


Northeast LA
Community Response

Community Profile



LA-MÁS October, 2020

A hand wearing a blue nitrile glove holds a small white card with the words "Thanks" and "Gracias" written in blue ink. The card is positioned over a large pile of food items, including several large loaves of bread in clear plastic bags, a head of broccoli, a bunch of carrots, and several lemons. The background shows more food items and cardboard boxes, suggesting a food bank or donation center setting.

Thanks
Gracias

Executive Summary

Northeast LA Community Response was a relief initiative created in response to the coronavirus crisis in March 2020. It was led by community development nonprofit LA Más in partnership with Elysian Valley Senior Group and Elysian Valley Neighborhood Watch. For 10 weeks, community members called neighbors, identified needs, and connected people to resources such as groceries, masks, activity kits, rent and mortgage information, unemployment filing, among others. The initiative was based in Elysian Valley (also known to some locals as “Frogtown”), and support was provided throughout neighborhoods in Northeast Los Angeles, including Glassell Park, Cypress Park, Lincoln Heights.

Over 2,000 Northeast LA residents were engaged, and over 750 residents received direct support. While we connected with a diverse range of households, we primarily supported multigenerational and immigrant families who were facing reduced or lost employment, food insecurity, and housing insecurity. Many of these families were already facing economic challenges prior to the pandemic – highlighting long-existing disparities in our region.

We know that these challenges will continue to persist after the emergency order is lifted, so LA Más is now looking at long-term strategies that tackle these systemic issues. To help inform this

work, the following Community Profile highlights trends and priorities identified in exit interviews with 250+ families, many of whom received support for over two months.

We also hope the lessons learned from the initiative can be useful to government agencies and community organizations continuing to provide COVID relief or in planning future crisis response efforts. We outline the following recommendations:

Policy

- Comprehensive relief efforts that prioritize safety and economic security;
- Simple, accessible application forms and systems;
- Designing programs around the experiences of the most vulnerable populations;
- Scaling initiatives to meet local need;
- Protections that consider economic realities in the midst of a pandemic.

Organizational

- Identifying what community infrastructure already exists;
- Investing in both immediate basic needs and authentic trust-building;
- Prioritizing the most vulnerable groups;
- Leveraging existing resources and fostering self-advocacy;
- Building partnerships around shared values.

Community Response: By the Numbers

In just ten weeks, with the support of our partners and dedicated volunteers, we've supported...

1490
masks distributed



850

activity kits
made &
delivered



119

residents received
other
resources



922

grocery bags
delivered



828

residents



156

trained volunteers



\$20K

cash deployed

50

families received
cash assistance

255

households served



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1. Program Overview



Call To Action

When the coronavirus outbreak began locally in March 2020 and Safer at Home orders went into effect, Elysian Valley-based nonprofit LA Más pivoted its operational model to provide immediate assistance to neighbors directly impacted by the crisis.

The LA Más team first reached out to their neighbors: David De La Torre, who heads Elysian Valley Neighborhood Watch and Jardín del Rio Community Garden, and Ceci Dominguez, who heads the Elysian Valley Senior Group. They shared that neighbors were already checking in with each other through an informal “phone tree”, learning that many were being laid off, having their work hours reduced, struggling to take care of aging parents or getting groceries. Thanks to the everyday advocacy and partnership of two neighbors, LA-Más was able to develop a more robust system and form the Northeast LA Community Response.



“We are calling neighbors, seniors, and families, asking them if they are ok - it’s touching. **This reminds me of the neighborhood we had many years ago.** There is so much compassion in this community.”

“A simple greeting goes a long way. When that’s met with additional relief, and **when that help comes from what may appear to be total strangers - but it’s actually a group of neighbors - it’s that much more special.**”

- DAVID DE LA TORRE

Elysian Valley Neighborhood Watch
Jardin del Rio Community Garden



Partners

This initiative was made possible by a collective of community organizations, grocers, foundations, government partners, and residents who are committed to supporting impacted neighbors. These include organizations that donated time, resources or funds, and those whom we purchased goods from to distribute to residents.

- **Volunteers:** More than 150 volunteers helped with outreach, assembly and deliveries.
- **Co-Creators:** LA Más, Elysian Valley Neighborhood Watch, Elysian Valley Senior Group
- **Community Organizations:** Clockshop, elysian, Women's Center for Creative Work
- **Service Providers:** Lemon Poppy Kitchen, API Forward Movement, SÜPRMARKT, Food Forward, Suay, Super A, AMPED Kitchens, Ben and Danny's, Rachel Pally, Tiny Pine Press, Caring Counts, Eastside Family Volunteer Club
- **Funders:** Wells Fargo Foundation, Annenberg Foundation, Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, Hegart Foundation, Council District 1, Council District 13, The Bend, Nonprofit Finance Fund, Bob Berg & Janet Workman



2.

Community Priorities

COVID-19 and its unprecedented arrival impacted many Northeast LA community members. Families with limited resources were already facing economic challenges when the health crisis began, causing compounded barriers in achieving financial, housing, and food stability. Throughout our outreach and ongoing conversations with residents, the following community priorities emerged:

Employment Challenges

With several businesses having to close their doors due to the pandemic, the majority of households we worked with experienced some level of economic strain as a result of job loss or reduced hours.

- **Competing Expenses** – Households with a reduced income needed to adjust their expenses. In many cases, families relied on free food services which allowed them to continue to make full or partial payments for expenses such as utilities, rent, and car insurance.
- **Unemployment Insurance** – Some residents who had been laid off faced barriers applying for Unemployment Insurance (UI). These were residents who relied on the informal economy (e.g. street vendors and day laborers), did not qualify due to immigration status, and/or did not know how to navigate the application system.
- **Childcare** – School closures and the lack of safe and affordable childcare made it difficult

for parents to consider looking for a new job. The limited options resulted in further financial instability for households with children.

Food Insecurity

The following populations experienced food insecurity as a result of limited income, school closures, and barriers to safe grocery shopping. In many cases, food distributions and deliveries became necessary to alleviate economic strain.

- **Households with Children** – Many families with children relied on subsidized breakfast and lunch from school. Although Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) hosted Grab n Go centers with meal distribution, transportation and lack of childcare was a barrier to access.
- **Undocumented Families** – Undocumented families chose not to tap into unemployment benefits and government food support programs because they feared it would negatively impact their ability to legalize their immigration status, even though their children were eligible for the programs. School closures further exacerbated this for families with children who could no longer receive meals at school.
- **Medically Vulnerable Residents** – Seniors and residents with disabilities or immunocompromised conditions were identified as high-risk populations for contracting coronavirus. This, along with a lack of safe public

transportation or PPE equipment, presented barriers for residents to safely shop for groceries or access ongoing medical treatment.

Housing Insecurity

Local and statewide protections fell short in ensuring housing stability for both tenants and homeowners. Many residents have incurred debt and struggled to access formal resources.

- **Rent & Mortgage Debt** - The local eviction moratorium put evictions on hold during the emergency order, but still requires renters to pay back any and all missed payments. As a result, many renter households whose income has been reduced due to COVID-related circumstances expressed fear of being in debt with their landlords. Similarly, homeowners with reduced incomes are incurring debt on mortgage payments.
- **Relationships Helped** - For the most part, residents we worked with expressed that their landlords were understanding. Long-standing relationships between tenants and landlords, with some being family members or friends, provided greater flexibility. Most were able to negotiate payment plans but, after the first two months, began to worry about the debt they would accumulate.
- **Inaccessible Forbearance Process** - Most homeowners did not request forbearance. In one case, homeowners applied and were approved for forbearance, but the process and repayment conditions were so unclear and difficult that they gave up on the request. They shared that they



3. Response Efforts



Resource Distribution

In response to the community priorities identified, organizational partners and volunteers connected residents with a range of resources, including food support, cash assistance, masks, activity kits, and assistance navigating public programs.

Resource Distribution

Organizational partners and volunteers coordinated a weekly distribution of food and supplies from March thru June:

- **Groceries** – We purchased food staples and fresh produce to assemble and deliver 75-100 grocery bags each week. While this did not serve as the sole food source for residents, it helped alleviate food and other household expenses.
- **Masks** – We gathered mask donations from individuals, our local council district office, and the local mutual aid network. We also distributed CDC guidelines for masks and face coverings to ensure that community members stayed safe.
- **Activity Kits** – We created activity kits for both children and adults to teach crafting skills and promote our neighbors' mental health and well-being. Example activities included flipbooks, light catchers, sand art, puzzles, lanterns, bath bombs, kites, letter writing, and kaleidoscopes. These kits provided families with an outlet to be creative and spend time together.
- **Cash Assistance** – We deployed \$20,000 of direct

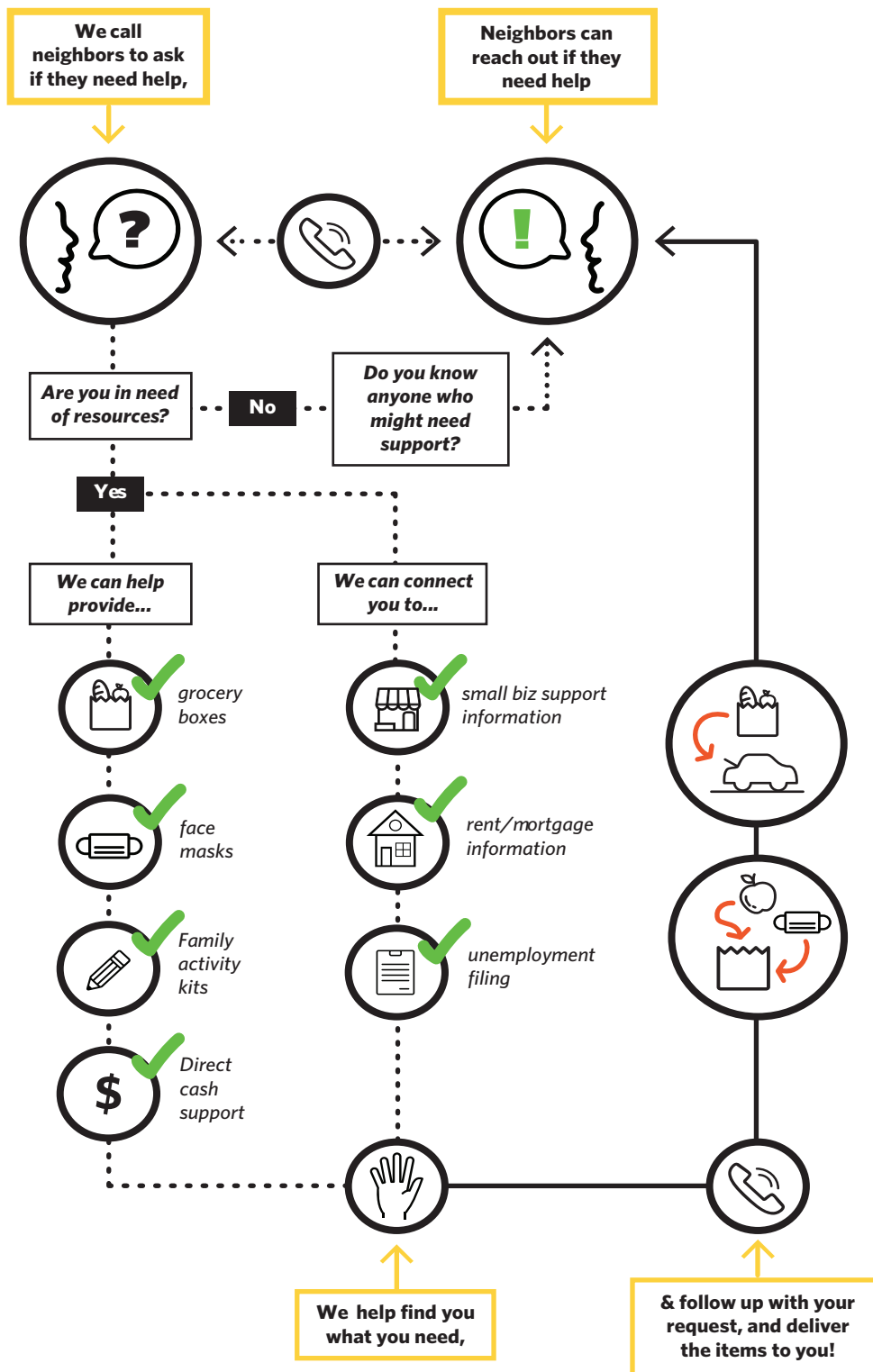
cash assistance and leveraged an additional \$15,000 through a partner organization's fund. Households received debit cards valued at \$250 to \$500. Recipients were selected based on a set of criteria that included access to other forms of relief and overall financial need. Families with COVID-related income loss and an inability to apply for government funding were prioritized. This helped families pay utility bills and make partial rent payments.

Information and Referrals

The response team connected residents to public programs that offered COVID-related relief – providing general information and application assistance.

- **Food Support Programs** – We connected residents to temporary and long-term food programs, including LAUSD's Grab n Go Centers, senior meal delivery services, grocery delivery services, food banks, CalFresh and WIC. While these provided options for long-term food security, there were some barriers to participation:
 - Lack of transportation or childcare when needing to travel to distribution sites;
 - Overloaded city/county programs that filled up quickly and/or had difficult application processes;

Our Program, A - Z



- Food banks with limited schedules and supplies;
 - Meal programs that offered low nutritional value and quality;
 - Fear that applying for government support would negatively impact immigrant families' process to become legal residents.
- **Rent and Mortgage Information** – We helped residents understand their rights as tenants and homeowners. With the support of local housing organizations, we helped demystify the local and statewide eviction moratoria and tenant protections as well as mortgage forbearance options that homeowners could access from their lending institutions. This information was most helpful for working class families, especially when the various rules and resources were either unclear or not widely publicized. Residents who were not directly impacted also passed information along to their neighbors.
 - **Other Resources** – Our response team researched and shared any additional resources requested by residents. This included information about childcare services, legal aid, unemployment filing, and mental health services.
 - **Ongoing Support** – While the initiative has formally ended, the response team compiled a comprehensive COVID-19 Resource Guide that continues to be updated. We remain in touch with residents to connect them to short and long-term support.



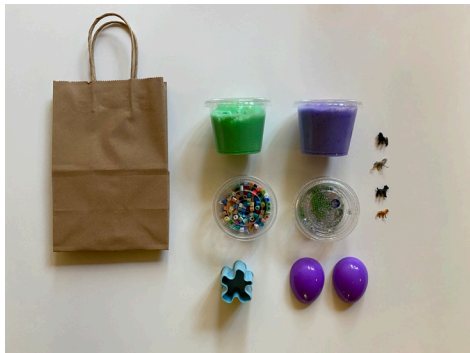
Craft Kits



1. Sand Art Kit



5. Lantern Kit



2. Slime Kit



6. Rainbow Penpal Kit



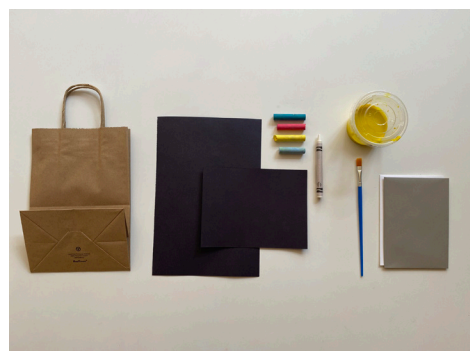
3. Bird Feeder Kit



7. Kaleidoscope Kit



4. Block Prints Kit



8. Hands Up Kit

Resident Snapshot

**Hi neighbor,
We're here
to help.**

As members of the Elysian Valley community, we know that the heart of our neighborhood is its diversity and generosity. We want to leave your...

**Hola vecina,
Estamos aquí
para ayudarle.**

Como miembros de la comunidad de Elysian Valley, sabemos que el corazón de nuestra comunidad está en la diversidad y generosidad de su gente. Si usted no puede salir de su casa o necesita algún tipo de apoyo, estamos aquí para asegurarnos de que reciba lo que necesite..

Podemos conectarlos con recursos GRATUITOS como:

- Entrega de provisiones del supermercado
- Cubre bocas familiares

- > Entrega de provisiones de
- > Mascarillas/ Cubrebocas
- > Paquete de actividades familiares
- > Apoyo directo en efectivo
- > Información de renta o hipoteca

Si necesita apoyo, por favor contáctenos al
(213) 465-0410 o covid19@mas.la.

Si le gustaría participar como voluntario o asociarse con nosotros, contáctenos al covid19@mas.la.

Le deseamos salud y amor,
Southeast LA Response

Northeast LA Respuesta Comunitaria

*Northeast LA Community Response es una iniciativa dirigida por LA-Más, en colaboración con el Elysian Valley Neighborhood Watch (vigilancia comunitaria) y Elysian Valley Senior Club (club de personas mayores). Estamos comprometidos a proporcionar apoyo inmediato a nuestros vecinos que han sido impactados por la crisis del coronavirus. Para más información, visite www.mla-la.net/ela-community-response.

Throughout the initiative, we worked with a diverse group of individuals and families in Northeast LA – ranging from longtime residents and working class communities of color to newer, more affluent residents. The following snapshot highlights the broad range of resources and priorities among various groups. Please note that these are generalizations based on trends seen in the Northeast LA Community Response and in exit interviews with community members. The snapshot is not intended to fully represent a specific group, as some households might fall into multiple categories, and it does not capture all of the nuances of every household's situation.

Fixed Income Families (SSI/SSDI)

Profile

Age	46-95
Immigration Status	U.S. Citizens or Residents
Language	Primary language is English
Mobility	Not able to drive; some rely on family members who drive them or the community carpooling network.
Years in the Community	20+

Housing Status

Rent/Own	Homeowners and renters; most are able to continue making payments.
Average Household Size	2
Household Structure	Many live alone or with adult children.

Economic Status

Education	Unknown.
Employment	Retired or not working due to disability.
Annual Income	< \$30,000; some depend on children to supplement income.
Stimulus Check Status	Received directly or through a child who claim them as a dependent.

COVID Situation

Resources & Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Know how to navigate public systems. Purchased home when it was less expensive, so they were able to cover mortgage payments. Enjoy public spaces, such as walking along the LA River or in the park. Rely on Elysian Valley Senior Group.
Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High risk of contracting COVID-19 (major health conditions and/or immunocompromised). Some residents need help going to medical appointments and rely on public transportation/neighborhood carpooling system to access goods and services.
Support Provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grocery deliveries and face masks increased a sense of safety. Some requested cash assistance, but because their income was not directly impacted by the health crisis, they were connected instead to long-term supportive services.

Multigenerational Families

Profile

<i>Age</i>	0-80 (children, young adults, parents & grandparents)
<i>Immigration Status</i>	Mixed immigration status.
<i>Language</i>	Bilingual households, using parents or grandparents' native language as primary language.
<i>Mobility</i>	Multiple vehicles.
<i>Years in the Community</i>	20+

Housing Status

<i>Rent/Own</i>	Homeowners and renters (some renting from family members).
<i>Average Household Size</i>	6
<i>Household Structure</i>	Men and adult children work; Adult children and children live with them; Homeowners are usually grandparents receiving SSI/SSDI.

Economic Status

<i>Education</i>	High school and some college.
<i>Employment</i>	Factory jobs, food service industry, retail.
<i>Annual Income</i>	> \$40,000; multiple income households.
<i>Stimulus Check Status</i>	Received.

COVID Situation

<i>Resources & Access</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Extended family lives in the neighborhood.• Teenagers and young adults have access to technology.• Well-connected in the community.• Someone in home is usually knowledgeable about accessing public programs.
<i>Barriers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some family members are immunocompromised.• Multiple incomes allowed households to pay rent and most utilities, but food assistance provided additional stability.
<i>Support Provided</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grocery deliveries supplemented LAUSD meals, reduced health risks, and offset economic strain.• Encouraged to apply for unemployment benefits

Immigrant Families

Profile

<i>Age</i>	0-80 (children and parents)
<i>Immigration Status</i>	Parents are usually undocumented and children are U.S. citizens.
<i>Language</i>	Most are Spanish speakers.
<i>Mobility</i>	One primary vehicle, in many cases used for work.
<i>Years in the Community</i>	5-20+

Housing Status

<i>Rent/Own</i>	Renters (average \$1,200/month for a household size of 4).
<i>Average Household Size</i>	4
<i>Household Structure</i>	Single parent households; Stay-at-home mothers and fathers working one or multiple jobs.

Economic Status

<i>Education</i>	Education levels vary.
<i>Employment</i>	Day laborers; service industry; factory jobs.
<i>Annual Income</i>	< \$40,000; 1-2 income households.
<i>Stimulus Check Status</i>	Not eligible due to immigration status.

COVID Situation

<i>Resources & Access</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Relied on children's schools for info.• Well-connected; strong relationships with neighbors.• Children attend local schools.• Accessed LAUSD Grab n Go Centers and local food banks.
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Street Vendors & Service Providers

Profile

<i>Age</i>	35-55
<i>Immigration Status</i>	Mixed immigration status.
<i>Language</i>	Most are Spanish speakers.
<i>Mobility</i>	Shared family vehicle; some rely on public transit.
<i>Years in the Community</i>	5-20+

Housing Status

<i>Rent/Own</i>	Renters.
<i>Average Household Size</i>	4
<i>Household Structure</i>	Most are women-led businesses; rely on extended family network.

Economic Status

<i>Education</i>	Some or no high school.
<i>Employment</i>	Food vending, cleaning services, babysitting, flower arrangements.
<i>Annual Income</i>	< \$40,000; vending is usually not the primary source of income.
<i>Stimulus Check Status</i>	Some not eligible due to immigration status.

COVID Situation

<i>Resources & Access</i>	Existing community connections based on their work: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Street vendors worked all over Northeast LA.▪ Service providers traveled outside their neighborhoods and had connections in those areas.
<i>Barriers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Difficulty accessing public programs due to immigration status▪ Economic strain - laid off or businesses stopped or decreased in revenue.▪ Not tech savvy▪ Rely on information in native language through the phone because they are unable to read or write.
<i>Support Provided</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Connected to the Street Vendor Emergency Fund.▪ Grocery deliveries to offset economic strain.▪ Cash assistance.

Newer Residents

Profile

<i>Age</i>	25-35
<i>Immigration Status</i>	U.S. Citizens or Residents.
<i>Language</i>	Primary language is English.
<i>Mobility</i>	1-2 vehicles, able to transport themselves.
<i>Years in the Community</i>	Less than 5.

Housing Status

<i>Rent/Own</i>	Renters (average \$2,000+/month)
<i>Average Household Size</i>	2
<i>Household Structure</i>	Single adults with financial stability (employment or savings).

Economic Status

<i>Education</i>	College educated.
<i>Employment</i>	Working professional, freelancers.
<i>Annual Income</i>	> \$100,000; one or two-income households.
<i>Stimulus Check Status</i>	Received.

COVID Situation

<i>Resources & Access</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability to work from home.• Frequently use local amenities and patron local businesses (e.g. LA River Bike Path, shops, restaurants).• Knowledgeable about available resources, such as unemployment benefits, tenants' rights, and organizations that can support them.
<i>Barriers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not in need of many resources.
<i>Support Provided</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Requested face masks and activity kits• Mainly served as volunteers (making outreach calls, assembling & delivering goods).

5. Recommendations



Impact in Northeast LA

Policy Recommendations

- 1. Many of the hardships faced by residents were interconnected.** Food distribution, for example, was a major component of the Northeast LA Community Response because of several different factors. Workers who had been laid off or had reduced income due to the pandemic had limited funds for food. Families with children could no longer benefit from free or reduced meals due to school closures. For medically vulnerable residents and those who relied on public transportation, grocery shopping was no longer safe. We recommend comprehensive relief efforts that take all of these factors into account – prioritizing both safety and economic security.
- 2. Applications for public programs were largely inaccessible.** Residents were applying to a variety of different programs during this time, including Unemployment Insurance, CalFresh/EBT/WIC, and rent relief and mortgage forbearance. Not everyone had access to complete online applications, which highlighted the need for alternative forms of engagement (ie. phone, text, email, mailers, flyers) that capture all levels of literacy. For those who did have online access, the applications were often still complex – requiring an advocate from the Northeast LA Community Response team or partner organizations to walk them through the process. In some cases, like in the case of the Disaster Relief

Assistance for Immigrants program, applicants could not get through to someone on the application hotline. And in other cases, such as with mortgage forbearance, the process was too complicated and residents ultimately did not move forward with it. We recommend application processes and systems that are simple, available in multiple languages, and accessible both online and offline. We also recommend ensuring there is capacity to answer questions and/or supporting community organizations to guide residents through the process.

- 3. Vulnerable groups faced heightened barriers.** In the Northeast LA Community Response, these groups included the following: households with children, undocumented immigrants, workers in the informal economy, seniors, and disabled or otherwise immunocompromised individuals. For households with children, parents often had to choose between work or childcare since schools were closed. For immigrants and those in the informal economy, many individuals did not qualify for relief such as unemployment benefits or CalFresh. For medically vulnerable individuals, they had limited access to things like safe grocery shopping or their typical social and support networks. We recommend

designing relief programs that prioritize and center the most vulnerable populations. In doing so, said programs will be accessible and reliable for everyone.

4. *The scale of relief available did not match the need.*

Public programs did not have the capacity to serve the large volume of applicants. For example, many Northeast LA residents were not able to apply to the Disaster Relief Assistance for Immigrants program because they could not get through busy phone lines. The LA County Workforce Development and Aging Services Critical Delivery Service also reached capacity early on. The lottery nature of LA City's rent relief program meant the chances of a tenant qualifying were very slim. Additionally, many of these initiatives had short application timeframes without enough public outreach, so individuals in need often missed deadlines or scrambled to complete an application. A more robust system that loops in local organizations for additional support could help maximize impact where it is most needed. We recommend that government agencies expand their relief programs to meet local need. This can involve tracking how many individuals tried to access services, ongoing outreach by local council districts, and building the capacity of community organizations to provide support.

5. *Government protections were incomplete with unrealistic expectations.* Many of the programs

residents were connected to during the Northeast LA Community Response were temporary relief initiatives. Most of these initiatives provided stop-gap support only and did not address long-term issues of housing stability, economic security, and health and safety. For example, the statewide and local eviction moratoria put evictions and rent and mortgage payments on hold up to a certain date; however, once the emergency order ends, individuals are expected to pay back all missed payments. This ignores the fact that many individuals remain unemployed, do not have the funds for rent let alone for food and health expenses, and are accruing monumental debt. We recommend protections for workers, renters, and property owners that realistically consider the state of the economy and persistent barriers to economic security. This can include rent and mortgage forgiveness and increased unemployment benefits.

Crisis Response

Organizational Recommendations

1. *Relationships and social infrastructure were critical.*

The Northeast LA Community Response evolved from an informal phone tree that neighbors in Elysian Valley had already started once the Safer at Home order went into effect. Modeling this existing infrastructure, the response team brought it to scale – calling approximately 2,000 residents. Beyond the existing list of residents, the majority of individuals who received support found about the program through a friend or neighbor (who had been contacted or was volunteering). Additionally, strong relationships between landlords and tenants in Elysian Valley helped promote housing stability, as landlords were less likely to resort to eviction if tenants missed rent payments. We recommend partnering with community members, identifying what infrastructure and assets already exist, and determining what additional support could be useful.

2. *Respond swiftly to immediate basic needs, and take time to build trust.* When calling residents, the response team followed a script that specifically asked about immediate basic needs, as well as broader questions about economic security. Being able to offer something tangible, such as free groceries and masks or face coverings, created an entrypoint for residents to receive services and begin building a relationship with the response team.

The weekly distribution focused on providing these urgent goods, but the response team spoke with residents weekly to identify other, more nuanced needs – allowing residents to access more extensive resources, such as cash assistance or government benefits. The relationships developed during this time laid the foundation for LA Más’ future programming, as the organization continues to shape programs based on community priorities to have a more sustained impact. We recommend acting with urgency when immediate needs are clear, while investing time in building trust and relationships with community members.

3. *Prioritize the most vulnerable groups.* Beyond the weekly distribution of food, masks and activity kits, the Northeast LA Community Response also deployed \$20,000 of direct cash assistance and leveraged an additional \$15,000 through a partner organization’s fund. Because there was limited funding available, the response team prioritized the most vulnerable households – taking into account COVID-related income loss and ineligibility for government programs. This helped fill in the service gap experienced by these households. We recommend taking time to understand the







LA-MÁS

October, 2020

