

Comunidades Latinas Unidas en Servicio (CLUES)

Partnerships are critical to advancing health equity and working to achieve policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) changes. At the beginning of the evaluation of the Health Equity in Prevention (HEiP) initiative, funded organizations were asked to identify the partners who support them in their work and consider the strength of those relationships. Four years later, each organization was asked to reflect on how their networks had changed, the benefits and challenges of working with partners, and how the networks have helped advance their HEiP-funded work.

NETWORK DESCRIPTION AND ITS IMPACTS

In 2013, Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio (CLUES) received funding from the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota (“Blue Cross”) to implement PSE changes to improve the health of Latino residents in the Twin Cities metropolitan area and greater Minnesota. CLUES’ work has primarily focused on working with businesses and organizations within the Latino community to adopt policies related to tobacco control, healthy eating, and active living. In addition, CLUES has worked closely with the Latino Student Wellness Program (LSWP) at Minnesota State University (MSU)-Mankato to promote healthy eating and active living on campus through educational campaigns, partnerships with other student organizations, and policy changes.

Partnerships with local businesses and organizations in the Latino community has provided the foundation of CLUES’ policy work. By early 2017, CLUES had worked with multi-unit housing complexes, schools, churches, businesses, and child care centers within the Latino community to adopt over 88 smoke-free policies. CLUES also partnered with mercados, restaurants, and other establishments to adopt over 39 healthy eating policies, which included practices such as modifying menu items to be healthier, increasing the availability of fresh produce in stores, or offering healthy foods during meetings and events. CLUES coordinated with other businesses and organizations to adopt over 30 active living policies to provide more opportunities to staff or patrons for physical activity (e.g., salsa or Zumba classes) or to install bike racks.

CLUES’ work with LSWP has also helped advance PSE changes within the campus community at MSU-Mankato. During the 2015-2016 school year, CLUES’ staff supported students in adopting a healthy eating policy within their collaborative and with five other registered student organizations. LSWP also successfully advocated for healthier foods in the campus’ open kitchen, designed and implemented a campus-wide campaign to promote drinking more water, and helped establish intramural soccer and volleyball teams to promote physical activity among Latino students.

CLUES has also developed partnerships with additional organizations to support its policy change work. At the beginning of the initiative in 2013, CLUES identified 15 partners beyond the businesses and organizations it had engaged in adopting policies. By 2016, that network had increased to 24 organizations. All but three of the initial partners have stayed involved with CLUES’ work over the past three years, and CLUES has maintained or strengthened its relationships with the remaining organizations. These organizations have helped support CLUES PSE change work through providing bike racks, technical assistance in navigating local regulations, or help with engaging businesses and organizations in rural communities. CLUES noted HEiP has allowed them to expand their work into the areas of healthy living and active living, which provided new opportunities to partner with organizations and public agencies. For example, CLUES helped three restaurants become involved with the City of Minneapolis Healthy Restaurant Initiative in which they worked with a nutritionist to modify three of their dishes to be healthier. The program also included technical assistance in designing menu inserts and table tents to advertise the dishes. Likewise, at the beginning of the initiative, CLUES partnered with Cycles for Change to sign residents up for the organization’s bike lending program. Over the past three years, that relationship has deepened. CLUES now sits on Cycles for Change’s Bike Equity Council and the two organizations have explored additional opportunities for joint programming.

CLUES has also built upon its HEiP-funded work to take on new health equity initiatives in partnership with organizations. In 2015, CLUES partnered with seven other organizations through funding from the Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) and Saint Paul-Ramsey County Public Health to hold a series of public input sessions about health needs and assets in the Latino community. These sessions led to the development of the Latino Chronic Disease Action Plan, a series of recommendations for local organizations, public agencies, and other stakeholders to improve the health of the Latino community in Ramsey County.

LESSONS LEARNED

CLUES staff reflected on promising practices and lessons they had learned in building a strong network of partners to advance their PSE change efforts.

Small policy changes in partnerships with local organizations can have broader impacts. A representative from CLUES described that a number of the businesses and organizations used the policies CLUES helped them develop and adopt as a starting point for additional efforts that further support health. For example, some mercados are now pre-packaging fruit slices or cut-up vegetables and meat for guisos (i.e., soup) and one church began tying the smoke-free policy on its grounds to its food donation, advertising “We Exchange Smoking for Healthy Food.” The representative noted that small changes to the landscape, such as through the installation of bike racks, can have expansive impacts in advancing equity.

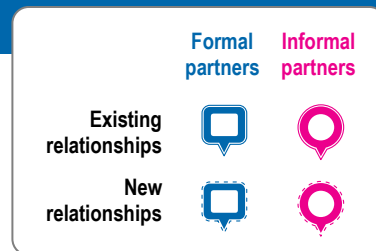
A partner [noted] how just the installation of the bike rack at their school has changed the community. [There are] more people riding to school, kids are also biking, [and] it feels more like a community. In terms of equity...it doesn't have to be a huge change, but it can be small steps that really create large ripples within the community.

Community health workers can play a critical role in building relationships with people and organizations. CLUES' community health workers have played a key role in building on established relationships within the Latino community to connect with local businesses and organizations about adopting policies. Having full-time exempt staff and providing support for staff travel to and from meetings with community partners also allows for greater flexibility to take the time to build relationships.

The formality of relationships can have implications for equity. A representative from CLUES reflected that partnerships where there is a formal agreement in place are often more transactional, with a set agreement on the exchange of resources or services. On the other hand, their informal relationships are often more fluid and with other community-based organizations. This informality allows for more organic collaboration, but can place a burden on organizations if the division of work is not equitable or aligned with their capacity. At the same time, formalizing relationships through written agreements can also add administrative time and resources, which may be difficult for small organizations to absorb.

Gatekeepers can present barriers to partnering with organizations, especially public agencies, to implement policies. Early on in its work through the HEiP initiative, CLUES sought to work with several rural county fair boards and a metro area coalition to implement smoke-free policies in public spaces. However, staff had difficulty making in-roads because of key gatekeepers within the coalition, and CLUES eventually had to pause their work in these areas. In these situations, staff commented on the importance of assessing when to continue to push and when to regroup and strengthen work in other areas. Staff added that as a result, efforts to advance PSE changes can take time and require flexibility to pivot when needed.

Organizational relationships can be thought of along a continuum. As organizations work more closely together, they develop more formal relationships, align their values, create shared ownership, and share common processes. To be effective in their work, organizations need relationships in place at all levels.



COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Description: Collaborative partners work together closely to accomplish specific long-term goals. They are likely to share resources and decision-making authority and work together to determine roles and responsibilities for key tasks. Often, collaborative partners develop a shared mission to guide their common work.

CLUES has collaborative relationships with eight partners:

Existing partners:

- a. Association of Nonsmokers-Minnesota¹
- b. Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota¹
- c. Latino churches¹
- d. Minnesota State University – Mankato¹
- e. Northeast Independent Soccer League¹
- f. Cycles for Change¹
- g. Saint Paul-Ramsey County Public Health¹

New partners:

- h. Wilder Research¹

COORDINATING RELATIONSHIPS

Description: Although there are strong relationships in place, coordinating partners tend to work more independently from one another to make decisions and accomplish project tasks. Coordinating partners often have aligned goals, but do not work to develop a shared mission to guide their common work.

CLUES has coordinating relationships with 15 partners:

Existing partners:

- a. Hennepin County Public Health³
- b. Bike Cost-Sharing Program – City of Minneapolis³
- c. Corcoran Neighborhood House¹
- d. Latino businesses (including restaurants and mercados)²

New partners:

- e. SPOKES (now a division of Cycles for Change)¹
- f. Eastside YMCA¹
- g. University of MN Extension¹
- h. CLEARCorps¹
- i. Consulate of Mexico³
- j. Dero Bike Racks²
- k. St. Mary's Health Clinic¹
- l. Neighborhood Bike Rack Program³
- m. In-home child care and centers²
- n. Multi-unit housing complexes²
- o. Hiawatha Academy¹

COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Description: Cooperative partners work together less frequently on specific common interests and goals, or to maximize resources, such as training. They are unlikely to share financial resources and decision-making authority.

CLUES has cooperative relationships with six partners:

Existing partners:

- a. Institute for Hispanic Health – National Council of La Raza¹
- b. Public Health Law Center¹
- c. YMCA¹

New partners:

- d. National Alliance for Hispanic Health¹
- e. Region 9 (Sibley, Nicollet, LeSueur, Brown, Blue Earth, Waseca, Watonwan, Martin, and Faribault counties)³
- f. Nice Ride and Free Bikes for Kids¹

The partners represented the following types of sectors:

1=Nonprofit organizations

2=For-profit organizations

3=Decision-making bodies (e.g. city councils)

4=Key stakeholder group or individual (e.g. community/resident groups)

5=HEIP-funded organizations