill Could Mean
- Meeting LA's Health Care Needs In the Pandemic
- Supporting LA's Essential Workers In the Pandemic
- LA County Support Programs for Small Businesses In Pandemic
- Keeping LA Housed In the Pandemic — County offers Help With Eviction, Foreclosure, Dispute Resolution, Homelessness Prevention